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Counselor Education Doctoral Students' Gatekeeper Experiences at a Large, Public Midwestern University: A Pilot Study

Abstract

This pilot study seeks to understand the gatekeeping experiences doctoral students have had during their training at a large, public midwestern university in a CACREP-accredited program. Using a basic qualitative approach, five students were interviewed about their gatekeeping experiences and learning process as well as how they navigate their multiple professional roles as developing gatekeepers. The following themes and sub-themes are discussed: (a) gatekeeping experiences, a process with several gates; (b) learning to gatekeep, primarily through experience and overcoming barriers; and (c) multiple professional roles in gatekeeping, focused on teaching and supervision and the impact of faculty mentors.

Keywords

Gatekeeping, Counselor Education, Doctoral Students, Professional Roles

Author's Notes

I would like to thank my advisor for his guidance, my research mentors, and my family for their support.

Introduction

Gatekeeping is a critical, yet complex aspect of work as a counselor educator as outlined in ethical, professional, and institutional guidelines. As many as half of all students in CACREP-accredited programs may not have access to information regarding the gatekeeping process in their program (Bryant et al., 2013). This study sought to understand how counselor education doctoral students at a large, public midwestern university experience their training and preparation to become gatekeepers for the profession. The implications for counselor educator and supervisor preparation and directions for further research are discussed.

Literature Review

Gatekeeping is a professional and ethical responsibility in counselor education as outlined in the American Counseling Association's Code of Ethics (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014). Gatekeeping is defined as "the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students' competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate" in the ACA 2014 Code of Ethics (p. 20). Conversely, gate slippage refers to "a phenomenon when a supervisor does not instigate remediation with a supervisee after recognizing potential gatekeeping issues" (Dediego & Burgin, 2016, p. 180). The Code of Ethics outlines gatekeeping protocol explicitly in section F code 6.b, where it denotes that gatekeeping is an ongoing process of assessing potential limitations of those under one's charge and creating a plan and securing means for remediation, which could include dismissal or loss of credentials or licenses (ACA, 2014, p. 13). This part of the ethics code references supervisors as those responsible for gatekeeping, but other areas of the code denote that those serving in the role of counselor educator are expected to uphold this gatekeeping standard as well (ACA, 2014). The Code of Ethics (2014) further defines supervisors as trained counselors who oversee counselors'

and counselors-in-training's clinical work and counselor educators as counselors who are predominantly engaged in developing, implementing, and supervising professional counselors' education and preparation.

Though gatekeeping typically falls to counselor education faculty and supervisors who supervise the clinical work of students, students must also serve as gatekeepers in some situations: "When students function in the role of counselor educators or supervisors, they understand that they have the same ethical obligations as counselor educators, trainers, and supervisors" (ACA, 2014, p. 14). Doctoral students and faculty have the same ethical responsibility to act as gatekeepers to the profession, but practically their duties may differ depending on the program. Though master's students do not operate in these roles prior to graduation, doctoral students' training does require them to function in the role of both counselor educators and supervisors. Doctoral students are specifically charged with "screening, remediation, and gatekeeping" relevant to both teaching and supervision functions (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016, p. 38-39). In addition to these ethical and accreditation requirements, doctoral students must also be aware of institutional policies for gatekeeping.

CACREP requires in their 2016 accreditation standards that "Counselor education programs have and follow a policy for student retention, remediation, and dismissal from the program consistent with institutional due process policies and with the counseling profession's ethical codes and standards of practice" (CACREP, 2016, p. 5). Remediation is a process addressing and documenting observable deficiencies in student performance and providing a specific plan or means to remedy the deficiency; common areas requiring remediation according to students include willingness to self-reflect and receptiveness to feedback, counseling

skills, and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries (Henderson & Dufrene, 2013). There are typically several gates in the process to catch and remediate concerns, beginning with admission, though up to half of programs may not have sufficient gates throughout the process (Bryant et al., 2013). Despite CACREP requirements, it appears gate slippage is still occurring (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002).

A study of 10 master's-level students' perceptions of gatekeeping found that most students were unaware of gatekeeping processes despite having concerns about peers (Foster et al., 2014). In another study, the combined gatekeeping intervention rates reported by both faculty (n = 45) and students (n = 62) suggest about 21% of master's students could be professionally deficient and complete their program without remediation or intervention (Gaubatz & Vera, 2006). A study of 103 clinical supervisors of master's students at internship field sites found that only 35% of the supervisors reported gatekeeping concerns to counselor education faculty, indicating about 2 in 3 concerns may not be addressed in supervision settings in addition to academic settings (Freeman et al., 2016). These studies reveal deficits in gatekeeping in programs, thus indicating potential deficits in gatekeeping training and application. Given rates of deficiency among students compared to rates of reporting concerns, it is likely that students who are professionally deficient are not addressed by gatekeepers and thus harm clients and the profession.

Cultural dynamics are an assessed area of counseling competence, but little is understood about how culture impacts gatekeeping. Though cultural dynamics in gatekeeping specifically are insufficiently researched, literature does indicate that cultural identity influences both supervision and teaching roles in which gatekeeping occurs. Gender identity and dynamics influence the supervision relationship in several ways, including perceptions of power and openness and honesty within the relationship, as found in a systemic literature review (Hindes & Andrews, 2011). Racial

identity also impacts doctoral students' experiences with faculty and other students such as feeling disrespected or isolated, which could influence supervision and teaching experiences and thus gatekeeping (Henfield et al., 2013). Trepal and Hammer (2014) looked at critical incidents in doctoral supervision training and found that multicultural training and culture impacted their supervision experiences, including gatekeeping.

In terms of teaching and cultural dynamics, research indicates an awareness of the impact of cultural dynamics, including in assessment of professional competence. Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) discovered that knowledge of students with problems of professional competence increases the stress of both faculty and students, and that faculty expressed concern about appearing culturally insensitive or struggling to balance gatekeeping with empathetic responses. Goodrich and Shin (2013) propose a culturally responsive approach for addressing professional competence, which focuses on faculty self-reflection, considerations of culture and intersectionality, and a group system intervention. Haskins and Singh (2015) also introduced a model to infuse critical race theory in counselor education pedagogy in response to a need for greater cultural awareness in the classroom. It is apparent from the number of culturally informed pedagogical approaches and existing research on teaching in counselor education that cultural dynamics impact both policy and personal interactions in training programs, and thus gatekeeping decisions as well.

Doctoral students are at the crux of these sociocultural interactions as gatekeepers, both in supervision and teaching. They are also in a unique position to interact with master's students in many capacities (i.e. mentor, supervisor, classmate) and could provide additional perspective for gatekeeping of master's students, who may be easier to identify as professionally deficient through non-academic or peer interactions. Gatekeeping concerns may be identified from multiple sources,

including doctoral students, and greater training and awareness of gatekeeping policies may increase the chances that these concerns are reported.

Research Problem and Significance

The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs' (CACREP) 2016 standards require that all programs have a remediation policy consistent with the ACA Code of Ethics (CACREP, 2016). Despite the CACREP mandate and several models for remediation policy, inconsistencies in the implementation of addressing a gatekeeping concern are pervasive in the literature (McCaughan & Hill, 2015; Swank & Smith-Adock, 2014; Wilkerson, 2006; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). The program policy at the institution where the study was conducted indicates that students are reviewed annually and if a concern requiring action arises, the faculty discuss the concern, allow the student to share their perspective, and then decide whether to recommend remediation or not; a Professional Conduct Concern form can also be filed, formally detailing the nature of the concern in the student's departmental file. If departmental intervention does not succeed, students may be referred to university review boards who may issue warnings, behavioral contracts, academic probation, or suspension and/or dismissal from the university, or the department may choose to remove a student from the program. To contend with the mandates that doctoral students be gatekeepers at professional and institutional levels, there is corresponding required training for doctoral students on gatekeeping and remediation.

The CACREP 2016 standards mandate that doctoral students must complete coursework in theories, techniques, and methods of supervision as part of their program training. Counselor education and supervision doctoral students at the institution where the study took place take two courses directly related to supervision, including a course on theories and a practicum course, in accordance with CACREP guidelines. Despite the critical role that doctoral students' supervision

coursework plays in their gatekeeping training, research in this area is limited (Frick & Glossoff, 2014; Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Limberg et al., 2013; Protivnak & Foss, 2011; Rapisarda et al., 2011).

Additionally, much of the research concerning doctoral students' training and experiences in gatekeeping focuses on supervision training exclusively (Falender et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2016; Trepal & Hammer, 2014), leaving a gap concerning gatekeeping in other roles such as teaching. Areas identified through existing studies indicate that further instruction in student assessment and remediation (Dediego & Burgin, 2016), learning to assess dispositional qualities and characteristics necessary to the profession (Foster et al., 2014; McCaughan & Hill, 2015), balancing multiple processes simultaneously (Gazzola et al., 2013), and making students aware of and helping them manage gatekeeping processes (Foster et al., 2014; Gazzola et al., 2013) may be helpful components of gatekeeping training for doctoral students. Additional aspects for training could include formal instruction regarding departmental and university policies for gatekeeping and remediation, providing case examples from different roles (i.e. both teaching and supervision gatekeeping scenarios), and making students aware of methods of reporting and receiving consultation regarding gatekeeping concerns. In order to prevent gate slippage, it is important to improve implementation of gatekeeping in the upcoming generation of counselor educators and better train them to fill the ethical obligation of gatekeepers during their training program.

Research Purpose and Questions

Despite ethical mandates to gatekeep in counselor education programs, not much is known about how counselor education doctoral students experience, learn about, and apply gatekeeping during their training. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences that current doctoral students at a large, public midwestern university have had with learning and applying

gatekeeping. Understanding how current doctoral counselor education students are experiencing and learning gatekeeping, as well as managing multiple professional roles, in which they are gatekeepers, will better inform policy and practice for gatekeeping training. Special consideration is given to describing how participants define gatekeeping and their process of identifying gatekeeping scenarios.

As such, the following research questions will be explored:

- What are counselor education doctoral students' experiences of gatekeeping during their training?
- How do counselor education students learn how to gatekeep?
- How do multiple professional roles inherent in counselor education doctoral training affect their experiences of gatekeeping?

It is hoped that understanding and describing the gatekeeping experiences of current doctoral students could inform program policy and training practices, thus better equipping doctoral students to be more effective gatekeepers during their program and later in the field. In turn, these changes could assist in preventing gate slippage for the profession and reduce the risk of client harm by master's-level trainees.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used for this study is based off both a personal understanding of gatekeeping and doctoral training and concepts taken from the extant literature. The impact of cultural context is an underlying assumption, and the impact of culture on supervision, teaching, and doctoral students' experiences in general is well-documented in the literature (Baker & Moore, 2015; Collins & Pieterse, 2007; Frick & Glosoff, 2014; Nilsson & Duan, 2007; Trepal & Hammer, 2014). As a result, culture informs and impacts gatekeeping experiences as well, and thus it is

important to include in this conceptual framework (Goodrich & Shin, 2013). The primary influences which comprise and inform the construct of gatekeeping include ethics, professional standards, university policies, and training program policies.

Ethics & Professional Standards

The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) defines gatekeeping, identifies who is mandated to serve as a gatekeeper, and under what circumstances gatekeeping must occur. Professional standards, such as varying state licensure requirements or CACREP accreditation standards, expand ethical practice towards both aspirational practice, and consensus on academic and dispositional expectations for counselor education trainees (Glance et al., 2012). Some examples of expectations could include strong skills in empathy, self-awareness, and reflecting on their development. Professional standards and the ACA Code of Ethics are broad in their scope of impact on gatekeeping training.

University and Training Program Policies

Training program policies are individual, as CACREP guidelines dictate the need for gatekeeping protocol in departmental policy but do not dictate specifics about how that protocol should look (CACREP, 2016). Implementation of ethical and CACREP standards of gatekeeping may vary based on departmental protocol and precedent. There are several models which inform effective gatekeeping, such as Homrich's (2009) model which recommends that gatekeepers and programs establish expectations, clearly and widely distribute these expectations, and consistency in enforcement. Departmental policy should be focused on establishing formal procedures for identifying and addressing academic or conduct concerns, however individual faculty members' implementation of these policies and procedures may vary due to personal concerns such as job security or fear of legal action by a student (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). Counselor education training

program policies outline procedures to be taken once a professional deficiency is identified, such as remediation or dismissal from a program (Bryant et al., 2013). Forrest et al.'s (1999) model of gatekeeping also provides recommendations on the different components of the remediation process and policy including establishment of a remediation plan, securing means to enact the plan, consideration of legality, and a clear and documented assessment criteria for student progress towards the goals of the plan. Though the responsibilities of gatekeepers and training programs are outlined and informed by ethical, professional, legal, and departmental standards, they are less clear on the specifics of how and when gatekeeping should occur, which can create uncertainty for less experienced doctoral students (Dediego & Burgin, 2016).

As learned from qualitative studies, doctoral students' experiences with learning gatekeeping are predominantly informed by academic and experiential learning (Dediego & Burgin, 2016; Trepal & Hammer, 2014). Input from faculty, most often in the form of mentorship, is central to both types of learning (Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002; Majcher & Daniluk, 2009; Nelson et al., 2006). Faculty input may be formal or informal and is likely informed by their experiences and approach to teaching and supervising. Formal input could include grading decisions during co-teaching or as a supervisor of clinical supervision, whereas informal input might involve voluntary consultation sought out by the student gatekeeper.

Academic learning includes any relevant learning not related to direct contact or experience, thus encompasses formal coursework and any relevant informal reading or research. In the conceptual framework, academic learning is espoused by two sub-concepts: research and coursework learning. Experiential learning includes supervision and teaching as major sub-concepts. Supervision includes additional sub-concepts of practicum and internship, and teaching includes additional sub-concepts of graduate assistantships and internship. The sub-concepts of

the conceptual framework are structured based on both CACREP standards and the institution's departmental coursework.

Doctoral students take both theoretical and practical coursework throughout their program, as represented by academic and experiential learning. However, practical coursework involves an additional evaluative component, in which doctoral students are put in a position to assess master's level students, thus giving them a level of authority over the students. Additionally, doctoral students work under the supervision of a faculty member during all practical coursework, where the faculty member (also called the instructor of record) has final authority over decisions and grades and is also assessing the doctoral student's performance. Teaching- and supervision-related experiences may result in a doctoral student working with students, sometimes the same students, in different capacities, which may result in multiple professional roles (Dickens et al., 2016). These relationships with faculty and students may be impacted by cultural factors. For example, racial and ethnic minority doctoral students may have concerns about being taken seriously by white faculty or supervisors (Baker & Moore, 2015). The culture of a supervisee or student could impact the way a gatekeeping concern is addressed as well.

This conceptual framework was designed to highlight the depth and breadth of roles and experiences that doctoral students contend with as student gatekeepers based on what is known in the literature (Maxwell, 2005). It also highlights experiences with power dynamics and authority in these experiences. Finally, cultural context impacts how doctoral students learn and make sense of gatekeeping, as well as how master's students may make sense of the exact same encounters. The structure focuses on both the unique contexts and roles that doctoral students experience as well as the external professional factors which continue to inform gatekeeping standards. This conceptual framework provides an outline of the constructs relevant to doctoral gatekeeping.

Method

Design

This project is intended to serve as a pilot project as such the method reflects this intention to serve as a steppingstone for future study. A basic qualitative approach that draws from the phenomenological influences was used to understand and describe the essence of the experiences of the participants with gatekeeping as a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). A social constructivist lens to understand and theme the approaches of the participants was used to conduct an “analysis of narratives” to describe the participants’ experiences of gatekeeping both collectively and separately (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 24). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the research questions and allow space to uncover and interpret meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The study obtained Human Subjects Institutional Review Board approval prior to the execution of recruitment and data collection.

Establishing Trustworthiness

In order to ensure credibility, dependability, and confirmability, elements concerning positionality and trustworthiness, and thus rigor, must be included in qualitative research (Toma, 2011). Both the author’s positionality statement, which was used to create progressive subjectivity, and checking data with members produced greater credibility (Mertens, 2015). Maintaining a research log to audit for dependability and repeated rounds of coding and coding memos for confirmability and credibility both contributed to the validity of the study (Mertens, 2015). Every effort was made to preserve confidentiality by changing identifying information. Additionally, data was coded and analyzed to conglomerate ideas, further reducing the chance of details that might identify participants becoming known. Participants were also given the opportunity to mutually agree upon an accessible meeting place that they found comfortable and met the need for

confidentiality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Also, per Mertens (2015) member checking was utilized by sending members copies of the transcript and asking them to confirm the contents and themes. All participants were provided with information about the conclusion and dissemination of the study, including information regarding how they can obtain a copy of the research results.

Researcher Positionality

Researcher positionality is critical in qualitative research, especially when the researcher is studying their own population as this researcher is doing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Richards, 2010). Based on personal experiences with gatekeeping, the researcher is guided by the belief that the profession can improve its ability to gatekeep, as literature indicates that gate slippage continues to occur and there is little on doctoral students' experiences with gatekeeping. The researcher felt that they are in a unique position to work collaboratively with doctoral students as a researcher, based on prior collegial rapport.

Being that the researcher is an insider with this population and the small size of the program, it was likely that the researcher would know most of the participants. The researcher's relationship with potential participants could range from colleague or acquaintance to close friend or mentor. The researcher put their role as a researcher first via bracketing, while still acknowledging that their relationship with participants impacts both their willingness to participate and their responses during the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher's closeness to the topic and possible relationship with participants, monitored properly, was primarily an asset to contextualize the study and build rapport with participants.

Recruitment and Data Collection

Participants were recruited via electronic mail using their university email accounts, with calls for participation sent a total of three times. A tailored approach to data collection combining email contact and in-person, phone, and computer interviews helped to maximize likelihood of response, considering the population consists of graduate students who likely check their email frequently (Dillman et al., 2014). If participants were interested in participating in the study, they were instructed to respond directly to the email or contact the researcher via telephone to schedule an interview.

Students who indicated interest in the study were selected through criteria sampling as well as maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2015). Inclusionary criteria for the participant sampling frame included being a current counselor education and supervision doctoral student at the institution where the study was conducted. Current students were defined as those students who were registered for a minimum of one credit toward the completion of their degree during the Spring 2018 semester. Maximum variation sampling was based upon the student's progress towards degree completion and gatekeeping experience. For example, effort was made to interview students from all stages of the program in order to maximize variation in gatekeeping experience, as students who are further along in the program have taken more practicum and internship courses dealing with gatekeeping activities. Additionally, a sample which is culturally representative of the program was pursued.

Each participant was asked to participate in a single 45- to 60-minute interview. The method of data collection was a semi-structured interview that consisted of open-ended questions and prompts, such as "Tell me about what gatekeeping means to you" and "What are your experiences with gatekeeping during your doctoral program?" Semi-structured interviewing was selected to allow for some flexibility to ask follow-up questions with participants, as this

population has not been well studied, and allows the interviewer to collect data that may otherwise have been missed or misunderstood (see Appendix A). The data collected from interviews was audio-recorded using a secure recorder, transcribed, coded, and interpreted in findings. All data was collected in the spring term of 2018, then transcribed and analyzed.

Participants

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend recruiting between five to thirty participants for qualitative studies. The total number of enrolled students at the institution's counselor education doctoral program at the time of the study was about 20, and five participants were recruited. Participant demographics were predominantly white (n = 4) and female (n = 4), with one participant identifying as multiracial and another identifying as male. Participants ranged in age from 26 to 45 and varied with respect to amount of time and experience in the program.

Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) was utilized for 30-60 minute in-person and Skype meetings. All participants participated in one interview where they responded to ten open-ended, free response questions. Follow up prompts or questions for clarification were asked, as were additional questions deemed relevant to the participant's interview and the study's research questions. Screening questions to confirm the participants' eligibility for the survey were asked prior to the interview questions. All responses were audio recorded and transcribed.

Questions for the study were selected after conducting literature review and reviewing national, professional, and the institution's departmental policies on gatekeeping (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016). Additionally, questions were constructed based on Dillman et al.'s (2014) open-ended question construction guidelines. As interviews were conducted, questions pertaining to content introduced by the participants were created.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred concurrently with the data collection phase, with initial analysis taking place following the first interview. The transcripts from the survey responses were coded using in vivo coding, preserving the actual language and honoring the participant's voice (Saldaña, 2015). A priori themes for coding the data correspond to major themes from the literature and are organized under the three research questions: experience, learning process, and roles. Themes were added or altered based on the outcome of the coding process, and subthemes were created and added. Each transcript was coded a minimum of two times to ensure codes are reviewed and refined by the researcher (Saldaña, 2015).

Findings

Due to the breadth of information gained from the interviews, the findings are presented as themes under the respective research questions and a priori themes. The themes were constructed from recurring and salient codes which directly pertain to the research questions. These findings are also supported by the conceptual framework.

Research Question One: Doctoral Students' Gatekeeping Experiences

Gatekeeping as a Process

When asked about what gatekeeping means to them, doctoral students noted that gatekeeping is a professional obligation, which consisted of a process of keeping track of those under their charge. Gatekeeping was described as a process by several participants: "I don't think of gatekeeping as like one thing or like one conversation that you have with a student where you say you're done. I think of gatekeeping, the whole process, and every conversation, every contact with the student is... there needs to be some offer of this is what needs to happen differently, in these ways, by this time." Another participant described it as a process which varies by program:

“as a counselor educator I need to be knowledgeable of and kind of um what that whole process looks like and knowing what that process is like at other universities too.” Participants noted that intervention should occur early in the process.

A prominent idea was that discussion of the gatekeeping concern should occur “sooner rather than later” with the student or supervisee: “[I]n supervision it’s like the moment that you are aware that there could be issues whether that’s relating to a client or like with multicultural issues with their clients. I address those things as soon as I notice them.” Participants noted that once an issue was detected, for example a boundary crossing or lack of counseling skills, they would speak with the student of concern:

[P]eople who have issues with boundary crossings or just speaking inappropriately to someone. Those would be some really big red flags for me. I think people who really struggle with issues of diversity and privilege, to me those students would require some sort of remediation.

Whereas another participant framed red flags as anything which could have a negative impact as a future counselor:

I think those situations kind of in my experience like it’s not really something like I’m going to look out for this in particular but when they come up it’s then pretty obvious that this is a red flag, like this is something that could have an impact on somebody down the road. And this is you know something that we should look into as far ‘Is this field a good fit for you?’

Assessing harm and protecting the public were recurring codes which helped doctoral students differentiate gatekeeping concerns from developmentally normal deficits. “I think when there’s a potential for them to harm a client is really like kind of the decision, so like when I’ve been

involved in these decisions in the past, like really that's what it comes down to." Additionally, competence and qualifications (i.e. multicultural competence, writing proficiency, interpersonal skills) were considered when assessing possibility of harm.

Coding also revealed a common process for assessing gatekeeping concerns. Doctoral students reported identifying a concern, assessing for harm within the student's developmental context, making the student aware of the concern, consulting with faculty, giving clear and direct feedback to the student regarding the concern, enact interventions (i.e. "extra practice"), and plan remediation based on student progress.

But there is still that process to it where there's usually been 'Ok there's been some worries early on... we've tried to make them aware of this, we've given them feedback', and then at some point they're just not progressing, and we think it's to the extent that there can be some negative consequences to clients if this student passes.

Common examples of remediation included failing or retaking a course, discussing fit of the program with the student, and attending personal counseling. "You want to give the student as many chances as possible to make the changes that need to be made. I don't think of gatekeeping as like one thing or like one conversation." Several interviews highlighted a developmental approach, focusing on student context and progress over time when addressing a gatekeeping concern and student's response to this feedback.

Several Gates

Though gatekeeping was described thematically throughout the interviews as a process, interviewees frequently mentioned key "gates" in the process. Admissions, important courses, clinical work, and licensure were the most frequently discussed gates. "We have a number of gates to the process, the first ones being in the admissions process." This theme was also reflected in

several participants' discussions of varying levels of severity in gatekeeping. For example, "So it's almost like gatekeeping can kind of happen in different ways and in different capacities or different like levels of intensity almost." Remediation was also discussed as having several layers of severity, from informal (i.e. supplemental readings) to formal (i.e. retaking a course). One participant summarized: "Well I think of remediation as um as wide variety of possibilities. But, each time you meet with the student... you're offering umm a chance to go a different way."

Research Question Two: Learning to Gatekeep

Ways of Learning

The participants unanimously identified that gatekeeping was addressed at some point in the curriculum, but that it was not addressed sufficiently or explicitly enough in classes. "As I recall I don't remember touching on this like in any... specific, targeted way in classes." All participants explicitly stated that they referenced professional standards such as the Code of Ethics or CACREP standards. Participants also cited literature and research as supplementary sources of learning. Experiences were noted as much more critical to doctoral students learning to gatekeep, but most doctoral students may not have these experiences.

I would imagine if you would ask all the doc students in our program, have you had an experience with gatekeeping or do you think you will? Almost everybody, if not everybody, would say yes. And then if the follow up question was, have you been *trained* in how to do it? I would guess that it would be the opposite, almost everybody would say no.

Gatekeeping experiences are also impacted by the faculty that a doctoral student is co-supervising or co-teaching with.

Often associated with experiential learning, faculty mentorship and consultation helped doctoral students decide on a course of action once a gatekeeping concern was identified as evidenced by a participant's response to common gatekeeping struggles: "I think knowing what to do in situations because I know like I've always been fortunate to like have faculty to ask like how should I handle this?" Another participant felt that their relationship with a faculty impacted their perception of gatekeeping authority:

I personally I don't feel like in the academic setting as a doc student that we have a whole lot of power. Um I do think it changes so if we are again if we're doing like a practicum or if we're teaching a class, that we will have some influence um in those and I think it depends upon who you're paired with as well. If your, the faculty member that's... the primary instructor of record, um... you know as colleagues it depends upon your level of relationship and influence with your classmates like on how impactful that will be.

A negative relationship with a faculty member could pose a barrier to gatekeeping effectiveness.

Barriers to Learning

The doctoral students interviewed for this study were asked to identify perceived struggles or barriers to gatekeeping. Though participants felt that identifying a gatekeeping issue was more obvious, "following through" or "knowing what to do" were perceived as the greatest problems that doctoral students face as gatekeepers. "I would like to think that doctoral students can easily identify students who might be lacking in whatever regard it is, clinically, academically, professionally, personally, the whole spectrum... but I think the biggest thing is actually following through." The participants indicated that lack of experience with gatekeeping and lack of frank discussion about gatekeeping were also barriers to learning, as gatekeeping conversations have been difficult. "...the biggest struggle is when you have to have these difficult conversations with

students, is that you know how devastating that is.” Another participant described their self-doubt about these conversations:

You’re already in this weird position where you’re fighting all kinds of imposter syndrome stuff as a doc student. You’re moving so quickly into a professional role, and you’re being given these opportunities and internships and practica where you’re actually in that professional role. I would think it would feel very like ‘What gives me the right? Am I you know... am I doing the right thing?’ I would think it would be a little scary to say that, to have any kind of conversation like that with uh with a fellow student.

Doctoral students had compassion for master’s students hearing this difficult information as students themselves.

Research Question Three: Multiple Professional Roles in Gatekeeping

Teaching Versus Supervision Roles

Consistent with the conceptual framework, two key roles were most associated with gatekeeping: teaching and supervision. Four of five participants perceived these roles as different with respect to how they would address a gatekeeping concern. Supervision was discussed as having more professional and legal liability and having greater focus on protecting the profession. Teaching was characterized as having less personal liability as students do not practice under the educator’s license as in supervision and that it is typically more focused on protecting the program and student. “I feel like teaching is much more of like almost protecting the *program* and *student*, where supervision is a little bit more of an emphasis on the profession and in a lot of ways too you know kind of covering yourself.” Red flags in the gatekeeping process were described as similar across supervision and teaching. Some participants noted that a doctoral student’s relationship with a faculty member and that faculty member’s approach to teaching or supervision will impact the

doctoral student's role. Three participants also described how cultural context influences their approach or willingness to approach faculty with gatekeeping concerns: "so I would think like with the teaching and the supervision, those would be the primary pieces... to make sure that that person is not continually choosing to do things that could create harm to a client or to a group of people, is what I see as like you know effective gatekeeping." Another shared his awareness of how his privilege as a white male may impact his faculty relationships and confidence differently than peers:

[O]ther potential barriers that *I've* not encountered as like a white man, is women might feel more intimidated by it, especially if the student who needs gatekeeping is a male or the instructor that they're working with is a male. They might feel like they don't have the voice to necessarily speak their concerns or that they won't be taken as seriously. I imagine the same could be said about race too. If I was a person of color working in this environment, it could be a fear of people not taking me as seriously so those are some of the potential barriers, that while *I* haven't experienced, I imagine are out there.

As this participant notes, faculty relationships influence doctoral gatekeepers as well.

Faculty Relationships

Faculty relationships were predominantly discussed with regards to mentorship or "gray area." Mentorship was highlighted as critical to both supervision and teaching roles, as well as learning to gatekeep, both through consultation and gaining experience. "I really like the mentorship from the faculty in regards to gatekeeping. I feel like that's been more valuable to me than reading literature on gatekeeping..." The "gray area" was described in two different ways: disagreements with faculty decisions and feeling "in the middle." Though participants who discussed disagreements with faculty regarding gatekeeping decisions noted they were rare, they

stated an awareness that they have less authority as faculty have the final say, as one participant put it: “One of the things I think could be difficult is you know you don’t have any authority... but at the end of the day the instructor of record is going to get the final say... I think sometimes being a doc student in those situations is a gray area.” Being “in the middle” was associated with both an awareness of being an assessor and being assessed: “...but it’s like you’re kind of in the middle, where it’s like you have some kind of say and some kind of influence over them, but at the same time you are still getting your own supervision and your own feedback.” When discussing “gray areas,” three of five participants also reflected on how they might deal with it if they were the faculty member.

Discussion

Limitations and Delimitations

This pilot study describes the experiences of a sample of counselor education doctoral students at a large, public midwestern university with the phenomenon of gatekeeping, in order to learn to do it better and inform programs so that they might improve their policies and protocols. However, more could be understood about the state of gatekeeping training and experiences with a larger and more diverse sample size, and as such the findings of this study are delimited to students within the institution where the study was conducted. The study focus was broad in scope but focused and small in terms of the sample. This study took place during a research practicum over a short period of time, and as such, the sample size was a limitation. The sample is limited in that it included those willing to participate in that time-frame and a single program population. Additionally, the criteria for inclusion allowed for students with both less experience with gatekeeping and extensive gatekeeper experiences to participate, which provides a developmental context, but led to less depth for those participants with fewer experiences earlier in their programs.

Another key limitation is the lack of cultural diversity within the sample in the areas of race and ethnicity and gender, which was influenced by the short time-frame and demographics of the program. These limitations and delimitations will inform future studies on specificity of inclusion and exclusion criteria, hopefully increasing transferability.

Positioning in Current Literature and Future Research

This study is the first study to this author's knowledge on doctoral students' experiences as developing gatekeepers. Gatekeeping has been examined with faculty (Schuermann et al., 2018; Swank, 2014) and site supervisors (Freeman et al., 2016), including a study of gatekeeping amongst gatekeepers (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015), but not with doctoral students. Additionally, current research on doctoral students focuses on the roles in which the students serve as gatekeepers, such as supervision (Dediego & Burgin, 2016; Majcher & Daniluk, 2009; Nelson et al., 2006; Trepal & Hammer, 2014) or teaching (Baltrinic et al., 2016, Hunter & Gilmore, 2011), as opposed to focusing more specifically on the role of being a gatekeeper. As such, this study serves as a pilot for future research focused on doctoral students as gatekeepers, and it provides initial findings on how doctoral students experience their role as a developing gatekeeper (Rapp et al., 2018).

Future research specifically focused on the learning experiences of a larger, more diverse group of counselor doctoral students, especially the experiential learning aspects of training, would provide greater context on doctoral gatekeeping development for the literature base. It is especially important that culturally diverse doctoral student perspectives be adequately represented in further studies, and research on the cultural context of gatekeeping from the perspectives of diverse doctoral students and faculty is warranted. Though Dickens, Ebrahim, and Herlihy (2016) explored multiple roles, the impact of multiple professional roles on doctoral student gatekeepers would be

a fruitful area of continued exploration. Additionally, the impact of cultural context and identities in experiential learning components of training has been explored (i.e., Baker & Moore, 2015, Goodrich & Shin, 2013), but research focused on how cultural factors influence gatekeeper development is needed. Finally, document review of program policies and studies with greater focus on doctoral students' experiences with the remediation process could improve understanding about how gatekeepers develop their approaches to remediation within and between programs (Dean et al., 2018; Bowen, 2009; Whitt, 2001).

Conclusion

This study has identified the importance of experiential learning and faculty mentorship for developing gatekeepers. Doctoral students in counselor education are tasked with the same responsibilities as faculty and supervisors, but they would benefit from increased training and experience with gatekeeping. Mentorship and experiential learning were identified as key themes in how doctoral students are already learning their roles as gatekeepers, so additional attention to gatekeeping in didactic coursework is also recommended. More research on doctoral students in counselor education programs is needed to better understand the training needs of developing gatekeepers for the profession. Additionally, cultural contexts inform teaching and supervision roles within the field and as such cultural contexts in supervision must be further explored with respect to their impact on gatekeeping. Finally, the institution where the study was conducted likely has a unique way that it addresses gatekeeping within the course content and structure relative to other universities, and it is hoped that this study may serve as a pilot for future research in this area.

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Appendix A

- Tell me about what gatekeeping means to you.
 - Give me an example.
 - How might you define gatekeeping?
- What are your experiences with gatekeeping during your doctoral program?
 - Give me an example.
 - Please say more about what those experiences were.
- How do you decide when gatekeeping is necessary?
 - Give me an example.
 - What is a hypothetical scenario in which you would know gatekeeping is necessary?
 - What do you look for when making the decision to gatekeep?
- What is your process when you have a gatekeeping concern about a trainee?
 - Give me an example of someone you felt might be violating ethical, professional, or program standards.
 - Walk me through your thought process when you are worried someone is deficient in skills and/or disposition.
 - What might you do in a hypothetical situation in which you encounter a gatekeeping concern?
- How did you learn to gatekeep?
 - Tell me about who or what you have encountered in the program that helped you understand gatekeeping.
 - What is your first memory of having to gatekeep?

- What are the professional roles you have been in where gatekeeping has come up?
 - How has gatekeeping come up in those roles?
 - Think about teaching, supervision, and mentorship roles you have had and any gatekeeping you had to do in those roles.
- What about gatekeeping do doctoral students struggle with?
 - What is an example of a barrier you have experienced while acting as a gatekeeper?
 - What is an example of a gatekeeping situation where you felt underprepared or unsupported?
- What do you wish you had known about gatekeeping coming into this program?
 - What do you still want to learn about gatekeeping?
 - What advice would you have for new doctoral students about being a gatekeeper?
- What are some ways that a doctoral program could prepare you to be a good gatekeeper for the profession?
 - What are the qualities of a good gatekeeper according to what the program has taught you?
 - What do you think programs could do to teach you more about gatekeeping?
- Thank you very much for your participation! Is there anything else you want to share with me about gatekeeping today?