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## Philosophy and Counseling: A Case Study

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Philosophy and Counseling: A Case Study

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Counselor Education

by  
Matthew Rault Wegmann

B.S. Spring Hill College, 2006  
M.S. Loyola University New Orleans, 2008

December 2013



## Dedication

To Spitz, John, and Justin,  
for inspiration at every level

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want thank my parents, Dick and Julie-Ann Wegmann, for their constant support and encouragement throughout my entire life. They gave me my love for education and provided me with the opportunities necessary to find my own path, despite a few hiccups along the way. They are my model for unconditional positive regard and have given me a template for how to live a joyous and shared life. I can only hope to show the same love to others as they have shown to me. Thanks must also go to my brother, Andrew, my constant ally and confidante. There is no one in this world with whom I would rather share a loud and unorthodox discussion and sharing the process of writing a dissertation with him has been one of the great joys of my life. The passion and skill that he brings to his work has served as inspiration and motivation for my own. Special thanks are finally due to my wife, Lauren. She has brought me to an understanding of love and fidelity that I never knew as possible. From the moment we met, she has loved me, supported me, and put up me, not once asking for anything in return. I would neither have wanted nor been able to make it this far without her by my side.

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## Foreword

This dissertation represents my education coming full circle. I was first exposed to the ideas of holism, Buber, dialectics, hermeneutics, and relation during my secondary education at Jesuit High School, New Orleans, although at the time I did not know that was what I was learning. A product of eleven years of Jesuit education, their foundation of philosophy has been a cornerstone of my development and this project serves as testament to that. Without the experience and knowledge I gained at all three Jesuit institutions: Jesuit High School, Spring Hill College, and Loyola University, I would not have been prepared to undertake a project like this. They taught me the patience necessary to fully understand the dynamic nature of truth and fostered the intellect necessary to begin studying it. I am forever in the debt of my teachers and hope that this project serves as fitting tribute to all that I have learned.

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## Abstract

Philosophical tenets have been at the heart of the counseling process since its inception. This study explores the factors present within a graduate-level counseling class that directly teaches these philosophical foundations through an exploration of dialectics and its impact on the medium of conversation. Interviews were conducted with both the professor who created the class as well as its current instructor, along with focus groups of both current program students and program alumni. The fundamental aim was to understand the processes at work within the class and their influence on its students. The results suggest that by bringing the students into awareness of their own interpretative process by reading and discussing dense philosophical works that require them to bring something of themselves to the literature, the class fosters within its students an understanding and appreciation for the pervasiveness of the interpretative process within all people, especially those who will one day be their clients. This knowledge also seems to provide the students with a paradigm compatible across all perspectives and theories that will contribute to their counselor education.

**KEYWORDS:** philosophy, counseling, hermeneutics, dialectics, Buber, counselor education

## **Chapter 1**

“[This] University’s counseling program includes Philosophy and Counseling within its curriculum because counselors are better able to understand counseling theory and practice once they are exposed to the larger and more basic philosophical underpinnings from which the practice of counseling evolved. Such an approach is not unique in Jesuit institutions but it is uncommon in many other academic settings. Philosophy offers many lenses from which to view the world, to guide decision making, identify priorities, and to establish/maintain important relationships within our lives. This course studies several philosophies selected from a larger group, all of which seek to help us understand the nature of relationships. They share in common a broad focus on the staple of relationship – ‘conversation’.” (Syllabus, Spring 2010, see Appendix A)

### **Case Description**

The “Philosophy and Counseling” class is a three credit-hour class that meets once a week for three hours throughout the course of one semester and is a Counselor Education Program requirement for graduation, typically taken during a student’s first or second semester in the program. The class progresses through a series of shared discussions centered on the course’s selected readings and its students’ experiences of those readings. The primary works used in the class are Martin Buber’s I and Thou (1958) and Thich Nhat Hanh’s Cultivating the Mind of Love (2008); several additional readings are provided in the form of articles and hand-outs. Grades are determined by three assignments, a mid-term and final exam consisting of essay and short answer questions as well as a final reflection paper, all of which are weighted equally (Syllabus, Spring 2010).

## **Literary Justification**

Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle intended their craft to be used by the people, not solely by those trained in the higher levels of academia, forming their message through dialogues and conversations rather than complex theory (Marinoff, 1999). As the study of philosophy progressed, scholars began interpreting these conversations and assigned their own theories to them. As education became less accessible to common people, the study of ideas and abstract concepts grew further and further out of their reach; and those engaged in their study had fewer and fewer interactions with the people their field was founded to help. The role of helping the people fell to the science of medicine and from it grew psychology and its application in psychotherapy. Psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, and counselors have taken many of the foundational principles of philosophy and applied them to modern concerns in the form of counseling and psychological theories (Achenbach, 1984). The problem with this is that many of these clinicians have little or no knowledge of the philosophical foundations upon which they are standing and thus lose a significant understanding of the richness and depth that these foundations provide.

The innovators of counseling theory based their work on many factors other than empirically validated, scientific methods and clinical experience. Personal factors, religion, life experience, family, the cultural Zeitgeist of the times, and childhood experiences may all have played a role in the innovator's experience that led to the creation of an agreed upon counseling theory. Wolpe, Ellis, Skinner, Rogers, and Freud are examples of theorists who based their work on clinical experience and testing, yet all seemed to believe in the view underlying their therapeutic approach as a guiding philosophical foundation for their lives. (Sollod, 1982). Each of these therapeutic models presupposes and promotes some philosophical value set, which can

at some point cause conflict not only between those on the giving and receiving ends of a counseling relationship but also within individuals themselves. Adherence to one specific theory can cause undue conflicts of value in the therapeutic process and thus impede the development of relation and empathy. What is needed is a way to make these presuppositions manifest in both the theories and the counselors who use them (Macklin, 1982). Through a deeper understanding of the philosophical premises forwarded by the various theoretical models as well as an inward look at the values and premises held by the therapist, a clearer picture of the inherent acrimony in psychotherapeutic theory emerges. It is through the awareness of this conflicted picture of theory that counselors come to understand the deeper roots of their profession.

Through the process of dialectic education and thinking, counseling students are able to work toward developing their own understanding of how these conflicting value sets necessitate each other and can be used according to the needs and demands of the individual client (Hanna, 1996). Dialectical thinking recognizes the interplay of opposites as complimentary concepts that cannot exist without the other and thus must be taken and understood together; one or the other is insufficient to fully explain any given phenomenon. Since counseling attempts, to varying degrees and in varying ways, to understand the phenomena of another's experience through the process of relation, it would hold that understanding counseling theory through the lens of dialectical thinking would better empower counselors to relate with a variety of clients and their inseparable philosophical presuppositions and values (Hanna, 1996).

The process of dialectical thinking and mindfulness as it pertains to counseling, and thus relation in general, are exactly the topics covered in the University's "Philosophy and Counseling" class. The class attempts to integrate these concepts into the person of the counseling student, attempting to explicitly accomplish what is called for in several studies of

philosophy's role in the counseling and the counselor education process (Gutsch & Rosenblatt, 1973; Hanna 1996; Howard 2000; Urofsky & Engels, 2003).

Outside of counselor education there has been a growing trend in the last twenty-five years to bring philosophy proper back into practical application through a specific field of philosophical counseling as well as a push for deeper philosophical education in counseling techniques (Lahav, 1995; Marinoff, 2002; Raabe, 2001). However, much of the research supporting this trend has come from the field of philosophy and is focused on instructing philosophers to be counselors rather than an investigation of the philosophy's impact on the educational and developmental processes of counselors in training. Although the importance of philosophy in counseling theory is agreed upon in the literature, especially as it pertains to the humanistic family of theories, most of the counselor education courses that incorporate philosophy into their curriculum do so through the lens of a counselor's personal philosophy of life and its impact on working with a particular client's spiritualistic beliefs rather than the philosophical foundations upon which counseling is based (Cashwell & Young, 2004).

### **Theoretical-Philosophical Framework**

Counseling theory is a point of the view that offers counselors a way of organizing the perspective that they take on the change and growth process. The foundation of these viewpoints is essentially philosophical, stemming from the love of study known throughout history as philosophy. This foundation provides the building blocks on which a deep understanding of the human experience is built (Cavanagh & Levitov, 2002). The "Philosophy and Counseling" class is based on this model of counseling theory, viewing both the class itself and the counseling process in general as an interpretive, meaning-making experience. This experience is unique to each person and is valued out of respect for the individual as each person will come to their own

interpretive and organizational foundations depending on how they relate to and understand the content and process contained within the class. It is the sum total of this understanding that guides the individual's behavior within the counseling process. This framework bears a striking resemblance to client-centered theory of Carl Rogers (1951) and its unconditional, positive regard for the individual's growth process. The framework for this dissertation is based upon these ideas as manifested within the "Philosophy and Counseling" course under investigation.

Rogers (1961) saw the development of people and their understanding of the world as a process of becoming, in which we grow into an unlimited potential of understanding when provided with the right environment. He saw this as manifesting through the relationship between a therapist and a client. Central to this relationship is therapists' unconditional positive regard for their clients in their present state in the very moment in which it is experienced. This regard frees the clients to simply be themselves and experience that selfness in whichever direction they choose to go, accepting that their interpretation of the experience will guide them down a path towards greater understanding and value. The "Philosophy and Counseling" class works towards the same end, although it does so through the students' experiences within the class itself toward the material presented both from the selected readings as well as the students' in-class discussions with each other and the class' instructor. Using a dialectical model, such as that present by Buber (1958), opposing ideas are seen as having value when viewed in this light. The variations of interpretation of each of the students in the class are accepted unconditionally and used in comparison with each other as a means for furthering each student's individual understanding as well as that of the class as a whole. This process opens the students up to the possibility that change occurs with understanding these varied interpretations. Understanding a



wide variety of interpretations, some of which are contradictory, provides the students with the foundation necessary for a broad range of counseling theories.

This dissertation is founded upon the same ideas. Each individual's interpretation of the "Philosophy and Counseling" class is going to be unique and an in depth understanding of the role that philosophical investigation plays in the study of counseling and the application of counseling theory will need to respect that individuality and embrace the variety of conceptualizations and contradictions that accompany it. By maintaining unconditional positive regard for the experience and interpretation of the participants, and respecting that contradictions serve to further our grasp of this dynamic and subjective topic, the research led to a rich understanding and description of the roles discussed above. There is a cyclical process within a students' interpretation of the philosophical material presented in the class, the understanding drawn from discussion of those interpretations, and the resulting understanding that will establish those students' counseling theories, all of which will eventually guide their clinical behavior. The framework for this research respects and guides the investigation of this dynamic development within the counselor education process.

### **Problem and Purpose Statement**

Philosophical tenets have been at the heart of the counseling process since its inception. Philosophy began as an attempt to help the general public, understand, explain, and cope with the problems that they encountered in everyday life. It has only been in the last several centuries that philosophy has grown distant from the common man, placing itself in the ivory towers of academia, while the notion of helping people with their personal problems has become a part of counseling and psychotherapy (Marinoff, 2002). Despite its strong foundation in philosophy, the counseling field has been slow to explicitly acknowledge these underlying tenets. In fact,

through contacting multiple counseling programs, I found that counselor education programs seem to rarely address and incorporate these foundations directly into their curricula in any specific manner, opting instead to brush over them as a brief introduction to a theories course. As such, counselor educators are unaware of the possible impact that philosophical instruction can have on their students' growth and development as clinicians and professionals. By experiencing these philosophical foundations in a class devoted specifically to them, it may be that counseling students are able to more deeply understand the fundamentals of the counseling process, expanding their perspectives and their ability to integrate a variety of theoretical ideas into their conceptualizations of their clients and the counseling process as a whole.

The purpose of this study was to discover the components, processes, and factors present in the "Philosophy and Counseling" class taught at the University's counseling program that most influenced its students in their personal, professional, and clinical development. It further aimed to understand how the experience of taking this class effected the students' growth as counselors as well as their clinical work with clients in the field. The central research question for this study was, "How do students experience the 'Philosophy and Counseling' class?"

It was furthered by the following sub-questions:

1. Which parts of this class had the most impact on their experience, and in what way?
2. How does this experience influence the students' development personally, professionally, and clinically?
3. How is this class different from the other classes they took as part of their counselor education?

4. In the opinion of the participants, was the experience of this class a worthwhile component of their counselor education?

### **Significance of Study**

By looking at this specific case of a counselor education program directly incorporating counseling's philosophical foundations into a class, I sought to develop a rich description and presentation of the developmental processes that the program's students experienced. This is significant for several reasons. First, it brought to light an aspect of the counselor education process that is called for in the literature yet not addressed in contemporary counselor education programs. Counseling has always been a balance between the science of psychology and the art of healing and to deny such a fundamental aspect of that balance (i.e. dialectical philosophy and thinking) is both irresponsible and disloyal to the field's origins.

Second, with the rise in popularity of eclectic counseling practices, understanding the philosophies that bind all theory together is becoming more and more important. All too often, neophyte counselors tend to pick and choose aspects of different counseling theories without any guiding system of reason behind their decisions. This results in a jumbling of theory and a poor experience for the client (Short, Boone, & Hess, 1997). However, experienced counselors regularly report using a variety of theoretical techniques that they have learned to integrate into their practice and counseling worldview through years of experience. In fact, high mastery in counseling is characterized by an ability to grow and explore new areas of theoretical conceptualization and an ability to comfortably work through a continual searching of the uncertainty of human life (Skovholt & Jennings, 2005). I believe that a class such as the "Philosophy and Counseling" course at the University can advance this level of growth in new counselors, helping them blend their knowledge of theory into their own personality and

counseling style. If this is the case, then a detailed understanding of how that happens will provide much needed insight to counselor educators looking to incorporate these same processes into their own students' programs of study.

Finally, the resulting data analysis may assist in better defining counseling's role in the mental health field. By incorporating philosophy into the education of clinical counselors, the University's program has resolved many of the issues faced by the emergent field of philosophical counseling, namely, that it lacks a coherent account of its goals, nature, and method and that its proponents often practice clinical therapeutic techniques without any formal training (Knapp & Tjeltveit, 2005). The students who proceed through the University's Counseling Program appear to have a clearly defined set of goals and methods as championed by the American Counseling Association, are well trained in the clinical methods of therapy, and yet also have an in-depth understanding of philosophy's role in the counseling process.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative approach was selected for this study for several reasons. First, so little work has been done in this field that a rich data source describing the impact that philosophical education has on counselor development simply does not exist. A qualitative analysis was needed to further the knowledge base and provide instructors and students with a comprehensive explanation of this topic. Although a quantitative analysis might have provided specifics as to such a course's effectiveness, the variables would have been difficult to operationalize without a strong descriptive foundation upon which to base them. There were not enough data available to justify such a specific, narrowly scoped investigation. By using a qualitative approach, it was my goal to build the foundational descriptions and hypotheses that a quantitative investigation would need to use and hopefully be able to confirm. Additionally, there were no reliable or validated

scales that measure any aspect of this study. Without a preexisting scale, one would have to have been created, which would have necessitated a strong foundation of data, which also did not exist. At this point it would have been premature to try to devise such a scale before a basic exploration of the topic had been conducted. Further, the number of people who had actually taken and experienced a “Philosophy and Counseling” class is extremely small, far fewer than were necessary for a valid quantitative sample. Qualitative analysis was far better suited to investigate rich data from a smaller sample. Finally, the very nature of philosophical inquiry as well as the personal experience of counselor development are deeply personal and subjective topics that did not lend themselves well to quantitative inquiry. To fully grasp how a course that explores subjective interpretation impacts individuals’ personal development as counselors required rich detail and intense description to truly develop a reliable conceptualization of understanding. This is the very reason that the qualitative approach was developed and was the main reason it was selected for this study. The specific tradition of qualitative inquiry chosen for this study was thus a case study focused on the bounded system of the University’s “Philosophy and Counseling” class, following methods of Stake (1995).

### **Data Collection and Methodological Procedures**

Data for this study were collected from three data sources using purposive sampling procedures. Interviews were conducted with a professor who has taught the class, referred to as Professor J in this document, as well as the program professor who originally conceived of and implemented the current incarnation of the class, referred to Professor M. The interview with the teaching professor provided insight into the goals and aims of the class’ professor and well as a description of his own experience and process of the class. The interview with the class’ founding professor provided an understanding of the class’ origins as well as a basis for

comparison between how the class was originally conceived and its contemporary manifestation. Furthermore, focus groups were conducted with two groups of students from the University's program: graduate students who had already taken the class, and graduates of the program who were working in a clinical setting. These focus groups were conducted to provide an understanding of the class' students' experiences throughout all stages of counselor development.

## **Chapter Two**

Three main topics in literature support this course of research: first, the philosophical foundations of counseling and the counseling process; second, the inherent philosophical value sets within counseling theory and the conflicts that naturally arise from them; and finally, dialectics and the role that they can play in mediating those conflicting values within counselor education. Each will be discussed separately but all three topics have a natural connection and tend to flow from one another. The ultimate goal of this chapter is to show that based upon the available literature, the “Philosophy and Counseling” class at this University fills a gap in counselor education that has been called for by scholars but is also left open by a lack of attention to the foundations and consequences of counseling and the theory behind it.

The foundations of the counseling process come from the ancient Greek philosophers, whose search to understand the nature of human existence and suffering led them to appreciate the value and power of meaningful, questioning conversation. They started their searches in the public squares and forums, talking with the common people about what was troubling them and working to develop some kind of understanding of this that might be helpful to those people. As time passed, philosophy moved out of the realm of helping the common man and into the ivory towers of academia. Medicine and science took over the problems of the people, especially as it pertained to their minds and daily struggles; from this grew psychology, counseling, and the entire mental health field; however, most of the major developers and thinkers in these fields drew from the wisdom of philosophy, whether intentionally or not, basing their theories on both scientific research as much as their own personal experiences and understandings of the world and the people in it. (Marinoff, 1999)

As a result of the both scientific and personal components of psychological and counseling theory development, the personal values of the theorists were intricately twined into their theories. These values must be understood together with the theories they underlie in order to fully optimize their use (Sollod, 1982). The problem that results from this is that many of these theories and values conflict with one another. Some may focus on the irrational beliefs of clients, guiding them towards a challenging of their fundamental understanding of the world, while others prescribe the exact opposite of not focusing on anything in particular and allowing the client to guide the direction and content of the counseling session; some theories value cognitions while others value perception; some place emphasis on unconscious drives when others work only with observable behavior. All of these theories have proven to be successful when working with various types of overlapping clients, so which one should a clinician use? Most counselors are instructed to pick one theory and stick with it; however, many times they find that the values of the theory they use conflict with those of the client with whom they are working. Clinicians find themselves torn between the values they hold themselves and trying to work with and respect the values of their individual clients, with little hope for resolution (Macklin, 1982).

Dialectics are able to mitigate these conflicts. Dialectics and dialectical thinking see the world as a changing balance between opposing forces and recognize that one cannot exist without the other. Dark is necessary to understanding light; good could not exist without evil. Dialectics sees understanding and knowledge as coming from an appreciation of both sides of a problem or conflict and that the truth is a dynamic phenomenon that lies between an idea and its opposite. Through a process of questioning and change, one can work with even the most conflicting topics by accepting that both are necessary to the path and must be taken together.



This has been suggested as a way to understand the complexity and confliction of the various counseling theories and value sets and would seem to have multiple useful applications within counselor education when coupled with a counselor's awareness of his or her own personal values and their impact on the counselor's theoretical and clinical understanding of the counseling process (Hanna, 1996).

Although called for in the literature, the only instance I have found of a counselor education course specifically teaching material such as dialectics and the philosophical foundations of counseling is within the "Philosophy and Counseling" class at this University. It addresses dialects through the study of Buber's I-Thou (1958), awareness and presence in Hanh's Cultivating the Mind of Love (2008), as well as various selected articles that focus on philosophical understandings of relationships.

### **Philosophical Foundations of Counseling**

#### **From the Origins of Counseling in Philosophy to the Current State of Mental Health**

Counseling began as an attempt by Greek philosophers to understand the human condition and assist the people of their communities to mitigate the problems that they encountered in their everyday lives. From the very beginning of Western philosophy there was a concern with psychotherapy as the Greek culture was intensely interested in use of words in healing processes (Drane, 1982). Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all paid special attention to how words could be used to facilitate, harmonize, and expand man's understanding of his own experience. Socrates used his questioning method; Plato recognized the power of and coined the term catharsis as a process by which words could be used to gain insight; and Aristotle believed that words produce change in a person by relieving unconscious and unseen pressures. Both Plato and Aristotle recognized the special relationship between the speaker and hearer of words

and that this relationship could itself be healing (Drane, 1982). All of these notions have since been adapted into techniques and beliefs of contemporary counseling and psychotherapy manifested through an almost unending plethora of counseling and therapeutic theories.

As time moved forward, philosophy moved out of the market and into the halls of academia, allowing the healthcare field to take over as curator of the human psyche and mental health (Marinoff, 1999). Still, most philosophy throughout history can be related to problems that people encountered in their lives, only manifested through an academic perspective often times beyond the understanding of the common man (Howard, 2000). Marinoff (1999) traced this evolution well, explaining that during the time of the Greek philosophers, physical healthcare was not nearly as evolved as the search for meaning and was often more influenced by superstition and uninformed beliefs than actual scientific knowledge. The most informed people of the day were the philosophers and thus they were the ones to whom the people turned when searching for answers. As medical and biological sciences grew more knowledgeable, they assumed the role of caring for the brain as part of the body while philosophy toiled with problems of the mind and the human condition. The doctors took over treating people's mental conditions as medical issues and philosophy was forced to secure its place in the world within the halls of universities rather than out with the people. As a result, the mental health field grew of medical studies and became psychology, social work, counseling, and psychiatry. This medical foundation left the mental health field out of touch with its philosophical heritage, serving only to widen the gap between two realms of understanding that were inextricably linked in their formations and goals (Achenbach, 1984). It should be noted, however, that many modern theorists in counseling and psychotherapy openly acknowledged the role that philosophy played in the development of their own theories (Sollod, 1982).

## **Philosophical Counseling**

**History.** In the last quarter century or so a movement has emerged that seeks to move philosophy out of its ivory tower and back into the realm of helping people with their life problems. Founded by Achenbach in 1984, this field known as Philosophical Counseling or Practical Philosophy has been taken on by different philosophers and has resulted in professional organizations, journals, conferences, loose credentialing, and many different books (e.g., LaHav, 1995; Marinoff, 2001, 1999; Raabe, 2002). There are numerous professional organizations that can be joined across Germany, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States and many other countries. In America alone there exist three separate organizations: the American Society for Philosophy, Counseling, and Psychotherapy (ASPCP), which is academic in nature; the American Philosophical Practitioners Association (APPA), which is professional in nature; and the American Philosophical Counseling Association (APCA), which attempts to be both academic and professional. Yet for all the different associations that exist, no one organization or description appears to dominate the field (Knapp & Tjeltveit, 2005). The books that have been published vary as well in their goals and targeted audience. Some are geared towards the general public and discuss ways that philosophy can be helpful in assisting people with their life crises (Marinoff, 1999); others are written for the philosophical counselors and prescribe not only practice procedures but also allude to best practices for the training of philosophical counselors (Marinoff, 2001; Raabe, 2001); still others attempt to define the emerging field of philosophical counseling and bring some unity to its foundations, aims, and procedures (LaHav, 1995). Although there is a substantial emerging field of literature, practice, and professional organization, there is little unity to the field as it struggles to specifically define

what its goals are and how those goals are to be implemented within the clinical setting; philosophical counseling is clearly a field that is still in its infancy and struggling to find its place within both academia and the helping profession (Sivil, 2009).

**Understandings and critiques.** Sivil (2009) discussed the growth and development of philosophical counseling and spent a considerable amount of time arguing for its effectiveness and worth within the healthcare field. He did recognize the newness of the field and admitted that it is a field finding its ways, yet his points for advocacy left much to be desired when viewed in the light of contemporary clinical therapy. Sivil placed the abilities and capabilities of philosophical counseling on the same level as those of clinical counseling and psychotherapy, even going so far as to claim that philosophical counseling is superior to clinical counseling because it can be understood without the need for a theoretical framework and does not rely upon the medical model of diagnosis and treatment in its conceptualizations of client issues. He suggested that clinical counselors are limited by their adherence to a specific theory and that the values and structures conceived by that theory hinder the counselors by forcing them into an understanding and belief system that limits them from true openness with their client. He supported this claim in three ways. First, he placed the power of healing within the context of the therapeutic relationship, citing Rogers' (1957) necessary and sufficient conditions for growth as a suitable substitute for a lack of theoretical orientation. He claimed that because of these conditions, the philosophical counselors do not need a theory and are thus better able to enter into a counseling relationship in a more genuine way. Secondly, he used social constructivism's understanding of theory as merely constructions of the therapists' understandings of the world and argued that their usefulness is thus limited in working with clients who have a different construction or understanding of the world. Finally, he claimed that many client problems are the

result of a narrowness of vision and that aiding them consists of offering a different frame of reference from which to view their situation. It was Sivil's contention that this does not require a theoretical orientation, rather a "level of disinterested objectivity coupled with insight and a moderate exercise of wisdom" (p. 204).

While Sivil's (2009) arguments offered a healthy understanding of the perspective of many philosophical counselors, they also raise some significant concerns regarding the preparedness and clinical understanding necessary to work with clients that philosophical counselors seem to be lacking. Although written four years before Sivil, Knapp and Tjeltveit's (2005) review and critique of philosophical counseling acknowledged many of the same points that Sivil did; however, they offered several challenges to the field of philosophical counseling, suggesting that the techniques used by its practitioners are better absorbed into clinical counseling and combined with the psychological and clinical knowledge that has been gained from the field's experience. They addressed the lack of unified theory and copious diversity of method as a sign that the field lacks coherence and unified purpose, claiming that if there is no clear account given of the nature, goals, and methods then the field does not warrant recognition or support as an independent profession. They further addressed one of the main claims that philosophical counseling makes towards its own appropriateness: treating human problems, namely, that philosophical issues underlie many of the dimensions of human life addressed in psychotherapy. While Knapp and Tjeltveit recognized that there are certainly many philosophical underpinnings to the issues addressed and work done in psychotherapy, they took this as a sign that "perhaps even more advantageous may be an awareness across professions that psychology and philosophy are often inextricably intertwined in practical problems. Developing a broad competence involving expertise and cooperation across disciplinary lines may thus be optimal"

(p. 561). The authors did admit that philosophical counseling is appropriate in certain situations, those they termed “narrow-scope” philosophical problems. These are issues that are clearly philosophical in nature such as a client’s metaphysical commitments and understanding or navigating a person’s political philosophy, problems that psychology and clinical counseling generally do not cover; however, they cautioned that even these problems may have a psychological component behind them that may stem from a larger, or “broad-scope” problem, which is more effectively addressed by a clinical therapist with a healthy understanding of the connection between psychology and philosophy. They warned that philosophical counselors may be helpful in dealing with the narrow-scope issues but will lack the necessary clinical training to address the broader issues that will certainly underlie some of them. Their final recommendation, which I personally support, was that those interested in pursuing broad-scope philosophical counseling obtain advanced degrees in both a clinical mental health field as well as philosophy so that they are adequately prepared to deal with all possible outcomes of their client’s philosophical explorations.

### **Inherent Philosophical Value Sets in Major Counseling Theories**

#### **Development of Counseling Theory**

Sollod (1982) discussed the growth and development of counseling and psychotherapeutic approaches as a combination of both attempts at scientific empiricism and the inseparable value and experiential factors existent in the lives of the theorists who developed the theories. He purported that the attempt at and claim of scientific foundations has significantly aided the popularity of counseling as well as furthered its acceptance within the academic and medical communities; however, he suggested that this reliance on scientific approaches for validation of the effectiveness of therapeutic theory and techniques is fallacious due to the other,

broad, non-scientific procedures that have been used in their development and adaptation by clinicians. Although rigid and objective empiricism may demonstrate the effectiveness of a given technique, such as systematic desensitization, it in no way is able to be generalized to a more comprehensive theory of personality and fully describe the process of change. There are too many subjective factors inherent in a person for the scientific method to encompass and explain all that is happening during a person's process of growth and change. Thus, theoreticians must rely on a union of both scientific and non-scientific approaches when attempting to develop and validate a comprehensive theory of personality and change. Sollod claimed that they must balance a broad view of reality, which is untestable by scientific means, with a certain level of utility or practicality, which is empirically verifiable. Drane (1982) supported this idea and stated that although a completely value-free, scientifically empirical stance is not entirely accurate or appropriate, it has been beneficial to the field through the "development of an objective perspective in the understanding of mental illness, moving the profession away from the superficial moralistic diagnoses and treatments" (p.19).

Sollod (1982) went on to propose a general model for the origin and development of psychotherapeutic approaches. Innovators of therapeutic approaches drew from a wide array of ideas, concepts, theories, and experiences when developing their own theories of person, personality, and change. They likely based their initial thoughts on the extant theories of their day in addition to a heavy dose of their own clinical experience and empirical knowledge; however, the role of other factors cannot be overlooked. Personal factors such as psychobiographical experiences, philosophical and religious beliefs, the cultural zeitgeist, and knowledge from other disciplines such as education or biology likely played important roles. These outside factors undoubtedly influenced the innovator's view of reality and manifested

themselves in how the person made sense of clinical, experiential, and empirical knowledge that they were gaining. In many cases the resulting theory bears a great deal of resemblance to the guiding philosophy of the innovator's life.

For example, there are striking similarities between Freud's ideas in psychoanalysis and his Jewish faith (Sollod, 1982). The Jewish concept of Talmudic interpretation reflects their belief that truth is worked out through a searching process aided by the guide of a learned rabbi or teacher rather than a revelatory process is analogous to Freud's contention that personal truth and growth comes from the client's self-searching aided by the learned psychoanalyst. Furthermore, Freud saw humans as being servants of forces outside their own control and that knowledge is hidden from the untrained mind of the client. These ideas parallel Jewish theological thought, which also emphasizes the forces outside our control that determine our lives. Beyond his theological experiences, Freud's personal life played a significant role in his theories on families and human instincts. Freud recalls in his letters that he experienced significant feelings of usurpation from his younger brother, Jules, early in his life and that Jules' addition to the family posed a significant threat to Freud's extremely close relationship with his mother. This theme of longing for a loved one and the need to fight rivals for exclusive ownership of said loved one can also be seen in Freud's courting and married relationship with his wife Martha, where he felt a constant threat from her male acquaintances. These early experiences clearly formed the foundation for his ideas on the Oedipus Complex (Demorest, 2005).

Skinner too was influenced by both his theological and personal life experiences when he developed his ideas on behaviorism. Raised in a Protestant family in the early twentieth century, Skinner was taught to serve God through action and works (behavior) rather than beliefs and



ideas. These actions were seen as the means for social and personal improvement. In his society growth was seen as progress and progress was the result of action (Demorest, 2005). As such it is no wonder that his entire theory of psychology and human change was focused on overt behaviors and actions rather than thoughts, feelings, or unconscious drives. His personal life led him towards a focus on behavior as well. Skinner suffered a yearlong depression following his failed career as a writer; and in his searching for a new career path, he turned to science which he believed to be “the art of the twentieth century” (Skinner, 1976 p. 291). The science he was drawn to was Watson’s behavior psychology that was devoid of thoughts and feelings and focused clearly on external sources of and influences on behavior. This shift in paradigm allowed Skinner to place the blame for his failures on literature itself as well as his familial upbringing rather than his inner qualities, or lack thereof (Demorest, 2005).

Rogers’ life influence came from similar foundations but through different means than the other members of the “big three.” Raised in an extremely conservative religious family that forbid drinking, dancing, card play, and even a broad social life, he was taught from an early age that humans were sinful in nature, an idea that stands in stark contrast to his eventual philosophy of humans and the change process (Rogers, 1961). Rogers originally entered religious training after high school but did not like the divisive and dogmatic instruction that he was receiving. This distaste for his upbringing culminated in his experience as a delegate of the World Student Christian Federation Summit in China when he was twenty years old. During this summer long trip, he was exposed to the subjectivity and variability of ideas and experience for the first time. He learned there is not one truth; instead it was up to the individual to discover their own path to truths. He returned from China a changed man and promptly left the theological institute to become a clinician of mental health. He took the ideas he discovered in the China and combined

them with the best of the foundations he received from his parents (Demorest, 2005). The unconditional positive regard that serves as the centerpiece of his theory is clearly analogous to the Christian concept of agape or “love of God”; beyond that, the informal clergy-laity distinction of his Protestant upbringing is strikingly similar to the therapist-client relationship of person centered therapy (Sollod, 1982). So while Freud and Skinner’s theories came from similar veins of their upbringings, Rogers’ took a slightly different path in founding his theory on both his religious foundations as well as a counter reaction to his experiences as a child.

Even the more contemporary theorists drew from their own life experiences in developing their theories of counseling and change. Fritz Perls was an energetic child, who was regularly humiliated by his father and was engaged in a constant battle to prove that he was not who his father perceived him to be. He took this early experience and used it as the basis for Gestalt’s focus on interpretation and perception. His personal appreciation for the existential philosophers Husserl and Sartre formed the foundation of his emphasis on immediate experience and its interpretation (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2004). Ellis was forced to be an extremely independent child because of his emotionally absent mother and his father’s career as a travelling businessman. He had to deal with his life and family issues on his own. This, combined with his frustration over personal experiences with psychoanalysis as taking too long and the psychoanalyst not really being necessary, was further melded with his fondness for the Roman slave philosopher Epictetus, who believed that humans are not disturbed by things but rather by the views they take on things, to form REBT with its focus on the client’s ability to help themselves rather than relying on a therapist to do it for them. Adler’s optimistic theory of personal growth and the worth of all people can be traced back to his father’s deep belief in his son’s worth even though he was a sickly child who lived in the shadow of his athletic and

brilliant older brother as well as his wife's early adoption of feminist and socialist theory, which emphasized the importance and worth of all people, not just those in power or those whom society deemed to be more valuable than others (Fall, Holden, & Marquis, 2004).

Thus many of these theories are as much a response to the times of the theoretician as they are a clinically derived understanding of the human person and its change process. The two cannot be effectively separated without losing the holistic power of the theory. The result of this inseparability is that theories contradict each other and the techniques forwarded can directly conflict with each other if applied to the same client. Since all were derived from a union of scientific and non-scientific factors, one cannot be said to be better than the other once they are accepted and put into use by the therapeutic community at large.

In light of this understanding, Sollod (1982) suggested a reappraisal of the status of psychotherapy. He claimed that psychotherapy is not an application of scientific psychology but rather "a group of approaches and methods which endeavor to facilitate new patterns of individual behavior and adaptation to society" (p. 55). Viewed in this way therapy is closer to an educational endeavor rather than a scientific one; this view also allows the diversity and sometimes conflicting nature of therapeutic theories to be seen as flexibly sensitive to various needs and values of the population at large, allowing the field to meet the needs of all people where they are instead of trying to fit them into a specific framework.

### **Values and Philosophical Foundations of Theory are Inseparable and Must be Understood Together**

The term "values" as it pertains to counseling is quite broad and can lead to much confusion of reference. Macklin (1982) defined it well, especially as it pertains to this dissertation. She termed "values" as "including the following: preferred goals; actual or ideal

norms governing human behavior and therapeutic methodology; prescriptions or directives ('ought' statements) employed by a therapist or embodied in a psychotherapeutic system; value judgments using the ethical terms 'good', 'bad', 'right', 'wrong', etc., or more general terms with value implications, such as 'successful', 'mature', 'normal'; and ideologies and ethical ideals" (p. 7). Macklin discussed the role of values in therapy from a philosophical perspective, detailing the different levels of value that come in to play within a therapeutic relationship. She defined three levels of values: 1.) values actually held by the client; 2.) values actually held by the therapist; and 3.) values implicit or explicit in the various psychotherapeutic theories. It is through a knowledge of these three levels of values that therapists are best able to enter into a therapeutic encounter with a client if they are to successfully work with a client.

An understanding of the values held by the client cannot be held out of the picture when working with said clients as these values play a large role in the clients own determination of what they think they ought to do and what they think they are allowed to do either through a personally, socially, or religiously determined framework. These beliefs will play a major role in how the client determines the success or failure of their course of therapy as well as which norms or adjustments the client will see as a possibility for themselves. Therapists must be keenly aware of these values in order to assess whether the course of therapies they have laid out for their clients are within the clients' value potential, that is, what the clients can identify with and what they believe can be manifested within themselves (Buhler, 1968).

Intricately woven within the understanding of the clients' values are the therapists' understandings of their own values. These can come from the therapists' own life such as personal or religious factors, as well as from professional values or ethics dictated by the therapists' fields of practice. Decisions made in the therapeutic relationship will be guided by

both of these value sets and may come into direct conflict with the values of the client. It is important for therapists to be aware and have a strong understanding of their own values before working with a client so that they can be prepared for possible conflicts and have a strong foundation to stand on when forced to decide their next step in the face of said conflicts. There are rarely absolute answers when dealing with these conflicts; however, a thorough understanding of them will help therapists when dealing with them (Macklin, 1982).

Macklin's (1982) final level of value within the therapeutic relationship were those values implicit or explicit within the various therapeutic theories. As discussed in Sollod (1982), the various personal and non-scientific factors that influenced the development of therapeutic theory resulted in many different forms of value and subjective appraisal inseparably tied to all theories of therapy, personality, and change. These values must be understood in conjunction with the two previous levels of values when working with a client. Theories have descriptions of the ideal types of functioning, adjustment, and personality as well as suppositions about the aims and goals for therapy. These ideals and suppositions may not align themselves with the needs and desires of the client, and therapists were warned that relying too strongly on them can result in a lack of success and a break in understanding of the clients and their position and experience. In total, Macklin's point was that an appreciation for the various values and resulting points of conflict within a therapeutic encounter are necessary for a therapist to effectively engage with a client. How to resolve these conflicts and mitigate the values; she did not say. There are, however, many researchers who point to the philosophical field of dialectics as a guide towards integrating these conflicting values of counseling theory into a broader manifestation in the form of reasoned eclecticism; and it is this movement that I turn my attention to next.

### **Dialectics**

## **What Dialectics Is**

Dialectics is broad term for a style of thinking about and approaching the world that can be termed dialectical thought and dialectical thinking. It traces its roots to the philosopher Heraclitus in approximately 565 BCE. Heraclitus theorized that the world consisted of a balanced adjustment between opposing tendencies and that between the inherent conflict of these opposing tendencies lay a hidden attunement that could only understood by seeing both sides as necessary for the other to exist: light cannot exist without its opposite dark, good without evil. The world and life within it is in a constant state of change and becoming as a result of this never-ending balance of conflict and change. This was a common stance taken by Socrates wherein he would ask his students a question on which to take a stand and then he would take the opposite, regardless of their answer. The dialectics of the argument would then ensue leading both Socrates and his students to a higher understanding of truth through the cooperation and interplay of the mutual interrogation. The dialectical process of understanding is thus never-ending as truth exists only through the man-made constructs of dialogue, discussion, and resulting interpretation, an unending process of growth and change (Short, Boone, & Hess, 1997).

Although a single, unified definition of dialectics does not exist (Rychlak, 1976), Hanna's (1996) review of the literature pointed out "several salient characteristics. It a.) points out the intrinsic flaws within human reasoning itself; b.) is grounded in experience; c.) distills clarity out of opposing, contradictory views without resorting to reductionism; d.) is eminently practical as well as global and farsighted; and perhaps most important, e.) is a metasystemic, developmentally mature mode of thought that can contemplate, compare, and evaluate many systems of thought simultaneously, including systemic theories" (p.15). All of these points can

be directly applied to both the counseling process, as it emerges through dialogue, and theory as well as the counselor education process as it seeks to help students develop an understanding of the counseling process and applicability of counseling theory. Dialectics acknowledge that pure logic and reasoning are not enough to capture the totality of either the human experience or the nature of our reality; however, that appears to be exactly what counseling theory has attempted to do. It is no wonder, then, that no one theory has emerged as dominant and that conflicts continue to abound (Hanna, 1996).

### **Value to Counselor Education**

Dialectics have a direct value in the counselor education process. Hanna (1996, 1994) suggested that dialectics can be used to help students integrate the conflicting values of various counseling theories. They can be taught to view theory as an interpretive or meaning-making experience of both the counselor and the clients. Just as counselors make sense of the human experience and its change process by developing a personal theory of counseling so too do their clients by developing a personal worldview, which can be conceived of as a personal theory of life. Kelly (1955) termed these worldviews as “constructs” and contended that they are used to order experience. These theories and worldviews will vary from person to person depending on context and will likely conflict with each other on one level or another. Thinking dialectically, students can see that all of these theories are “right” and necessary for each other as they explain the same experience in different ways. This will aid the students’ attempts at empathy in the counseling relationship as they work towards understanding their clients in the clients’ own unique ways (Hanna, 1996). It is what the dialectical philosopher Martin Buber (1958) termed an “I-Thou” relationship whereby a person immerses him or herself into the present of another’s world of experience and meaning making without filtering it through their own interpretation.

Gutsch and Rosenblatt (1973) reported that this is as a major goal for counselors and for counselor education to foster. They reported that “the guiding principle for those who are training counselors...is that to know a person one must touch the world of that person” (p. 10) and that this can only be fully experienced through a dialectical understanding and relationship based on the uniqueness of that person’s life and experience.

Dialectical thinking supports the view that there are aspects of life that are beyond our ability of understanding intellectually and that relationship and experience with those aspects are the means by which we come to know them (Hanna, 1996). Through recognizing that theoretical constructs serve to both clarify and obscure our understanding of reality, counselors are better able to reach towards the experience and person of another in the hopes of engaging in a relationship that is fully open and congruent with their own experience (Gutsch & Rosenblatt, 1973). It is through this relationship that the very foundations of the counseling process are formed (Rogers, 1951) and without which a counselor, regardless of theoretical orientation, cannot proceed.

### **Dialectics in Counseling Theory**

**Dialectical behavior therapy.** Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) is based on a central dialectic of change and acceptance; it uses dialectics to contrast the invalidating feelings of the need for change with an acceptance of clients’ experiences and situations that brought them to therapy in the first place (Swales, 2009b). In developing DBT, Linehan found that most treatments focused exclusively on changing the patient, which often led to the clients dropping out of therapy because they felt invalidated and criticized for their experience; however, purely acceptance based treatments did not recognize the seriousness of their suffering and the need to produce change in their lives. As such, Linehan based DBT in dialectics which allows for a



balance to be found between both sides of the situation (Lynch et. al, 2006). DBT was originally developed for the treatment of borderline personality disorder (BPD), in which dichotomous thinking is quite typical. Dialectics sees everything as interconnected, in a constant state of transition, and thus provides an excellent contrast and counter-point to the dichotomous thinking of BPD (Koons, 2008).

DBT understands change as behavioral in nature and views the BPD diagnosis in behavioral terms rather than an underlying personality disorder typical of most BPD treatment strategies. From this perspective changing the behavior of the client removes the diagnosis, which orients the clients towards recovery instead of merely adjusting their lives to an unchanging condition (Swales, 2009a). The client and therapist work together, seeking to link stimuli with experience and consequent action, which may be rewarding, punishing, or neutral. Additionally, it employs modeling behavior of both the therapist and other significant figures in either the client's life or the world in general.

The acceptance side of the dialectic in DBT is based in Zen principles of mindfulness. Zen sees perfection in each person, as they are the sum total of all that preceded them and therefore can be nothing other than perfection. It is an acknowledgment of what is rather than a search for approval or agreement. In this way it validates the client's situation as a product of truth and wisdom that could be nothing other than what the client is experiencing given their past history (Swales, 2009b). This acceptance and validation helps clients tolerate the extreme difficulty of change. Inconsistency between received feedback and self-experience leads to high arousal, in the presence of which clients strive to regain emotional control, resulting in less collaboration and willingness to change. In DBT the therapist validates this difficulty in changing as well as the client's disbelief of the possibility of change (Swales, 2009a). The

treatment uses a principle called the “wise mind” as a synthesis of information from emotions with the information gathered from fact to help the client find a balance between the conflicting elements of their experience in therapy (Koons, 2008).

Dialectics is used as a “theoretical undercurrent needed to balance and synthesize these two strategies” reducing polarization of thought (Lynch, et al. 2006, p. 463). The philosophical foundation of balance between acceptance and change frames the growth and treatment through a constant search for synthesis of contrasting ideas and experiences, non-judgmentally identifying the validity of both sides of the dialectic and finding a synthesis that recognizes this validity (Swales, 2009a).

DBT also employs specific dialectical skills as part of the treatment process. It contrasts reciprocal communication strategies on the acceptance side of the dialectic with irreverent communication strategies on the change side. The reciprocal strategies include the traditional client-centered skills of warmth, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard while the irreverent strategies take the form of challenging established ways of perceiving, experiencing, and acting such as speaking matter-of-factly about topics that normally get a more affective tone of voice (Swales, 2009a). This unexpected nature of dialectical responses causes clients to remain more awake and attentive in session as predicting the therapist’s behavior is not easy. This opens clients up to their environment, making them more mindful of themselves and their present. Increasing therapist unpredictability provides preference-inconsistent information to increase attention, learning, and cognitive processing (Lynch, et al., 2006). Beyond this, DBT teaches dialectically contrasting skills such as mindfulness and distress tolerance on the acceptance side and interpersonal effectiveness and emotion regulation on the change side (Swales, 2009a). As mentioned earlier, modeling and in vivo learning are used in treatment as

well. Examples of this include the therapist's using the devil's advocate technique, which requires the client to change positions and learn flexibility by working from both sides of the argument or dialectical position. The therapist may also model dialectical statements, which may cause clients to integrate more flexible thinking or positions into their own person, helping them become unstuck from rigid patterns of thought and behavior.

DBT is a theoretical position that attempts to counter dichotomous and polarized thinking by employing a dialectical balance between acceptance and change. By working with both sides of this dialectical position, it seeks to model balance for clients while helping them find their own synthesis of positions as a path towards growth when future conflicts and contrasts inevitably arise in their experience.

**Ivey's developmental counseling and therapy.** Ivey's Developmental Counseling is best understood as a meta-model for organizing therapy rather than a therapeutic theory (Daniels, 1993). It describes the self-construct of the client through a Piagetian framework and advocates a style-shift on the part of the counselor to meet the client at their present developmental level, "helping the client explore the resources of each one of the developmental stages" (Ivey & Goncalves, 1988 p. 412). Ivey uses dialectics in two ways: overtly and philosophically.

Ivey (1986) overtly discussed dialectics by terming his fourth stage of development as the "dialectic stage." This stage involves the client understanding and introducing change to the dynamic and contradictory nature of their reality and patterns (Ivey, 1986). The focus in this stage is on the ability to see oneself as an integrated part of various larger systems (Daniel, 1993). Clients are able to understand the tacit epistemological and ontological constructs that they have created for themselves with the confines of their environment. Dialectical discussion is also used to facilitate growth within this stage (Ivey & Goncalves, 1988).

Philosophically, Ivey's therapy seeks synthesis between the environment-driven conceptualization of behaviorism and the person-driven conceptualization of humanism (Ivey & Goncalves, 1988). It sees clients' worldviews as co-constructed, person-environment dialectics (Harre, 1983). Ivey expressed this point succinctly, "Cultural environment defines which constructions the client is allowed to make" (Ivey & Goncalves, 1988 p. 410). Therapy itself is seen as a dialectic between the client and therapist in that people must always face flaws in the reality of their experience and must synthesize new paths of development in order to grow. The client and therapist work this path together in a continual quest for an unreachable and ever changing truth (Ivey, 1991). Central to this is the holistic development of both the client and the therapist as both sides are considered necessary in order to "become increasingly respectful of formerly competing varieties of help" (Ivey & Goncalves, 1988 p. 412). Both must meet together for growth to occur. The belief in a co-construction of reality is basic to the philosophy of the therapy; the client and therapist are the dialectic, serving as person and environment for each other (Ivey, 1986). By working as a dialectic, therapist and client move through the developmental stages of the therapy, shifting styles and techniques to best match whichever stage the client is in at the present moment based on the presenting problem.

**Dialectics in existentialist theory.** Existential counseling theory is derived from the broad field of existential philosophy. These existentialists hold a wide and varied view of human nature where some support an optimistic view of human nature and others focus on nihilism and meaninglessness; yet all approaches emphasize that humans must grapple with core issues of life and that anxiety is a normal part of experience that results from avoiding, rather than confronting, these core issues (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2004). The variety in existential theory comes from differing perspectives of what exactly these issues are. The

discussion of dialectics, typically framed within the context of becoming and a conflict between the self and its experience of itself and its surroundings, is founded in the philosophical work of Kierkegaard and furthered by psychotherapy theorists such as Rogers and Maslow, both of whom saw becoming as fundamental to the human growth and change process (Maslow, 1961; Rogers, 1961).

Kierkegaard's notion of dialectics as the process of becoming the self is a rejection of Hegel's use of dialectics as "being in history" (Berry, 1981). Hegel saw dialectics as a process of reality in which what is immediately given (thesis) is related to the contrary or contradictory (antithesis), which is logically implied by the thesis, and then synthesized by a rational unity of the two (Calhoun, 1958). Hegel saw this process as stemming from rational, objective thought and being based within the outer-historical and rational world with the process of synthesis moving us ever closer to an absolute and objective truth.

Although Kierkegaard did use Hegelian notions of process and becoming, he rejected completely the idea of objective speculation towards an absolute truth. Instead, he saw our dialectical process as one in which the self becomes itself, switching the focus to an inner rather than outer history (Berry, 1981). To do so, the self must relate to its own self, rather than some other logical, objective idea, and it is this relation that forces the self to relate to a new self which is synthesized from the original relation. This process occurs continuously throughout our existence as we are constantly building and recognizing new selves with which we can relate. Thus Kierkegaard's dialectic recognizes the infinite concern of the self with itself rather than its concern or capacity for logical games and rationalization (Kierkegaard, 1992). Kierkegaard's dialectic is a reflection upon one's own self (existence) and the intolerable contradictions that result; and it is the infinite quest for resolution to these contradictions that result in the human

dialectic. He saw various stages of contradictions depending on life circumstances and personal development, resulting in an internal history in which previous movements determine the present possibilities and give rise to the continuous process of becoming (Berry, 1981).

Others also use the process of becoming founded in Kierkegaard, which vary depending on the authors' focus on the dialectical process. Maslow's (1962) work on self-actualization is most similar to Kierkegaard's in that it is an inward process of becoming seen as the self finding or becoming itself. Roger's (1961) work sees becoming as part of an interpersonal process in which the dialectic is found within our relationship with another person and with whom we move through the dialectical or becoming process together. Other philosophers, upon whose work much existential psychotherapy is based, used Kierkegaard's becoming dialectic as well. Heidegger and Sartre's discussions of authenticity and inauthenticity are founded on the dialectic between man's existence and his own recognition of that existence. Their work on the dialectic between being and nonbeing and, perhaps more importantly, the responsibility to that understanding has been foundational to a wide variety of existential counseling perspectives (Fall, Holden, & Marquis, 2004). Furthermore, the work of Buber (1958) and its differentiation between the self's relation to itself and its body, or temporal-spatial self, is not only based in the Kierkegaardian notion of aesthetical dialectic but also serves as the foundation for the "Philosophy and Counseling" class under investigation (Berry, 1981).

Although few existential theorists specifically discuss the role that dialectics plays in their theory, a review of the literature finds compelling evidence that the philosophies upon which their theories are based are fundamentally rooted in the existential dialectic of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, among others. The notion of the process of becoming, regardless of the focus of that process, and the need to recognize, confront, and become a

cognizant part of that process is almost universal amongst existential and humanistic theories of counseling and psychotherapy. Dialectics are at their core, while it is their manifestation and implementation that varies.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to discover what role, if any, the study of philosophy plays in the study of counseling and the ways in which theory can be applied. Does a class in philosophy and counseling make a difference; and if so, what kind? A further aim of this study was to understand how the experience of taking this class effected the students' growth as counselors as well as their clinical work with clients in the field.

### **Qualitative Design**

Qualitative research attempts to understand the multiple realities of experience, recognizing that there is no one "truth," only place-markers in the path towards understanding. Qualitative research attempts to piece together various experiences within a natural setting whereby a deeper understanding of a given phenomenon can be developed through rich description and data collection (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Qualitative research is well suited to explore areas about which little is known (Stern, 1980).

A qualitative approach was selected for this study for several reasons. First, so little work has been done in this field that a rich data source describing the impact that philosophical education has on counselor development simply did not exist. A qualitative analysis was needed to further the knowledge base and provide instructors and students with a comprehensive explanation of this topic. Although a quantitative analysis might have provided specifics as to such a course's effectiveness, the variables would have been difficult to operationalize without a strong descriptive foundation upon which to base them. Sufficient data was not available to justify such a specific, narrowly scoped investigation. By using a qualitative approach, it was my goal to build the foundational descriptions and hypotheses that a quantitative investigation would



need to use and hopefully be able to confirm. Additionally, there were no reliable or validated scales that measured any aspect of this study. Without a preexisting scale, one would have to have been created, which would have necessitated a strong foundation of data, which also did not exist. It would have been premature to try to devise such a scale before a basic exploration of the topic had been conducted. Further, the number of people who had actually taken and experienced a “Philosophy and Counseling” class is extremely small, far fewer than are necessary for a valid quantitative sample. Qualitative analysis is far better suited to gather rich data from a smaller sample. Finally, the very nature of philosophical inquiry as well as personal experiences of counselor development are deeply personal and subjective topics that did not lend themselves well to quantitative inquiry. To fully grasp how a course that explores subjective interpretation impacted individuals’ personal development as counselors required rich detail and intense description to truly develop a reliable theory of understanding. This was the very reason that the qualitative approach was developed (Creswell, 2007) and was the main reason it was selected for this study. The specific tradition of qualitative inquiry chosen for this study was a case study, focused on the bounded system of the University’s “Philosophy and Counseling” class.

### **Rationale for the use of Case Study**

Case study research is well suited to inquiries of processes and relationships and offers the opportunity to investigate phenomena where they occur (Denscombe, 2007). It systematically explores a setting in order to generate understanding about it and aims to offer a wealth of data and analysis from which the readers can draw their own generalizations (Stake, 1995). This study sought similar ends as it worked to understand the processes and relationships at play within the “Philosophy and Counseling” class. Specifically, the interest of this study was the class itself rather than a larger problem that was to be understood through the use of this particular case.

This is characteristic of what Stake (1995) termed an *intrinsic case study*. Although the methods used within this study shared many similarities with other forms of qualitative inquiry, a case study was chosen because of the focus it took on the case as a whole rather than specifically looking at a shared experience or attempting to generate broad hypotheses regarding the case.

### **Research Questions**

This dissertation focused around one central question: “How do students experience the ‘Philosophy and Counseling’ class at this University?” More specific sub-questions that flowed from the central question are:

1. Which parts of the class had the most influence on the students’ experience?
2. How does this class experience shape the students’ development personally, professionally, and clinically?
3. How did this class shape the students’ understanding of the counseling process as a whole?
4. In the opinion of the participants, was the experience of this class a worthwhile component of their counselor education?

### **Researcher Role and Bias**

Certain biases needed to be accounted for in my approach to this study, the most notable of which was my own experience with the “Philosophy and Counseling” class. I received my master’s degree from this University’s program and thus took this class myself. The course had a significant impact on my own development as a counselor and formed a foundation for my understanding of the counseling process. I had to be especially careful in my research not to push my participants towards confirming my own opinions; I needed to make sure to allow them to express their own views, opinions, and experiences. This was accomplished by maintaining an

open environment during data collection as well as being careful to mainly use clarifying statements rather than trying to reframe or rephrase my participants' comments. Additionally, I used a proxy to conduct my focus groups so that my own bias did not steer the group's discussion towards confirmation of my own views. The person I chose for my proxy was the same person who served as my peer-debriefer discussed later in this chapter. She was well aware of the foundations of my work, yet was far better than I at keeping those presuppositions out of the focus groups. Furthermore, the use of a research journal to note my own thoughts, opinions, and feelings surrounding the entire research process was used. This journal served to not only note my own experience of the research but also aided me in tempering my interpretations during the data collection and analysis phases of the research. Patton (2002) argued that the researcher's subjectivity is simply another perspective of the process and that it must be made explicit when interpreting meaning. By using a personal journal, I was able to overtly distinguish between the interpretations made by my participants and those made on my own. I also used peer debriefing throughout my research process as an aid in monitoring my biases and their potential impact on my research; this process will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

### **Site Selection and Access**

Another significant role that was important to this dissertation was gaining access to the case setting and the participants whom I studied. I had been in contact with professors from the University's program throughout the development of this dissertation and they consented to my interviewing some of them as well as soliciting participation from their students and program alumni. Upon approval of my dissertation proposal, I contacted the director of the University's counseling program to confirm her consent of my access to the Counselor Education Program as part of my research. Following this, contact was made with the participants discussed below

through a variety of methods, including email and direction solicitation from the program's practicum and internship classes.

### **Participants**

Three different categories of participants were used for this study, all of whom were selected using purposive sampling so that they conformed to the specific needs and research questions of the study. Two professors were included; one was the professor who originally developed the "Philosophy and Counseling" class. He is currently on the faculty at the University and agreed to participate in the study. Although he was not currently working within the counseling graduate program, his insight into the development of the course proved helpful in understanding how the class came to be as well as the basic goals for its students. The other professor has taught the "Philosophy and Counseling" class recently and commented on the state and content of the class' contemporary manifestation. Two groups of students were also included. One group was composed of five current students in the counseling program who met the following criteria for inclusion. First, they need to have taken and passed the "Philosophy and Counseling" class so that they could comment on it after having experienced it in full. Second, they needed to have had some clinical experience so that they could comment on what, if any, impact the course had on their work in the field with actual clients. All of these students were in their second semester of internship. Students in their practicum semester were not used as their lack of experience in a clinical setting prohibited them from commenting on the class' impact on work with clients. These students were solicited from the program's internship classes. An initial survey was given to all qualified students interested in participating in this study in order to gather basic demographic data such as age, gender, race, educational background, career path, and their path into the program. These data were used to select a stratified, diverse, and

representationally proportionate sample of the program's students. The second group of six students were alumni of the program who were currently working in clinical counseling settings. These former students were contacted using the program's alumni records and every attempt was made to obtain clinicians from a variety of clinical settings including, but not limited to, private practice, schools, agencies, and family preservation. These participants were solicited using alumni contact lists maintained by the University as well as snowball sampling.

### **Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected using interviews and focus groups, which were videotaped in order to both capture the non-verbal communications of the participants and distinguish between speaking participants in the focus groups. The University professors were interviewed individually once, follow-up interviews were not deemed necessary as the focus groups with the current students and alumni yielded similar data and suggested topic saturation. Separate focus groups were conducted with the current students of the program and the alumni. Focus groups were selected for these participants because of their ability to facilitate diversity of ideas and growth of original opinions, extending the academic practice of exploratory discussion (Cousin, 2009; Stake, 1995). By allowing the participants to interact with each other, they reacted to each other's comments and thus came up with ideas that would not have been thought of in a private interview. Additionally, the "Philosophy and Counseling" class centers on group conversation and a focus group was most similar to this environment, which facilitated their thinking in the style of the class.

I followed Holstein and Gubrium's (1997) model of active interviewing in which the aim was to think with the interviewee in order to extend understanding, using the interviewee as the guiding force. I viewed this process as an explorative collaboration between myself and the

interviewees (Cousin, 2009). The questions for the professor interviews focused specifically on issues that were unique to their experience with the course. The following questions were used as initial stimuli for data collection and were used to prompt exploration of the professors' experience with the class as well as their views on how the class impacted student development but varied depending upon whether I was working with the professor who developed the course or the professor who teaches the course.

1. How did you come to be involved in the "Philosophy and Counseling" class?
2. How was the "Philosophy and Counseling" class developed and what resources were used in creating its content and syllabus?
3. How would you describe the information and material covered in this course?
4. What bearing do you think it has on the students' development and education as counselors?
5. How does this course benefit counselor education as a field?
6. What do you see as the most salient course outcomes?
7. How are these outcomes assessed?
8. What have you learned as a result of your experience with this course?

When conducting the focus groups, I had my proxy use a prompt sheet organized around the topics I wanted to cover rather than a list of specific questions. This allowed for greater adjustment during the course of the focus group so that she could work to stimulate discussion instead of asking for specific pieces of information. The goal of the focus group was to foster the social interactivity of the participants and using a list prompts helped to keep the group focused while still allowing them to move beyond how they would normally understand the topic (Cousin, 2009). Throughout this process I asked my proxy to have the general goal of probing

the students to tell me about their experience in as rich a detail as possible. The topical prompts that I provided for both focus groups are included below.

1. What stands out the most from your experience in the “Philosophy and Counseling” class?
2. Differences between this course and others in your counselor education
3. Themes covered in this course
4. The role this course played in your development and education
5. The bearing this course has had or continues to have on your clinical work
6. Describe this course with one word

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of preparing and organizing data, reducing it into themes through coding, interpreting those codes to establish meaning, and finally representing that meaning in a recognizable and understandable way (Creswell, 2009). Stake (1995) contended that there is no particular moment when data analysis begins, that it starts as soon as the researchers come in contact with data and experience their initial impressions. Although my own impressions and interpretations of the research were noted from the beginning of the research process in my personal journal, the formal analysis of data for this project began with the transcription of the interviews and focus groups.

The data collected from the participants were coded and categorized to develop themes and patterns in the data using the most current version of the qualitative data analysis software suite Nvivo. Nvivo is a powerful software program that allows for not only data coding but also categorical and descriptor comparison across participants, codes, and collection methods.

Data were organized by participant type so that data collected from each group could be compared to that of the others. It was expected that each type of participant would have a different experience and understanding of the class and that a comparison of these would yield a better understanding of how the class is experienced across all levels of education and clinical experience. The specific data were described using various categories of comments, direct quotes, and paraphrasing within the report all framed by the different types of participants who provided the data. Within the description of the data, special caution was taken to protect the anonymity of the participants, especially the current and former students of this Counselor Education Program. This was made known to the participants at the beginning of their focus groups so that they could discuss and comment on the class free from the fear of talking about things they did not like or had problems with. I did not want the data given by the participants to be detrimental to either their academic or professional lives.

Finally, data were validated using member checking. Once the initial interview and focus groups had been completed, the initial coding process began. As further questions arose, I selectively contacted the participants to provide further information regarding what they were talking about and meaning by those statements. After these follow-ups had been completed, analyzed, and written up, I solicited participants to review the parts of the report that specifically pertained to their comments and data for accuracy of content and meaning. The final results of the data are presented in an explanatory, conceptual model.

### **Trustworthiness**

In any study ensuring validity is of significant importance; however, in qualitative research validity is referred to as trustworthiness. While conventional, quantitative inquiry seeks to affirm a single “truth”, qualitative research believes that there are multiple paths to reality and



that truth is seen as representing the multiple constructions of experience in a way that is credible to the original constructors (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). In this study trustworthiness was maintained through several methods: broad and prolonged engagement in the field, including member checking; consistent debriefing; and maintenance of a personal research journal. Although these methods cannot guarantee trustworthiness in the study, they increased the probability that it was achieved (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Broad, prolonged engagement in the field was a major step towards building trustworthiness in a study by providing scope and depth to the data gathered (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Stake, 1995). This was achieved by my use of multiple data sources, including the three different types of participants discussed previously as well as original documentation from the “Philosophy and Counseling” class. Throughout this process I maintained an aura of skepticism, being careful of early closure of my interpretations and analysis. I did not want to stop my analysis or data collection prematurely lest I ran the risk of missing out on a key piece of additional information or clarification from my participants. This is why member checking played such a vital role in my analysis. My goal in this study was to represent the multiple constructions of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class and consistent member checking allowed me to both hear and weigh the various member criticisms of my analysis and interpretations throughout the course of my research (Creswell, 2007), exposing as many of the different member constructions of the class as possible. Furthermore, it maintained an open line of communication with my participants such that they felt free to modify or correct information that they gave me once they had the chance to reflect on it and see how I presented said information in my report.

Guba and Lincoln (1985) defined peer debriefing as “the process of exposing oneself to an disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain implicit with in the inquirer’s mind.” (p. 308). I intended to enter the debriefing process in two ways. First, I conducted regular consultation sessions with my dissertation committee chair and methodologist to discuss the progress and course of my research. Given their expertise in research, methodology, and my topic, exposing my own thoughts and ideas to them throughout this process allowed me to gain not only needed guidance but also relevant criticism of my choices as the emergent design of my research unfolded. Stake (1995) advocated that case study research have some structure to it, but that the design remains open to change and growth as data and insight grows. By regularly consulting with my committee, I was able to stay structured in my plans but also make well-reasoned decisions when the time for change presented itself. Secondly, I consistently debriefed with a trusted colleague. This colleague was selected because we had been through our entire graduate education together and regularly consulted with each other on both clinical and research matters. We had a good rapport of searching and questioning each other’s decisions, challenging each other’s beliefs, and requiring the other to defend their choices and actions. This peer also served as my proxy in conducting this project’s focus groups in order to help remove my own bias from the data collection process. Guba and Lincoln (1985) specifically discussed the need for this type of relationship and debriefing process as an important component of naturalistic, qualitative inquiry.

Finally, I maintained a personal journal throughout the research process. My own biases towards this topic had the potential to influence the subjectivity of my data analysis. Keeping a personal journal allowed me to make my personal thoughts and feelings explicit and thus section

them out of my final interpretations. Patton (2002) claimed that the researcher's perspective is simply one of many in a study and must be made as explicit as any other encountered in the research. By having my own biases clearly noted in a reflective journal, I was able to account for them just as I would any other participant's thoughts, feelings, or beliefs. Qualitative research relies heavily on the adaptability of the human instrument; however, along with that adaptability comes a propensity for bias. It is through awareness and recognition of those biases that their impact on the data can best be tempered (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

### **Summary**

This study explored the experience of students in a unique "Philosophy and Counseling" class. The data was collected and analyzed in the qualitative tradition through the use interviews and focus groups with various stakeholders within the class itself. Following the guidance of Guba and Lincoln (1985), care was taken to respect the individuality of each participant's experience and encourage a spirit of collaboration through the use of focus groups working towards a deeper understanding of the complex system that was the participant's experience with the class. Data analysis utilized qualitative analysis software to organize and present the collected data. Trustworthiness within the study was maintained through the recognition of the multiple truths in reality, member-checking, and accounting for my own personal biases through consistent peer-debriefing and the maintenance of a personal journal.

## **Chapter 4**

This chapter is organized around the bounded system of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class, using data gathered from the interviews and focus groups to describe and explain the various aspects of the class including the class’ history and development, its goals as understood by the professors and experienced by the students, the teaching methods employed by the professors, the actual student experience of taking the class, and its subsequent clinical impact on its students. The focus of this chapter is to describe how the class influences its students, through process themes present throughout the class and in the students’ own described experiences in the clinical world.

This chapter, therefore, begins with a discussion of the coding process used to analyze the data collected from the interviews and focus groups. The earliest codes based on the literature, the codes that emerged from the data itself, as well as the utilization of those codes in the analysis are explained. Then, a history of the class and its development into its current form are discussed. The course goals and teaching method used during the class are discussed from the perspective of both the students and the professors in order to highlight the differences and similarities between what the professors intended versus what the students actually experienced. Attention is also given to the actual experience of taking the class as well as the impact of the class on the clinical experiences in the field as described by the students.

The methodology for this study was based upon the work of Stake (1995) and thus the presentation of the collected data is structured around Stake’s work. Stake’s process involves pulling gross data apart into more digestible components during data presentation and then putting it back together in a more meaningful way during data analysis. This chapter represents the first part of Stake’s process. It presents the discovered data broken down into sections based

upon the most common codes found within the professor interviews, student and alumni focus groups, and collected literary resources.

### **The Coding Process**

Stake (1995) contended that there is no particular moment when data gathering, and thus the coding and data analysis process, begins. He suggested that early impressions of the subject and the data lay the foundations which frame the entire data analysis process and that throughout the course of a study, early ideas are refined or replaced as new information and understanding emerge. Accordingly, the initial phases of data coding were based on the previously uncovered literature and grew as more salient themes emerged.

### **Beginning Codes**

The earliest codes that were used to break down these data were derived from the literature presented in Chapter Two. These included codes such as dialectics, Buber, hermeneutics/interpretation, philosophical counseling, underlying framework, and counseling theory. The earliest readings of the transcripts and collected documents were accomplished using Nvivo 10. The relevant codes were highlighted across transcripts and documents, including many instances of texts that contained multiple codes within the same passages.

The most frequent codes identified from this phase of analysis included hermeneutics/interpretation, which was found in statements that specifically included those words as well as those that implied their meanings, such as Professor J's statements that

They leave the course with a sense of how meaningfully people, of how much human beings are meaning seeking creatures, of how much they will try to make sense of anything that they are exposed to, even if it doesn't make sense to them

and

They have a reverence for the fact that the person sitting in front of them, even if they are seemingly crazy, even if they are filled with counter-productive acts and ideas, they are still trying to make sense of the world in the best way they know how. They are trying to create meaning in the best way they can. And they have a sense that people are basically good, that Thich was right that if people are free to choose, if they are free to know themselves and if they are mindful then they will make healthy and good choices.

Another example of this type of indirect coding selection was a current student's statement that the class is "kind of like a Rorschach. Everyone has their own opinion and then sharing that opinion just tells a lot of about you, like what about you made you think that."

The other most frequently emergent code, underlying framework, emerged primarily from the interviews with the professors and was typically addressed through implication by the participants. Using the relevant literature, particularly the section regarding the role that background understanding and values played in the development of counseling theory, statements such as those that follow were classified as both relevant to this investigation and as a part of the underlying framework code. These included Professor M's comment,

when you move from discipline to discipline, or at least when I moved from discipline to discipline, one of the things that I was searching for was a framework that was consistent with all of them, not one that could contain all of them but that could give me a way of thinking that would be compatible with all of them.

Professor J also touched on this in his description of students who have taken the course,

They leave the course with a sense of how meaningfully people,... of how much human beings are meaning seeking creatures,... of how they will try to make sense of anything that they are exposed to even if it doesn't make sense to them. And, how they have to

learn how to be mindful and empathic if they are going to be able to function in the world. And, I think, we achieve those goals in varying degrees but often students report that there's a sort of harmony, a conglomeration of ideas of feelings and thoughts that are the result of their having exposed themselves to those different literatures.

Within these earliest stages of coding, coding overlaps began to develop. The following comment from Professor M exemplifies a statement that not only fits within two codes (hermeneutics/interpretation and underlying framework) but also suggests the interconnected nature of the data collected. This may prove vital to the final analysis and understanding of the course learned from this study. In one such example, Professor M stated,

When interpretation is talked about, typically in the context of clinical psychology and counseling psychology, most frequently it would be referred to as a type of technical activity that a therapist would engage in among other technical activities. Like, you know, in psychoanalysis an analyst would make a definite decision about whether or not to make an interpretation or not and what an interpretation means there is really trying to explain to a client how something that they're going through could be understood. You know, like a marital conflict, an interpretation might be that this could possibly be a replay of something that was in your relationship with your mother or your father. So it has kind of a technical understanding and it's a particular kind of intervention that people make. And as I'm using it, I think the difference of this approach for counseling work per se or for psychotherapy or for human communication really is to think about interpretation as a pervasive process, not as a particular skill or a technical action that you do among other things in the work of counseling.

Following this initial coding, the data were re-coded based on both the research questions

that served as the foundation for this study as well as new avenues for understanding the course that were found within the data. These codes centered on the componential, structural, and historical aspects of the course and I termed them course history, teaching method, and course goals. Although the course history code was derived almost exclusively from the professors' interviews, the data revealed that the teaching method and course goals codes represented two distinct perspectives: those of the professors and their intentions for the class, and those of the students and their experiences of the class. Thus, they are presented in separate sections later in this chapter. Recognition of these distinct perspectives on the same topics provided deeper understanding of how the "Philosophy and Counseling" class was experienced by the participants and thereby informed future coding efforts; codes originally drawn from the professors' interviews were viewed differently when applied to the students' focus group. This same phenomenon occurred when student codes were applied to the professors' data. The cross coding and varying perspectives developed during this coding process served as a significant foundation for the analysis and for the conclusions drawn later in the study.

### **Codes that Emerged from Participant Data**

When looking for emerging themes within the data, I began the search within the professors' data. The professors had provided the most useful information on the history of the course and the goals contained within the class, and their thoughts on how the class functioned and what it did for students seemed to be an appropriate place to begin. Furthermore, it seemed prudent to use their themes as a starting point to which the student data would later be compared.

The most salient codes to emerge from the professors' interviews included background understanding, relation, student awareness, personal background, and shared experience. Each of these codes were found within both of the professor interviews as well as within both of the



student focus groups. As successive readings of each data source were performed, more instances of these specific cluster codes were found. Of particular note were the codes of background understanding and student awareness as they had noteworthy overlap or cross-coding, such as in the following quote from the alumni focus group:

Philosophy really existed before the discipline of psychology and when we start looking at the subfield of epistemology or even metaphysics, these are the disciplines that psychology ended up growing out of and so when the fathers of psychology that started forming these theories, what were they reading? They were reading philosophers, they were reading philosophy, they were reading biology, they were reading literature, they were reading all these different disciplines and so this new field of psychology developed and then other theorists that come after them are jumping on their shoulders. And so I think in order to really understand if you're talking about where did this stuff come from, you've got to go back and you've got to read, like what was this guy reading? Like, oh I like him a lot but where did he come from, who was he reading, who was he paying attention to? I know that this can end up being this infinite regress, but I think that really if you're really going to understand some of the motivations for why you're doing what you're doing, you have to have an historical basis for where these guys are coming from.

This aforementioned quote seems to represent the emerging theme of students becoming aware of the underlying framework that founded their field of counseling and possibly how that awareness might in turn shape their own background understanding and use of the counseling process as a whole. This is also exemplified in Professor M's comments about his goals for the course, which fit into multiple codes of course goals; namely, background understanding and student awareness. Professor M commented that, "What I thought about when I was putting the

course together originally was, ‘How could I help students become alert to their own background understandings?’”

This course goal of bringing students into awareness of their own background understandings became more important when coding continued using the themes that emerged from the students’ focus groups. The primary codes that emerged from the students’ data were the personal experience of the students and the differences between the “Philosophy and Counseling” class and other courses in the students’ counselor education curriculum. After I found these themes within the student data, I re-coded the professors’ data to include them. This inclusion yielded a clear picture and reinforced the notion put forward by the professors that they were intent on providing the students with a personal experience of the class. As noted by Professor M,

It’s really the process of interpretation that I’m wanting them to comprehend and, you know, the hermeneutical spiral, that has a content and there’s information in that. So, if there is information that’s what it would be about, the process of interpretation; but I’m interested in them getting to those concepts in a very experiential way, like through the encounter with those two challenging texts.

It appears that the students tended to receive this intention and found it meaningful enough that it emerged as an important theme or code within the data. As a current student said,

I’ve changed as a person; I’ve learned to understand myself; I’ve become more self-aware; but the philosophy class takes it even deeper. And I think if you took that out of the curriculum, I don’t know if you’d be able to go as deep as you do. I think that the class gave us the tools to know how to go so deep.

Furthermore, this personal experience noticeably cross-coded with the reported differences from other classes in the counselor education curriculum at the University. An alumna also explained it and her quote offers an example of both codes:

Sure, there was an interactive component in other classes but it was really more of: these are the skills and I want you to model them; I'm modeling them for you and I want you to try them and then let's talk about your experience, as opposed to in the philosophy class. We were actually trying on ideas and kind of, yes, there was a personal exploration and then also how might this fit or how might this apply to what I'm doing.

### **Code Pattern Development and Utilization**

After the emerging themes and codes were elicited from both the students' and professors' data, patterns within the codes began to emerge. These patterns showed significant overlap across multiple codes and provided insight into the analysis. They also showed the differences in perspective between the professor and student participants, giving rise to the data presentation that follows. Using Stake (1995) as a guide, the raw data that had been broken down into smaller parts through coding are reassembled here in a way that presents the case in both a descriptive and subjective fashion. In this context, subjective means based on the unique, personal experience and interpretation of the participants. The specific information regarding the course's history is presented first, as gleaned from the interviews with the professors, and is followed by intended and experienced course goals and teaching methods from both the professors' and students' perspectives. A section on the student experience is included, as that emerged as a significant theme within the data due to repeated overlap of the codes of student awareness, personal experience, and shared experience within the class. All of these codes represent some aspect of what the students actually experienced while in the class and are

included to provide a richer description of the class itself and the experience within it. Finally, a section on the class' impact on the students' clinical work is included along with an explanation of the educational and developmental role the class played in the ultimate goal of the University's Counseling Program: training counselors to work in the field.

### **Course History**

It is unclear how long a philosophy class has been a part of the graduate counseling curriculum at the University. Both of the professors who were interviewed reported that a philosophy class was already in place when they began working at the university. In fact, the current professor of the course stated that when he "came to the University, all the master's programs had a philosophy course at the front" of them. However, it appears that the course taken by counseling students at that time was presented through the lens of education rather than counseling itself and thus was not reported to the professor as a significant influence by the program's students. As he recalled:

I never thought the course was all that cool and I got a lot of complaints out of counseling students that thought, you know, the course is good pedagogically, with regard to education but not so strong as far as counseling's concerned. About 15 years ago we had another faculty member come in and say, "Could we split the course up so that we would have a counseling course and an education course?" And they did the first time, and still wasn't any good. Then [Professor M] came in and taught it, brought a whole different curriculum to it, and at that point I think I became clear about how valuable it was because it was requiring students to think in philosophical terms instead of in theoretical terms about what they were doing.

Professor M explained further that “it had been developed by a person in the religious studies department...and I believe his approach was heavily influenced by a theologian named Lonergan.” It was Professor M who brought the class into its contemporary manifestation which is the version of the class that is under investigation in this study.

In developing the class, Professor M decided to start fresh: “I didn’t modify it or update it. I pretty much set it aside and created the approach that you find in there myself.” Using his own academic background and personal experiences, he developed a class he thought would be most appropriate for counselors:

Because I’ve worked in psychology, and philosophy, and theology, and I also did some pretty serious work in sociology and anthropology and political science, I’ve been an interdisciplinary scholar and writer and teacher, all my career actually; I didn’t set up down that road but that’s how it turned out. And when you move from discipline to discipline, or at least when I moved from discipline to discipline, one of the things that I was searching for was a framework that was consistent with all of them, not one that could contain all of them but that could give me a way of thinking that would be compatible with all of them. And I found my first stab at that was what in those days was called systems theory, general systems theory. After that and partly because of that, I studied the philosophy of a man named Alfred North Whitehead; and his work is technically what would be called the philosophy of metaphysics, so an attempt to give an account of everything that’s real or of reality or what it means to be real: how is reality organized; and he described reality as web of relationships, which itself is developing and within which all of its component parts are also developing. So his philosophy is sometimes called a process-relational metaphysics. And so that’s really a worldview, you

could say; it's a picture of how things are: everything including the human, but also the non-human. And I found that a good framework because everything else that I was reading had its place in there, including theology, there was a theological dimension to Whitehead's model. So that's important, background for me, and it has remained ...in the language of the hermeneutical spiral that's in the course...

And at the same time that I was studying Whitehead, I also began reading a German, 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher named Martin Heidegger; and I would say Heidegger is the originator of what today is called philosophical hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the study or the theory of how interpretation works. And it was originally used for the work of translating ancient documents to contemporary European languages; and later philosophers picked it up to...describe any process of interpreting. In fact, one of the most powerful images in hermeneutics is the idea that every interpretation of a text is a translation of the text into the translator's language...

So what I really found...over time was that, and this is what brought me to the course. I use this approach in everything that I do...was that as a picture of the structure of reality, Whitehead was very powerful and remains very powerful, the most powerful one that I have found. As a picture within that reality of how human beings live our lives, the hermeneutical model is the most powerful one and, you know I haven't spent time trying to figure out how I would technically integrate hermeneutics into Whitehead, but that's how it would have to be: the larger framework is the metaphysics and the smaller, the piece within it, would be the human part. But they're certainly not incompatible in my opinion; and the course itself, the "Philosophy and Counseling" course is primarily built

around philosophical hermeneutics, the hermeneutical perspective as you know. And with the hermeneutical spiral, it was my attempt to try to catch that in a model for the students. Thus Professor M took the class into what he felt was a broader and more relational realm of study in a way that could be directly applied to the process and practice of counseling. By so doing, he also seemed to plant the seeds of personal experience, interpretation, and background understanding that would he would note as prevalent themes throughout the course. Furthermore, his search for a model that would allow compatibility among his various fields of study would, he thought, build the foundational understanding that students of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class would later find of paramount importance to their experience of the course.

He then selected readings that he thought would require students to experience the hermeneutical process for themselves rather than simply reading about it in a book, giving them the opportunity to explore how their own personal experience and background understandings influence their interpretation of the world:

One of the tenets of hermeneutics is that it’s the concept of background understandings that every reader, or every interpreter, comes to what they are interpreting with a set of understandings based on life experiences; and, for the most part, we’re not conscious of those; we don’t have to reflect on those unless we are either in crisis or in graduate school, then we get invited to reflect on those. So when I was putting the course together, I was thinking about the fact that one of the famous metaphors in probably the most important book on hermeneutics in the last century, which is called *Truth and Method*, one of the images that the author, whose name is Gadamer, has in there that has always stayed with me, is that he talks about the experience of being brought up short. And he was talking about texts or works of art; but what he meant was, for instance, you’re

reading along in a text and you think you're understanding it, but then all of a sudden the author says something that you don't understand and it makes you wonder if you ever understood what he was saying or if you've been on a wrong track. So what I thought about when I was putting the course together originally was, how could I help students become alert to their own background understandings by way of this experience of being brought up short. What could I put in front of them as a text that would be very valuable in itself but also be different enough from how they usually think about things that they would have to grapple with it and grapple with themselves in the process. And so I chose Buber because that's a text that I love and I've taught it many times with graduate students, mostly in theology; and I chose the Thich Naht Hanh text not because I knew it but because I knew I wanted a Buddhist text and that's the one that I found and I really love it. I think it did exactly what I wanted it to do. So really the answer is I chose those texts to create an experience for the students where they would really have to grapple with the text because the point of view or the worldview or the background understanding of those authors is quite different than most modern, well-educated westerners.

Professor M felt that this concept of exploring one's own background understanding and process of interpretation, and how they influence and change one's future interpretations and understandings, has become an important part of the work of this class. In later sections, this process will become seemingly evident through both the stated goals of the instructing professors as well as the experience of students taking the class. Professor M's intent for students to grapple with the texts as a means towards understanding their own interpretational process seemed to unintentionally reveal a parallel process: a suggestive process which could be identified with that of grappling with difficult clients, which often became an important part of the clinical benefit



that students took from this course. Through both of these processes, the professors sought to have students brought into a seemingly greater state of self-awareness, which would become a necessary tool for engaging in the rest of their counselor education.

After creating the new curriculum for the class, Professor M taught it for several years before handing it off to Professor J to use and teach. Since then, Professor J has been the primary instructor for the class, excluding several semesters when he was on sabbatical, and he offered these thoughts on the changes Professor M made to the curriculum and their value to the students:

He modified the curriculum so that it included studies of philosophers that were really on target as far as counseling was concerned. Students were having a lot of trouble figuring out how a particular philosophical perspective was really valuable but what [Professor M] said was that we should study Buber because he was talking about relationships and that's what counseling is. And we should study Thich Nat Hanh because he talks about mindfulness and he talks about how what one thinks influences how they feel, how they think, and how they act. And he also brought in the Spiral of Interpretation which is basically hermeneutics, the philosophy of interpretation. And those, all together, formed a very good and, I think, easily understood backbone for students when they were studying counseling.

In his time teaching the class, Professor J has made several changes to its curriculum based on the feedback he received from the students as well as his own personal experiences and interests:

Over time, I put a couple of pieces in and took a couple of pieces out. [Professor M]'s goal was to come up with literature that was so thick that you had to talk about it. You couldn't just read it and say, "Oh, ok." And one of his pieces he recommended was just

so thick that students couldn't get through it; they were just getting real frustrated with it. Eventually I replaced that with a reading that came out of Bowen and Kerr's book... I think personally I had started reading more about Family Systems so I wanted to include that. The students were complaining pretty regularly about this one piece that they were reading. Jonathon Krites wrote it and it was really complicated, I think. And the piece that I picked from Kerr talked about a philosophical tradition and how it aided him in understanding the family and the family dynamic; it's a real personal piece that talks about how he understood his own family. So it was a real nice entrée for people that were taking these philosophical pieces and trying to apply them in some useful way because it charted Kerr's journey through trying to make sense of his own family. He doesn't say he used philosophy to do so, but he uses a philosophical frame of reference to study his family and to make some judgments about them.

Through this process of using material presented in the past and then incorporating personal experience and background, the class has grown and evolved into its present form. In fact, the personal experience and application of the class were some of the most commonly referenced themes throughout all the collected data. Furthermore, with primarily two instructors having taught it in the last fifteen years, the goals of the course have remained consistent. These goals, as intended by the professors and experienced by the students, are addressed in the next section.

### **Course Goals**

There are several perspectives from which to understand the goals set forth in the class. Although the goals of the class are certainly set by the instructing professors, they are presented to the students in a variety of ways and also experienced by the students in ways other than those explicitly set forth by their professors.

## **The Professors' Perspective**

As the course was developed and crystallized between Professors M and J, they each settled upon their own ideas of what should be accomplished within the class. Although based around the same ideas of philosophical examination and awareness of self, they each added their own interpretation and thus, perspective, to the nature of the material, which in turn changed the class in unique ways. Professor M explained his intent in this way:

I would say to students at the beginning of that course that unlike every other philosophy or every other counseling course that they take, I'm not concerned with conveying information to them. No. Obviously that cannot be true of counseling theory, counseling method; any other course has content that a professional person has to master but my intention in [this] course is that they focus not on gaining new knowledge but on coming to grips with, as deeply as they can and as we can together, with how interpretation works in the sense of how it works in their lives as human beings and as counselors but also how it works in any human being's life including the lives of people that will be their clients. So it's really the process of interpretation that I'm wanting them to comprehend... but I'm interested in them getting to those concepts in a very experiential way, like through the encounter with those two challenging texts... I hope that they're going to be much more aware of how the interpretive process works in them and in others.

Professor M talked about his desire for students to experientially comprehend the process of interpretation in their own lives. He went on to discuss how that understanding can later be applied to any situation in which they later find themselves. He explained that,

What I would hope is that in whatever they're doing after that, other coursework both content courses and also practicum coursework that this notion of interpretation would be somewhere in their reflective space, because ... a very important premise of hermeneutics is that interpretation goes on constantly and the only question is what awareness do we have of it in ourselves and others. It's that awareness of always being in a process of interpretation that I would want.

Again, Professor M referenced an experientially derived self-awareness, the same awareness that is fostered through the parallels between the class and the counseling process.

In taking the class over from Professor M, Professor J's goals for the course seem influenced by his own sense of discovery of the value of this philosophical perspective:

Then [Professor M] came in and taught it, and brought a whole different curriculum to it, and at that point I think I became clear about how valuable it was because it was requiring students to think in philosophical terms instead of in theoretical terms about what they were doing. They were surprised first of all to imagine that philosophy could have any practical value; they were surprised that there were philosophical pieces that were underpinning what they were doing clinically. For me, that really made a huge difference; it was all of a sudden clear to me that the philosophy was really important.

Through that experience of discovery, he was able to create his own conceptualization of the course's goals. Although the course goals have remained aligned with and have been influenced by Professor M's original intent, the data suggest they have grown with Professor J's own understanding of the course and its topic:

This course really tries to do two things. It tries to expose people to a philosophical perspective, a way of thinking about things, a paradigm rather than a direct clinical

application. And the second thing is the literature is very thick, so just as it's hard to understand a client, it's also hard to understand these writings. It gets them ready to handle the rigors of understanding something that is really complicated... And it ends with a piece where we try to understand something about empathy and something about how we apply these ideas, these philosophical ideas in a clinical way, to make sense of the world. But students leave the course with an understanding about what relationships are like, especially in the eyes of Buber. They leave the course with a sense...of how much human beings are meaning seeking creatures, of how they will try to make sense of anything that they are exposed to even if it doesn't make sense to them. And how they have to learn how to be mindful and empathic if they are going to be able to function in the world. And I think we achieve those goals in varying degrees but often students report that there's a sort of harmony, a conglomeration of ideas of feelings and thoughts that are the result of their having exposed themselves to those different literatures.

This quote represents the first of many allusions that the professors make to the relational paradigm that the course provides its students. By understanding "what relationships are like, especially in the eyes of Buber," the students seemed to gain a framework of understanding that they would use both personally and clinically when entering future relationships.

While Professor J holds true to Professor M's original intent of fostering a sense of understanding the continual process of interpretation within the students themselves through experiencing that awareness, he also intends to apply those goals to humanity as a whole and the counseling process of relating to another human specifically:

I think that the course helps acquaint them with what it means for them to be human and the humanity of the people they work with. I think that's what it does. It does that to

varying degrees with different people and in very different ways. It's always interesting to me to see the final reports that students write up and each one will be influenced in a very different way, but along the same theme. The issue of mindfulness, the priority and importance of relationships, and the idea that we create meaning whenever we are exposed to any situation.

### **The Students' Perspective**

The following goals, as understood by the instructing Professors, are clearly delineated to the students at the outset of the class. The syllabus for "Philosophy and Counseling" lists ten specific goals for students taking the class:

1. understand the philosophical basis for relationships
2. identify patterns of communication
3. evaluate the efficacy of various communication styles
4. gain insight into the ways in which human beings are effected by communication with one another
5. link philosophy to effective clinical practice
6. describe from a philosophical perspective, how and why the conversational aspects of counseling work
7. identify why some conversations produce change while others do not
8. identify patterns within self that encourage good communication along with those that blunt effective communication
9. identify the nature of the relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal communication
10. understand how communication aids in counselor self-care

Whereas these stated goals show the influence of the professors' own conceptualizations, refined for the purposes of clear communication to the students, it appears that it is ultimately the students' own experiences within the class that dictated their perception of these goals. In fact, throughout the conducted interviews and focus groups, no current or former students specifically mentioned any of the above goals. Rather, they remembered the purpose and goal of the class in a much larger paradigm, similar to that expressed by the professors in their own interviews. As one current student stated:

It's all about the universe... I think it's like man's relationship with the universe. It started off really small with relationships and then it just got bigger and bigger and bigger and then we're talking about spirituality and the heavens and the earth and so there was that aspect of it in there...then also in Cultivating the Mind of Love it was all about spirituality. And that's really something that is a key theme for me, is just that aspect of talking...and actually the perspective thing of, if you have a bigger perspective of people and your role in it, you can maintain more emotional...flat line-calm in the midst of people's chaos. And that's something that you take with you forward, having a better sense of the bigger picture and bigger perspective.

Another student echoed a similar sentiment, "It's all about perspective and how you develop your perspective."

Thus it appears there is a clear transmission of the goals and intent of the course from one professor to another and then to the students in an experienced way rather than through a specific set of instructions or commands. The students appear to have incorporated the professors' focus on the pervasiveness of the interpretative process and used their awareness of that to gain a larger understanding of both themselves and how the self influences their experience and interaction

with the world. This remains in line with the fundamental purpose and principles on which Professor M founded the course.

### **Teaching Method**

The method of instruction in this course is based around the shared experience of reading the difficult literary works and then discussing as a group those readings and each person's interpretation of them. It appears that Professor M put this structure in place from the outset and that it has carried on throughout the life of course:

My method of teaching the course is not to come in and give lectures; it's to come in and read these texts with the students. I often will explain things, but I won't know what I'm going to explain when I go in because I won't know what the questions are yet, the questions haven't appeared yet in the discussion. So I always ask students, in the margins of their texts, to put question marks where something is said that they just don't understand.

Through this process of evolving reading, questioning, and discussing, the class proceeds in a unique way depending on the students taking the class and their individual experience of the presented readings, creating, as one alumnus put it,

A more interactive class...I felt like it was my very first group experience, like a therapeutic group. I think that [Professor J] gave us the food and then watched us eat. I think that he, just like a good group leader, adds in a tidbit here and there to open your mind to alternative interpretations.

A current student supported this idea, saying, "That's why we needed [Professor J] so much...in class, having a guide to help us understand what was happening."



Many students discussed the teaching method of the class as one of a deep examination of the fundamental concepts of the counseling process such as relation and empathy, in which these concepts were broken down to their most base elements and then rebuilt in the light of the new knowledge that they gained through the shared experience of exploration. A current student expressed it thusly:

There's just something about the relation concept and having a whole class devoted to analyzing relationships and what they mean to you and what they mean to other people and what a bad relationship would look like...And that was one of the things that [Professor J] had us do: define this, define that, define this, define empathy. And basically like, the way I feel was that he set that up and then completely tore empathy apart and then rebuilt it for us where we could actually see that this is what empathy is. Again, the importance of studying relation and the understanding of the relational process that the class provides appears to be key to the students' experience of the class. This focus on understanding relationships will be applied to a variety of settings and processes in future sections of this study.

Others mentioned the experience of the class as one of the professors modeling the nature of I-Thou relationships and the thoughtful examination of difficult topics. For example, one student stated, "I don't really remember him that much necessarily speaking about it...but he is very capable of having I and Thou relationships with people so I think he could be that for us in the class." Furthermore, it seems the class afforded the students the opportunity to try these behaviors on for themselves and apply them to both themselves and their classmates during the course of their shared experience. "In the philosophy class we were actually trying on

ideas...and there was a personal exploration and then also how might this fit or how might this apply to what I'm doing right now." One current student explained this idea well:

He opened it up to what did ya'll think this said. And we would all throw out things and not once did he say "oh, that was wrong." He would explore and say like "that's interesting" and he would explore why people thought this passage meant this and why you thought this passage meant this. And he'd say "well, I think it means this" and it was a great way to kind of unfold it, instead of just telling you "well this means this and this means this." ... It was very interactive, like most of the classes are here, but it was material that we couldn't have learned on our own but we were given the freedom to try and then we would all learn it together...it's kind of like a Rorschach. Everyone has their own opinion and then sharing that opinion just tells a lot of people about you, like what about you made you think that, that is what it meant.

It is deeply engrained within the goals and teaching methods of this course to provide students with a chaperoned opportunity to explore this dense, yet deeply personal, philosophical material. By doing so in an interactive environment which supports novel thought and independent interpretation by all members of the class, the professors seem able to foster not only the students' understanding of the concepts of interpretation and exposition of thought, but also the importance of their own experience on their development as counselors and as individuals. This focus on the students' own experience seems to play an important role in this class and the value its students take away from it.

### **The Student Experience**

As previously mentioned, one of the main goals of this course is "to make people conscious of what their own background understandings make possible and limit by way of

interpretation.” This goal is implemented by exposing the students to new and dense material that requires interpretation and then discussing those interpretations in class as a way to bring the students’ background understandings and their impact on the process of interpretation into their conscious awareness. Throughout the course of the data collection, the concepts of novel awareness, exposure to the continual process of interpretation, and its impact on the personal experience of the students in the class were regularly mentioned by most participants as being of key importance to the process and power of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class.

Professor M mentioned awareness as one of the only methods of assessing course outcomes, stating that

The experience that would indicate whether that [outcome] has happened or not would be to compare how alert people are to the interpretative process and to the way that their background understandings effect their interpretations at the end of the course compared to the beginning...If someone were to say to me, “What outcomes are you look for?” I’d say I hope that they’re going to be much more aware of how the interpretative process works in them and others.

Professor J discussed at length in his interview the process of awareness, the revelatory experience, and its impact on the students,

It was requiring students to think in philosophical terms instead of in theoretical terms about what they were doing. They were surprised first of all to imagine that philosophy could have any practical value; they were surprised that there were philosophical pieces that were underpinning what they were doing clinically.

He made special note of how important a role it plays in the overall process of the class, what it does for its students, and how this newly exposed understanding fundamentally impacts their understanding of themselves and the counseling process as a whole,

They have to learn how to be mindful and empathic if they are going to be able to function in the world. And I think we achieve those goals in varying degrees but often students report that there's a sort of harmony, a conglomeration of ideas of feelings and thoughts that are the result of their having exposed themselves to those different literatures... I think that this causes them to see themselves and their clinical work in a very different way...I think that they look at the counselor-client relationship differently. I think they let Buber inform them about what they're really trying to do, in that relationship. I think that they understand thought processes better. They don't look at clients and think, "Well that's stupid. Why is that person thinking that way?" They realize that we have no choice, every event that happens to us, we have to interpret. So they have a certain patience for the realization that the person's making an interpretation.

The students echoed the significance of this new awareness and exposure to novel concepts as being integral to their experience of the class and what they took from it. As one alumnus stated,

It was a really interesting opportunity and one that I hadn't experienced before. It was a lot of stuff that I innately knew and was about, and I think they did an amazing job of choosing books that really highlighted and gave life to that...the explorations that we did were life changing...I never would have sought out Buber. I had never heard of him before the class, but like I said, it really resonated with me in reading it, being [that] those are the words that go with what I've been feeling and thinking all these years.

In thinking about the course's impact on the students who followed her, another alumna reflected that "I think that the exposure to a counseling philosophy program or class is vital because it might open something up for them of 'oh my gosh! I had no idea that it would be important to know this kind of stuff.'" Current students expressed similar opinions; one explained, "it's important in that it helps you realize exactly what a counselor is supposed to be and what you're supposed to look for in that relationship" and one of her colleagues furthered this by saying, "I guess for me it's really more the exposure to the ideas that made the biggest difference."

This revelatory awareness of the continual process of interpretation and how it makes possible and limits future interpretations through its impact on background understandings lends itself to the second aspect of the students' experience within the class, their own personal experience in the class and how that informs the very awareness and interpretation that is under examination within the course. As stated by the Professor M, a major goal of the course is "coming to grips, as deeply as they can and we can together, with how interpretation works...in their lives as human beings and as counselors...but I'm interested in them getting to those concepts in a very experiential way." The personal experience of being in the class and recognizing how that experience is informing, changing, and exposing a student's understanding of the interpretative process being studied seems fundamental to the class and its power.

Professor M provided a good example:

You're reading a paragraph; and you're following it. And you get to the last sentence and you just don't comprehend it. So you have to back and read the paragraph again in order to integrate that last sentence; and usually what will happen is that in order to do that the understanding of the text that you had when you got to the last sentence has to be reworked. So, the experience of the question gives you a chance to rethink how you are

understanding a particular thing and sometimes that turns into an experience of thinking about how you understand things in general.

According to the data collected, the material and concepts of the class cannot be fully understood without the personal experience of being in the class and engaging in shared exploration and conversation about the literature presented, because by doing so the students become experientially aware of the very process they are attempting to study.

One of the current students explained the experiential concept of the class succinctly by saying,

I don't remember specifics, but that's the thing, though. It's so strange what you take with you from a class. I don't remember exact definitions from this class, I just remember the feeling, the sense of understanding that came from the experience of being there.

Another student, in speaking about the same topic, stated,

It's so funny because I would read [the material] and I wouldn't understand it, but then I would go to class and only in those two hours would I fully understand it. Then right when I left the experience of class, I wouldn't understand it anymore. I would try to explain it to my boyfriend and it wasn't possible. You couldn't quite understand it ever, and yet at the same time you get exactly what it's saying about counseling relationships because the experience is counseling relationships.

Participants indicated that the experience of taking the class and being present in the group has had a significant impact on their lives. Both the alumni and student focus group yielded comments such as,

I've changed as a person; I've learned to understand myself; I've become more self-aware because the philosophy class takes you so deep. And I think if you took that out of

the curriculum, I don't know if we'd be able to go as deep as we do now. I think it gave us the tools to know how to go there with ourselves.

Others made comments about the foundational nature of taking the course, such as "I think it's important to have it in the beginning because it sets the ground work for the program; it sets the groundwork for you as a clinician and as a person." Others discussed the reflective nature of their change in the class, "It actually made me be honest with myself, because of that I'm a completely different person than I was when I started the course...if I could read my old papers, I would cringe and ask, 'who was that person?'"

### **Clinical Experience**

Although the students' personal experience in the class was regularly discussed by the participants as playing a key role in overall experience of the class, it is also worthwhile to attend to the impact of the course on the clinical work of the participants. The data collected indicated that the class did not specifically impart technical skills that the students or alumni implemented into their work; rather, as the trends of this course have previously shown, it imparted a more foundational and broad paradigm through which the students approached their work in the field with their clients.

Although the alumni participants were able to offer more examples of the class' clinical influence due to their greater clinical experience, their comments and those of the students were very much aligned with each other. The reported clinical influence from the class was centered on the ability to stay present, aware, and confident with clients during their more difficult, awkward, or disturbing moments and appreciate the interpretation and subjectivity of the situation rather than "freaking out," as one alumnus put it. Another explained her experience this way:

I think that being in the philosophy class and having that open dialogue...gave me the ability to articulate myself better to call a client out and say, “what is going on here?” or “I’ve been feeling this way about our sessions. Are you sharing that experience?” And I think a lot of that is very much from the mindfulness...and being present, being in the session, just feeling that I-Thou relationship and navigating through that with the client. Another student described this awareness of the possibility of I-Thou relationships as a type of diagnostic tool to help him analyze problems he encountered with clients:

I think that I’ve also had moments where I’m like, “Oh, I’m just not connecting with this person, I can’t form a connection with this person” and I feel freaked out whenever they come in and I think that not being able to enter into that I-Thou relationship is a diagnostic and that feeling of “What is going on here” and can help me evaluate. Maybe they’re not being authentic with themselves or they’re not having that microcosmic I-Thou relationship with themselves that’s throwing us out. Or maybe I’m not coming fully into the relationships because I was feeling freaked out by our lack of previous connection.

Almost all alumni alluded to the class’ impact on their fundamental ability to understand and relate to their clients and their experience of the world. This was expressed several times in various ways. One alumnus said, “A class like this is necessary because it has a profound impact on a clinician’s ability to understand their client. I think the more we can take in, the better.”

Another stated,

If you don’t have the framework to contain and shape this, [the clients] are going to end up continuing to walk around with this sort of huge mass of unnamed affect floating around inside of them and they’re not going to be able to say “Oh my gosh! This is an



existential fear I'm facing!" or "Oh my gosh! This is..." and it's an existential fear of death or abandonment or annihilation that everyone has. So it's not like they're some freaky weird abomination, no! They're experiencing a human emotion that we all experience. And that's ok. But again, that's another, I think, benefit of having your therapist have a philosophical framework.

The clinical impact discussed by the current students was described in terms more in line with the vernacular of the class since they had so recently completed it; however, the intent and concepts they discussed were of the same theme as the alumni. One student discussed the metaphors that came with the class by stating,

I think the idea of having certain metaphors that you take with you is helpful. Like one of the metaphors was going to the ridge with a client...and being with them as they're looking into their black abyss, what they're going through and suffering and all that. I think about that a lot because, seeing clients now in my internship...especially with really severe mental illness, it's like you have a tendency to be say "eh, you're perception is wrong." But then you can also put yourself in that frame of mind, what we learned in philosophy, and decide "no, go all the way to the edge with them and just be or buy into their world view" because probably that's more helpful to them than saying, "no, no, no don't think like that." Because I bet everyone else is doing that and we, as counselors, need to be different.

Another student alluded to the diagnostic process mentioned by the alumnus without having ever heard his thoughts, "I was thinking, 'why don't I feel that connection?' ...and that's something that I learned in philosophy that I'm supposed to have that deep connection that's clearly not there." Here again, the larger perspective and the relational paradigm that the class offers are

illuminated in the data. These two concepts will be of fundamental importance in answering the research questions of this study and understanding the “Philosophy and Counseling” class as a whole.

Although the five students and six alumni who participated in this study took different versions of the class, at different times, with different teachers, and have had varied experience and settings in the clinical field, all seemed to support the idea that the “Philosophy and Counseling” class gave them the skill necessary to relate to their clients on a deep, personal, and subjective level while also remaining keenly aware of the type of relationship that is possible and necessary to become fully engaged in a helpful process of healing.

### **Conclusion**

Since the redesign of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class fifteen years ago by Professor M, its content and stated instruction has focused on developing an awareness within its students of the constant process of interpretation within their lives and the lives of humans both within and outside of the counseling relationship. Through the program-orchestrated function of sharing in the experience of reading and interpreting works of literature that focus on the fundamental nature of relationships and mindfulness, the students seem able to open themselves up to new possibilities of thought that have significant bearing on the paradigm they use when approaching their clinical work with clients. The data seem to reveal that a key component to this change and this experience as a whole appears to be the shared nature of the work done and the personal exploration and awareness that is raised. Through this understanding of the processes and components present within the class, it is now possible to draw conclusions about the class as a whole, its impact on the students, and its value to counselor education and the counseling process.

## **Chapter 5**

This chapter is organized around the research questions for this study. These include 1.) Which parts of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class had the most influence on the students’ experience? 2.) How does this class experience shape the students’ development personally, professionally, and clinically? 3.) How did this class shape the students’ understanding of the counseling process as a whole? 4.) In the opinion of the participants, was the experience of this class a worthwhile component of the counselor education? An introduction to the role that coding played in the analysis of these data is presented, and then each question is addressed directly. Implications are included within each section. During the data analysis, it was found that many of the salient themes overlapped the various research questions; therefore, this overlap is given its own section and attention. Finally, limits of the study as well as directions for future research are presented along with a brief conclusion.

### **Coding Analysis**

After the original coding process yielded noticeable overlaps and cross-codes mentioned in the previous chapter, a more consolidated way to make meaning of the data was needed. The original research questions used for the conceptualization of this project were used as they were the most seemingly appropriate guide to what this study was seeking. Subsequently, the original data were then recoded, taking into account the cross-codes and overlaps. Using the original research questions, coding each data source for any possible response to any of the four research questions was executed. The resultant new codes were then compared to those codes originally used, from which overlaps or cross-coding patterns emerged. These patterns are presented in the following sections, framed from the perspective of each research question. Information gleaned from the literature is included in the discussion.

## **Research Question 1: Which parts of the class had the most influence on the Students' experience?**

The answer to this research question represents the most commonly found codes or themes in the data collected. They are presented first because these components transcend all other research questions; they can be applied in different ways depending on the perspective of inquiry used to examine various aspects of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class. These components are presented in a descriptive-conceptual fashion within this section and later are applied to the experience of the class in ways most appropriate to the other research questions. The overlap between codes was so great that it is seemingly more effective to present the data from a conceptual perspective rather than a specific one. This class in general does not deal with specifics; it is a class of holistic values and thus a conceptual perspective, again, seemed to best capture the power the class holds and the way it is understood by both the professors and students.

### **Personal Experience**

The importance of the personal experience of being a part of this class and engaging the readings and subsequent discussions is explicitly stated within the course syllabus. In fact, it is described as being “critical” to students achieving the course goals. From the formation of the class, it has been of primary importance. The significance of this aspect of the class appears to be manifested through the students relating the course material to themselves, and understanding the personal application of this material and how it can be used in their lives, not only as a counselor but as a person. Professor M stated, “They focus not on gaining new knowledge but on coming to, as deeply as they can and we can together, how interpretation works in the sense of how it works in their lives as human beings and as counselors, but also how it works in any human

being's life, including the lives of people that will be their clients.” Thus it seems this is achieved by having the students apply the concepts to themselves before looking to apply these concepts with others. The students are asked to provide their personal interpretation of the literature before presenting it to the group or hearing others' opinions; they write personal reflective essays on how the material has affected them long before they are asked to think about applying the concepts to their future clients. The relational philosophy discussed in class is applied to both themselves and the group experience of the class so that the students are provided with the opportunity to live the class in the moment. As both professors mentioned, the material is intentionally so dense that the students must necessarily and personally participate in the class in order to fully absorb and apply the class material. It appears that this lived experience of the course material is something that cannot be achieved simply by reading the assigned books or articles without also experiencing the corresponding class discussions.

Beyond the basic experience of being in the class and applying its concepts in an in-vivo environment, the students' experience in the classroom actually forms and informs what is learned there. How the class proceeds varies greatly depending on the individuals present. Each student will have her or his own unique experience of the material and thus will have to make his or her own unique interpretations of the intentionally dense literature. These interpretations inevitably lead to different questions and discussion threads during the class time and will change how the class approaches and thinks about its work. This is one of the aspects of the class that Professor M specifically mentioned when talking about how he has been changed by the class: that each new iteration of the class has the potential to bring about a new way of looking at the material that he had not thought of before.

This class deals with holistic concepts that the students may not have the language or capacity to explicate when they start. One alumnus said, “This class gave words to stuff that I innately knew about.” From the personal content provided by the study participants, there seems to be a reflection that suggests that although participants may have seemed to gain the necessary understanding to use these words by the end of the course; much of that knowledge appears to come from their own lived experiences, including their understanding of how the material relates to them personally, and then their use of that experience to find their own appropriate ways of explaining it. How the concepts are explained varied from student to student, yet the underlying experience of the class seemingly remained the same; the presented topics remain the same. What tended to change for the participants were their explanations and the background understandings that each brought into the class. Professor J explains how the class engages its students, “It tries to expose people to a philosophical perspective, a way of thinking about things, a paradigm rather than a direct clinical application.” This explanation suggests that the class itself provides a common background understanding that each student must then merge with his or her own background to yield the final conceptualization of what this class means to them and how it can be applied to the student’s own life and work. A current student explained this experience this way, “I would read [the material], and I wouldn’t understand it. But then I would go to class and only in those two hours would I truly understand.” independently. Another current student echoed this sentiment saying, “That’s why we needed [Professor J] so much...in class, having a guide to help us understand what was happening.” In the opinion of the author, these comments suggest that participation in the class and engaging in its process seems to add another layer to the students’ personal experience of the material that would not be present were the students simply exposed to the class’ literature

## **Student Awareness**

The idea of exposing the students to new concepts, processes, and ways of thinking emerged across all the data collected. The professors talked about it as an intentional goal of the class. Professor M explicitly stated that he is trying to expose students to the pervasive process of interpretation that is at work in all people and all relationships, while Professor J spoke to the power of this class to open students up to philosophical, as opposed to theoretical, thinking. The students and alumni regularly brought up what an eye-opening experience this class was, giving them new ideas and possibilities for self-understanding and relationships that they would never have come across had it not been for this class. It seems that the class facilitates greater awareness of self through the students' personal experience with the literature as well as greater awareness of the novel concepts of the interpretational process and background understandings.

Students are exposed to novel concepts within this class that most have never before encountered, the most salient of which are the pervasiveness of the interpretative process, I-Thou relationships, mindfulness, and background understandings. Not all of these topics are explicitly taught within the class but, as discussed in chapter four, all are directly experienced by the students. One alumnus explained her understanding of this process thusly, "I think that the exposure to a counseling philosophy program...is vital because it [can] open something up for [students] of 'Oh my gosh! I had no idea that this would be important to think about this kind of stuff.'" It seems that this experience of exposure, as noted by the previous participant comment, might seem to influence how participants in general thought about the process.

The students are required to apply these concepts to themselves, and the concepts then become inescapably linked to the way they think in the future as a part of their background understanding. Many participants talked about the class' long-term impact on their understanding

of reality in general, not just counseling. They did not speak to specific techniques or skills, opting instead to explain the class' impact in a more universal and holistic way. For instance, one current student said, "It helps you understand that you're supposed to be an I-You relationship with your client rather than an I-It relationship...I guess for me it's more the ideas." With the previous comment in mind, the conceptual awareness fostered themes that might seemingly carry over into other aspects of their counselor education since it may influence their background understandings which, as Professor M discussed, necessarily makes possible and limits all future interpretations. Further, Professor M notes that these students were exposed to things they never might have thought would be important to counseling process and could not help but have their background understandings, and thus it seems themselves, changed by it.

In addition to the conceptual awareness, students appear to grow in understanding themselves better through the experience of the class. This is done through overt means such as the assigned readings on mindfulness as well as experiential means in which students write personal reflections and look inward to try and understand how these new concepts are personally relevant. They go through a process of personal examination in which they try to apply their new found conceptual awareness to themselves, opening them up to a self-awareness that was not present before. In fact, it is this type of awareness that Professor M described as the only assessable outcome from the course: "to compare how alert people are to the interpretative process and the way that their background understandings effect their interpretations...at the end of the course compared to the beginning of the course." The results of this change in self-awareness will have a major bearing on role this class plays in students' development and understanding of the counseling process.

### **Relation and Relationships**



This class provides students with a foundational understanding of the process of relation and its manifestation in the context of relationships. Professor M founded the course on philosophical works in metaphysics that described reality as a web of relationships and that theme carries throughout the material and process of the class as students learn to see and be mindful of that web in everything that they do. The fundamentals of relation are examined through reading Buber (1958), in which they are provided with a relational paradigm to “frame all future relationships,” as one alumnus explained it. A current student explained it this way, “I think it’s a good class to start off the experience because it kind of set up the whole nature of what a relationship is supposed to be like with a client.” Professor J furthers this concept in his discussion of what the class intends to teach, saying, “We should study Buber because he was talking about relationships and that’s what counseling is. And we should study Thich Nat Hanh because he talks about mindfulness and he talks about how what one thinks influences how they feel, how they think, and how they act. [We] also brought in the Spiral of Interpretation which is basically hermeneutics, the philosophy of interpretation. And those altogether formed a very good and, I think, easily understood backbone for students when they were studying counseling.” These quotes seem to suggest that this class teaches students to place the relationship at the center of the counseling process and to use it as a connection for clients to create meaning. It gives them an example of what counseling is supposed to be on its most basic level: wholly relating to another. The students then seem able to apply this paradigm as a backbone for the rest of their work in the class and the counselor education program as a whole.

The professors’ comments suggest that the students experience this web of relation and interpretation by becoming mindful of the multiple relationships that are at work within the class itself and the world at large. All of these relationships are examined and understood together,

bringing the students to an appreciation for the complexity of the web. Professor J explains their understanding of the complexity this way, “They don’t look at clients and think, ‘Well that’s stupid. Why is that person thinking that way?’ They realize that we have no choice, every event that happens to us, we have to interpret. So they have a certain patience for the realization that the person’s making an interpretation. It may devastate them professionally, it may make them feel worse instead of better but they make that interpretation.”

Students form and examine relationships with each other through the class discussions. The relationship they develop with the professor and his way of interacting with the class is also explored, especially as it changes with each group of students taking the course. As Professor M explains regarding his teaching method, “My method of teaching the course is not to come in and give lectures; it’s to come in and read these texts with the students. I often will explain things, but I won’t know what I’m going to explain when I go in because I won’t know what the questions are yet, the questions haven’t appeared yet in the discussion.” They experience a relationship with the course material when they are confronted with dense and vague literature that requires them to bring something of themselves to the works in order to interpret them. Professor M noted this when he explained that he chose literature for the class that “would be very valuable in itself but also be different enough from how they usually think about things that they would have to grapple with it and grapple with themselves in the process.” By bringing themselves to the literature, they appear to also examine their relationship with themselves in order to understand exactly what it is that they are bringing into this literary relationship. This relationship with themselves further seems to inform their understanding of all relationships as they come into awareness of what role they play in the web of relation. Professor J explains this concept thusly, “students leave the course with an understanding about what relationships are

like, especially in the eyes of Buber. They leave the course with a sense...of how much human beings are meaning seeking creatures, of how they will try to make sense of anything that they are exposed to even if it doesn't make sense to them. And how they have to learn how to be mindful and empathic if they are going to be able to function in that world. And I think we achieve those goals in varying degrees but often students report that there's a sort of harmony, a conglomeration of ideas of feelings and thoughts that are the result of their having exposed themselves to those different literatures." Thus it seem, the students use all this relational knowledge to look forward towards how they will one day relate to their clients, using the relationships within the class as an experiential lab for understanding how they must function in order to relate and respect the different views, opinions, and people whom they will eventually encounter in the clinical world. The focus on relation and both its specificity and breadth, appears to give students the perspective necessary to comprehend the pervasive process of interpretation that Professor M placed at the center of this course.

### **Background Understandings**

Background understandings are all the accumulated knowledge and interpretations that a person has gained up to the present moment in their life. The "Philosophy and Counseling" class uses these to help inform the students as to how they relate to others and how they are formed and shaped by every experience they have in their lives. They are exposed to the concept of background understandings at the outset of the class, and they later apply the concept to the literature in the course and eventually themselves. As one current student described, their exposure to this concept facilitates their asking the question, "How did this fact or theory come to be that way?" This suggests that within the literature the concept of background understanding informs the students' understanding of where the literature and theories they are studying came

from, asking them to look beyond what is on the page and see the bigger picture of the myriad of influences and interpretations that brought the authors to put those words down on paper.

From a personal perspective, students report gaining recognition of the background understandings they themselves hold through the personal reflection of the course. They also seemingly become more aware of how these background understandings are changing as a result of their experience in this course, providing added insight into how background understandings are constantly changing through the pervasive process of interpretation in which we are all engaged. Professor M explains it this way:

Every understanding of everything a client says or does has already been made possible and limited by the counselor's background understandings. And then every way that a counselor responds to what they have understood about the client is being made possible and limited by the understanding. So that's three links in the spiral...you're never outside that spiral; you're never doing anything other than that.

Thus it appears that the students seem to learn how these new background understandings will then change the interpretative process itself as it continually spirals on throughout our life. This statement suggests that the knowledge they gain allows them to see the place that background understandings and the interpretative process hold within the counseling relationships as they become conscious of the background understandings of both the counselor and the client. They are taught to see how both participants bring their own background understandings into the relationship, which must be respected, and how both sets of background understandings are changed as a result of the experience within the counseling relationship. This offers students what one alumnus termed, "a profound impact on clinicians' ability to understand their clients."

As important as these components seem to be to the experience of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class, Professor M suggests it is even more important to remember that they do not exist in isolation, stating, “You can be in [them] in a whole lot of different ways.” They appear to stand as the foundation upon which the class is formed and are applicable to all other aspects of the course in much the same way that this class stands at the foundation upon which the students’ counselor education is formed.

## **Research Question 2: How Does this Class Experience Shape the Students’ Development Personally, Professionally, and Clinically?**

### **Relational Paradigm**

According to the participants, one of the most frequently mentioned and important things that the “Philosophy and Counseling” class does for its students is setup a framework with which they can understanding the nature of relationships. By going deeply into the basic philosophies of not only relationships themselves, through the work of Buber (1958), but also pushing a basic awareness of both themselves and their relationships, students are given a strong foundation to stand upon as they move through the coursework that will eventually teach them the skills necessary to facilitate an effective counseling experience with their future clients. It appears that this is why the class is taught at the beginning of the program’s curriculum; it is this framework that will be used throughout their counselor education and this awareness that will be necessary for them to understand how they themselves fit into said coursework. As one current student said, “I didn’t realize how deep this relationship was supposed to go until this class.”

This foundational paradigm for relationships is transmitted through the students’ understanding and experience of Buber’s I-Thou concept. Buber (1958) described an I-Thou relationship as one in which a person fully immerses him or herself into the present of another’s

world experience and meaning making by entering into the relationship with their own whole self. By learning about this type of relationship in the class, students seem to develop a deeper appreciation for what is possible between two people, exposing them to possibilities for relating that they likely never knew before. Furthermore, it gives students a goal to ascribe to in their work with clients, giving them an idea of “what you’re supposed to be,” as one current student put it. In fact, this is one of the goals of course specifically mentioned by Professor J, that of exposing students to the idea that I-Thou relationships can exist and by doing so bringing them into a larger relational world with direct applications to the counseling field.

The student focus group specifically described the class as “having certain metaphors to take with you.” This further supports the foundational paradigm shift that the class appears to provide rather than some technical skill or tool. It suggests a change in the way students understand the relationships they are called to form as counselors. They described metaphors such as “going to the ridge” or buying into a client’s worldview as influencing not only their clinical work but also their holistic understanding of both the counseling process and the people involved in that process, themselves included. An example of the metaphor “going to the ridge” was described by a current student during her process of working with a severely mentally disturbed client and following their interpretative process as deeply as she could despite its apparent absurdity. She further describes using the understanding of the client she gained from that to form a deeper and more significant relationship with that client in a way that no one had done before. This allowed her to see the client’s interpretative world just as it was without writing it off as unworthy of consideration, which others apparently had done with this person. This example of going to the ridge is analogous to the metaphor of buying into a client’s worldview where students learn to accept and appreciate the way their clients make sense of the

world because they have learned to see their clients as the same interpretative creatures as all humans, trying their best to make sense of the world with which they are presented.

These metaphors and the I-Thou paradigm seemingly give the class' students a new language for understanding and appreciating relationships that can be applied throughout the rest of their counselor education as well as their eventual clinical work. This broad understanding is suggested because participants did not describe the class as something that they specifically thought about when working with clients. It was described as something more foundational than that, something that "you take with you" as a current student said, something that "changes your background understanding." As the class teaches, it is background understanding that makes possible and limits all future interactions because it influences our fundamental interpretive process. One alumnus described the class thusly, "It's always back there and swimming underneath...and that really helps." This suggests that by changing the background understanding of its students, the class necessarily changes the way they understand all future work.

It is this broad understanding that Professor M specifically wanted to impart to the students. In fact, it is the only specific goal that he discussed. He wanted the students to gain the understanding that interpretation is a pervasive process rather than a technical skill, to see that we cannot escape or remove ourselves from the process of interpretation and that through understanding its pervasive nature in both ourselves and the people with whom we come into contact, we are better able to form meaningful relationships. In the case of counselors, they seem better able to fully enter into an I-Thou relationship with their clients because they understand their clients' inescapable interpretative process as well as their own. As one alumnus explained, "If you don't have the background of philosophy or the framework to contain and shape this,

[your clients] are going to end up continuing to walk around with these sort of huge masses of unnamed affect floating around inside of them.” These counselors seem able to sit inside of the dynamic between the two and maintain a level of comfort and understanding that hopefully allows the client the freedom to do the same, what one alumna termed the ability “to maintain more emotional, flat-line calm in the midst of people’s chaos.”

This I-Thou paradigm also suggests a clinical benefit for the students. Both alumni and students discussed using their knowledge of I-Thou relationships as a diagnostic tool for assessing the strength and quality of their relationship with a client. They reported having the ability to gain a great deal of information about the client and their relationship by comparing what was happening in session with what they knew to be possible through I-Thou relationships. With the I-Thou used as a guide for “what [they’re] supposed to be,” they reported being better able to recognize when the relationship was not moving in a productive direction and address that with the client in session. One alumna described this as the ability to “call a client out.” Participants also reported that this relational paradigm gave them the ability to contain what was happening between them and their clients. They stated that it gave them the necessary language to understand the dynamic of the relationship and to articulate better understanding to their clients, which further served to strengthen their relationship. This understanding was also reported to assist in their ability maintain a sense of calm or collectedness in the midst of the chaos that their clients would bring into session so that regardless of what was brought in, both students and alumni conveyed being better able to “contain and frame” it, in contrast to their clients.

Beyond the relational paradigm that it seemingly provides, the data suggest that the class serves to shape the development of its students by acting as an *in vivo* parallel for what they will



experience with their clients. Professor J discussed how the class takes great care to expose students to very dense material, literature that was intentionally written to be vague and obtuse. This material was selected for not only its meaning but also for the qualities just mentioned. The density of the material requires deep interpretation on the part of the students, asking them to try and understand something that does not have a clear answer. Professor J reported that this is designed to be parallel to what they will experience with their clients: Clients are vague, dense, and obtuse; they come to counselors without clear answers to the problems they are facing and often do not have an effective way to elucidate exactly what those problems are. By having the experience of working the difficult materials of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class and having had appropriate facilitation from the professor on how to best accomplish that in their own unique way, the students seem better prepared to understand the complexity of the people who will be their clients. As Professor J stated, “I think that this causes them to see themselves and their clinical work in a very different way...I think that they look at the counselor-client relationship differently... I think that they understand thought processes better. They don’t look at clients and think, ‘well that’s stupid. Why is that person thinking that way?’ They realize that we have no choice, every event that happens to us, we have to interpret. So they have a certain patience for the realization that the person’s making an interpretation.” In this way they seem better equipped with the understanding needed to work through their clients’ problems regardless of how confusing, irrational, and absurd they may appear. They seem to possess the ability to appreciate all of the different perspectives that can be taken when looking at these issues along with the skill necessary to bring novel perspectives into the counseling relationship that the client may not have considered before.

Furthermore, the professors' comments suggest that the class appears to serve as a parallel for the dynamic process of both relationships and the dialectical understanding of truth. It allows students to live a variety of contradictory relationships through their interactions with the literature, themselves, their classmates, their professor, and all of the interpretations that they bring into the experience and discussion of the class. They seem to learn to understand that all of these different relationships are able to coexist even if they don't agree with each other because each one came from the unique interpretations of the individuals involved. "They let Buber inform them," as Professor J said. They tend to realize that, as dialectics teaches, truth is constantly changing as our understanding of it grows: new information breeds new interpretations which breed new background understandings which inform new truth. Referring back to Professor M's statement:

Every understanding of everything a client says or does has already been made possible and limited by the counselor's background understandings. And then every way that a counselor responds to what they have understood about the client is being made possible and limited by the understanding. So that's three links in the spiral...you're never outside that spiral; you're never doing anything other than that.

The spiral of interpretation, and thus truth, is seen as never ending. This awareness can then be applied to clients as students are able to see them through the same holistic lens as ever changing products of their own experiences of interpretation and truth. They then seem able to understand how their relationship with these clients will further change the clients' understanding and interpretation of the world. The class places students at the experiential center of the interpretative spiral of which both they and their clients are a part and by doing so places the relationship at the center of the process and means necessary to understanding this dynamic

within their clients. As one alumnus surmises, “What’s so awesome about having a philosophical framework is that I think it starts to frame the relationship that’s happening.”

### **Self Awareness**

The second significant way that this class seems to shape participants’ development is by fostering a deeper understanding of self and a greater sense of self awareness. Professor M contends that the greatest thing a counselor brings into the room is their person and that personhood needs to be professionally formed. He suggests that people are not often given the opportunity to reflect on their own personhood and the background understandings contained within it unless they are in crisis or in graduate school. As such, he designed the course to give students a chance to do just that, to examine themselves as person and to form an understanding of how their own background understandings impact the person who they will be bringing into the counseling relationship. He contends that they are given the opportunity to do so through self-reflection along with reflection on how their self interacts with the others in the class as well as the material presented.

This new awareness may also be a necessary tool for engaging in future classes as it may inform how the students understand more concrete material, especially when some of the material contradicts ideas they hold for themselves as well as other material presented throughout their education. As one alumnus put it, they are “given the opportunity to try on different ideas” in a supportive environment and to see how they fit within the changing understanding of their self that is developing through their experience in the class. According to the students, they are exposed to this “new information that [they] may never have thought would be important” for their education as counselors and are prepared to open themselves to these new ideas because they have had the opportunity to open themselves up to new ways of

self-understanding that they do not get in more traditional counselor education courses. Just as the relationship paradigm of I-Thou seems to set the comprehensional foundation for future relationships and coursework, the self-awareness gained through this class seems to set the foundation for deep personal growth and fullness of person necessary to appropriately enter into an I-Thou relationship, “the development of the whole counselor” as Professor J described it. Students begin to understand the holistic nature of the material being taught throughout the program through their understanding of the holistic nature of themselves. The participants suggest that they begin to understand what is beneath, to “go deeper” as several current students termed it. By applying this holistic understanding to themselves first, the students respond to the original goals of Professor M in his development of the course by seeming to then universalize it, seeing how different pieces of their education as well as different disciplines are able to work together to inform the person of the counselor and to use all these pieces when they enter into a relationship with a client. Professor M stated that “this model can give people a way of being systematic in their application of this background understandings.” With this model, they appear able to use the relational paradigm that this course provides to frame their understanding and use it in an intentional and reasoned manner without becoming overwhelmed or falling victim to happenstance eclecticism.

Professor M discusses the need for awareness as a tool for building the ability to stick with and gain an appreciation for questions and confusions that the students will inevitably encounter within themselves and when working with clients. By opening themselves up to the dense confusion of the course material and then through working with these questions in the class by addressing them directly and allowing them to inform and guide the class toward various discussions and eventual understandings of the material, he suggests that students learn

that the same can be applied to their experiences outside of class. He claims they learn to confront their own questions and recognize that they, like all people, are trying to make sense of the world in which they find themselves. They further seem to gain a “reverence” for this process when dealing with their clients, as Professor J puts it. This reverence provides them with, in Professor J’s words, “a certain patience for the realization that,” whether personally or when working with clients, “the person is making an interpretation. It teaches them to stand in the middle of the process without trying to force it to a definite or easy answer.” They gain a deeper appreciation for, again in Professor J’s words, “what it means to be human and for the humanity of the people they will work with.” Through understanding their own questions and confusion better, they tend to understand just how hard it is for their clients to do the same thing. They seem able to share in that process with their clients and develop the ability to be present in that moment, becoming a part of that process. They report having the confidence to go “the ridge...being with them as they’re looking into their black abyss,” in the words of one current student, because they too have been to that place in their own self-discovery process. They appear to develop the “I” part of the I-Thou relationship that allows them to fully enter the relationship while still maintaining an appreciation for the difference that their clients will experience in their own process of entering the same relationship.

By providing an underlying framework through which to understand the nature of relationships, the “Philosophy and Counseling” class seems to give students the necessary perspective to enter into the dense and dynamic interpretational worlds of their clients. By exposing them to new ways of thinking and applying these ways to themselves, the class attempts to force students to confront both themselves and their own confusion, hopefully leading to greater sense of self-awareness that they can then use to fully enter the counseling

relationship in a way consistent with the I-Thou paradigm. The framework and exposure suggest important parallels between the students and their eventual clients such that the students gain a greater understanding of the holistic nature of themselves, their clients, the interpretative process, and the work that they will be doing throughout the rest of their counselor education. In this way, the class attempts to shape the development of the students by giving them a strong foundation of understanding upon which to stand as they confront all future interactions and experiences.

### **Research Question 3: How Did this Class Shape the Students' Understanding of the Counseling Process as a Whole?**

These data suggest that the primary way that the “Philosophy and Counseling” class shapes students’ understanding of the counseling process is through the experiential parallel between the shared experience of the class and the shared experience of the counseling process. The students are required to dig deeply into dense works of literature through their interactions with others in the class, thereby seeming to gain an understanding of both the literature and the interactions as each are directly examined. This, as both professors reported, is analogous to the process of trying to make sense of the dense nature of their client and directly examining it along with said client. Since counseling is not one specific skill or one specific theory, the dynamic process must be understood as a whole and this class affords students the opportunity to do just that. They explore why each person in the class felt one way or another and how they came to those feelings and conclusions. This is the same thing that must be done with clients regardless of theoretical orientation. Students reported that they have learned to recognize the validity of different points of view within the context of dense and subjective material. Professor M stated, “Everybody’s got background understandings and that’s part of their uniqueness. Nobody has exactly the same way of comprehending reality as you do, as I do, or as anybody else does.” This

suggests that each client they encounter will come into the relationship with their own life experiences and their own way of making sense of it all, which is the result of those experiences. Students thus seem to learn to appreciate and even hold reverence for these interpretations because the students have been through the process of this class and understand how important they are in their own lives. They have confronted the views of others and used them to inform themselves about these vague and difficult topics. Professor M implies that this is the same thing that must be done when attempting to understand a client and, perhaps more importantly, assisting clients in understanding themselves, saying, “How we understand what our clients are going through and how they can get better is conditioned a lot by one part of our background understanding,” Through this the professors reported that students tend to gain a respect for the interpretative process of individuals and report being able to apply that respect when facing the problems and interpretations of their clients. They are taught to experience this process as pervasive and unending and use this knowledge to inform their clinical work.

One student participant described this process of learning as “material we couldn’t have learned on our own, but were given the freedom to try and then we would learn it together.” This tends towards similarity with the counseling process. Clients are grappling with problems that they cannot work through on their own; they enter into a counseling relationship in which they are given the freedom to try and work through them and then learn from that experience along with the counselor who is able to frame and contain the process in a meaningful way (Cavanagh & Levitov, 2002). Through this parallel, students appear to not only learn about the counseling process, but to experience the counseling process. Furthermore they seem to experience the counseling process from the perspective of the client, the one who is grappling with the difficult questions and the confusion. One alumnus even went so far as to describe the class as her “first

group experience,” saying further, “That’s why we need [Professor J] so much...in class, having a guide to help us understand what was happening.” This statement suggests that they are given a model of both behaviors, in the part of the professor who encourages discussion and respect for all the different interpretations of the course material; and they are given a model of thinking, in the form of the I-Thou relational paradigm. All of this is done in a way that is experienced in the class rather than solely instructed from a book, suggesting for the students a practical, holistic understanding of the many facets of the counseling process. When this level of understanding is combined with the student-reported self-awareness that the class also facilitates, it seems to encourage them to develop an awareness of how they, as individuals, will uniquely enter and be a part of the pervasive interpretive process with their clients in the counseling dynamic.

The class was not reported to impart specific or technical knowledge about the counseling process, which is covered more appropriately in a counseling techniques, practice, or theories course. Professor M reported that this class, instead, seeks to help students “think about interpretation as a pervasive process not as a particular skill or technical action that you do among other things in the work of counseling.” This seems to suggest that it may assist students in coming to grips with the interpretative and counseling processes as a whole; helping them understand how they work on a personal level so that they can then help apply them to others. The process seeks to aid in the students seeing interpretation as inextricable from the counseling process and that both must be understood together.

The final way the data suggest this class shapes students’ understanding of the counseling process is by providing them with a framework from which to understand the theories that they will use to aid in the counseling process. As discussed in Chapter 2, the foundations of counseling and psychology as a whole have their roots in philosophy. Philosophers were the



original caretakers of the mind and of everyday life problems (Marinoff, 1999). With the fundamentals of the counseling process based around the counseling relationship itself, this class seems to provide students with a basic understanding of how to best engage in relationship and the possibilities that can result. As one alumnus put it, “this class helps explain why you’re doing what you’re doing.” This statement suggests the role this class plays on the students’ understanding of theory in that it appears to give them some guidance regarding the motivations of counseling theory as whole. Although there are many theories of counseling, each represents a different point of view for how to best engage in a helping relationship, with the class, as Professor M noted, serving as “a way of being systematic in choosing among [those] various theoretical backgrounds.” Beyond that, the understanding of and respect for the various interpretative processes that students seem to gain from this class can possibly be applied to their understanding of counseling theory. By seeing counseling theories as merely different interpretations, or “points of view” in Professor J’s words, made by the founding theorists, students may well be able to more effectively assimilate the contradictions that occur among the huge assortment of theories available to them as discussed by Hanna (1996). This suggests that they see, as Professor M stated, “whatever the counselor’s theoretical perspective, what all counselors have in common, is that they are acting based on interpretation and their interpretations are based on understandings that are usually in the background.” It seems they can use the understanding gained in this class as an underlying meta-theory that can allow all theories to exist with the same respect and reverence that they have for all the interpretative experiences that exist.

By experiencing the counseling process through the “Philosophy and Counseling” class, students appear to gain a deeper appreciation for the dynamic nature of the process. It seems they

learn respect for different ways that the process can proceed, while still maintaining an appreciation for what it can be on its most basic level, that of an I-Thou relationship. They appear able to take the understanding gained from that paradigm, apply the self-awareness developed through the class' reflections, and assimilate both into a meaningful experience through which they are better able to understand what it is like to be on the receiving end of the counseling process and relationship. This knowledge seems to opens them up to more possibilities when working with clients while still remaining grounded in a unified understanding of both the interpretative and counseling processes through the relational paradigm of I-Thou.

**Research Question 4: In the Opinion of the Participants, was the Experience of this Class a Worthwhile Component of the Counselor Education Process?**

Based on the data collected, it seems clear that all participants found the “Philosophy and Counseling” class to be a worthwhile part of the counseling education process. Perhaps the way this is class was most worthwhile was through the growth as a person that the participants reported the class facilitated. Participants across the board noted that the class contributed to their holistic understanding of a wide variety of components of their counselor education. Students reported that this class taught them to view themselves “from a wider angle”, seeing how their own interpretative process influences both their own self-knowledge as well as how they enter the counseling relationship. The class seemed to foster a more holistic understanding of the classes they later took by laying a down a foundation in the form of, what Professor J described as, the “philosophical pieces that were unpinning what they were doing.” This foundation would seem to necessarily change how they engaged the material of different classes because, as Professor M previously mentioned, it had necessarily changed their background understandings. He reported that they used this change in background understanding, framed by

the foundations of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class, to see the counseling process as a part of the pervasive interpretative process that is necessarily a part of all human experience. This class attempts to give students the awareness necessary to see all of this as one holistic interpretative process that works together to become something of greater meaning and importance than the sum of its parts. It asks them to grow as people and thus as counselors, given Professor M’s contention that the most important thing a counselor brings into the relationship is their own self.

This growth is not limited to only the students. In fact both the student and the professor participants reported that they were positively changed as a result of being a part of this class. Both were opened to new ideas and understandings never previously thought of. For the students this mostly came from the exposure to new material and the subsequent discussions and self-reflections; yet both professors stated that they were exposed to new interpretations of the material and new ways of understanding relationships each time they taught the class. Professor M stated, “to the extent that my students and I had authentic conversations with each other and with those texts, then by definition, I am changed by that... or because of the way that one of my students responded to the text, I had not thought about that point in my life until the very moment the question was asked.” The very nature of the diversity of interpretations that were brought into the class by each group of students seemed to necessitate the professors’ experiencing unique ways of proceeding through the process of the course. Thus the class tends to require an open mind from professors and students alike, another parallel between the process of the class and the processes of both counseling and education.

Participants reported that this personal development would not have happened without this class. It was “absolutely necessary” as one alumnus put it. The students reported that it

required a level of thinking from them that was not called for in other classes yet was very much desired by the students. They reported wanting to “go deeper in [their] education” but that other courses were only able to do so because they were taught after the students had gained the foundation from the “Philosophy and Counseling” class. Had they not received said foundation, it seems doubtful that they would have had the understanding, appreciation, or awareness necessary to dig as deeply into their other courses as they did. This class seemed to open the entire counselor education experience up to exploration that they did not know was possible before and this exploration seemed to allow them to get more out of their entire education. They reported that “other classes seemed easy after this one” because the “Philosophy and Counseling” class asked them to “take a bigger perspective on the whole thing.” It appears to have helped them to see their education as a holistic process rather than simply a combination of specifically taught concepts, theories, and techniques. Students described the class as “a much needed change of pace” stating, “I wish there were more like it.”

This important change is further exemplified by the descriptions of the class as “enlightening” and “invigorating” by various participants. This reinforces the suggestion that the class opened their minds to previously unknown possibilities and that it was a positive experience. It reportedly left them excited and energized to engage in the rest of their counselor education, wanting more of what they received from the class, the wanting “to go deeper in [their] education” mentioned earlier. One alumnus described the papers written in the class as “life changing” that they gave her an entirely new way of looking at herself, who she was, and how she could use that to become a better counselor. Another alumnus noted that the class opened her up to possibilities and ideas that she never knew could be important or helpful in counseling. Students universally reported how much the class influenced their understanding of

the counseling process, not through specific skills or techniques but through their understanding of the process as a whole. Many spoke about the class setting up the understanding necessary for most other parts of their education, giving them the paradigm required to incorporate everything together. Said one alumnus, “Those are the words that go with what I’ve been feeling and thinking all these years.” The class thus seemingly gave language to things they innately knew but were unable to manifest until taking the class. It seemed to provide a way to express what they had felt for a long time but could not appropriately identify, giving what seems to be tangible life to their experiences.

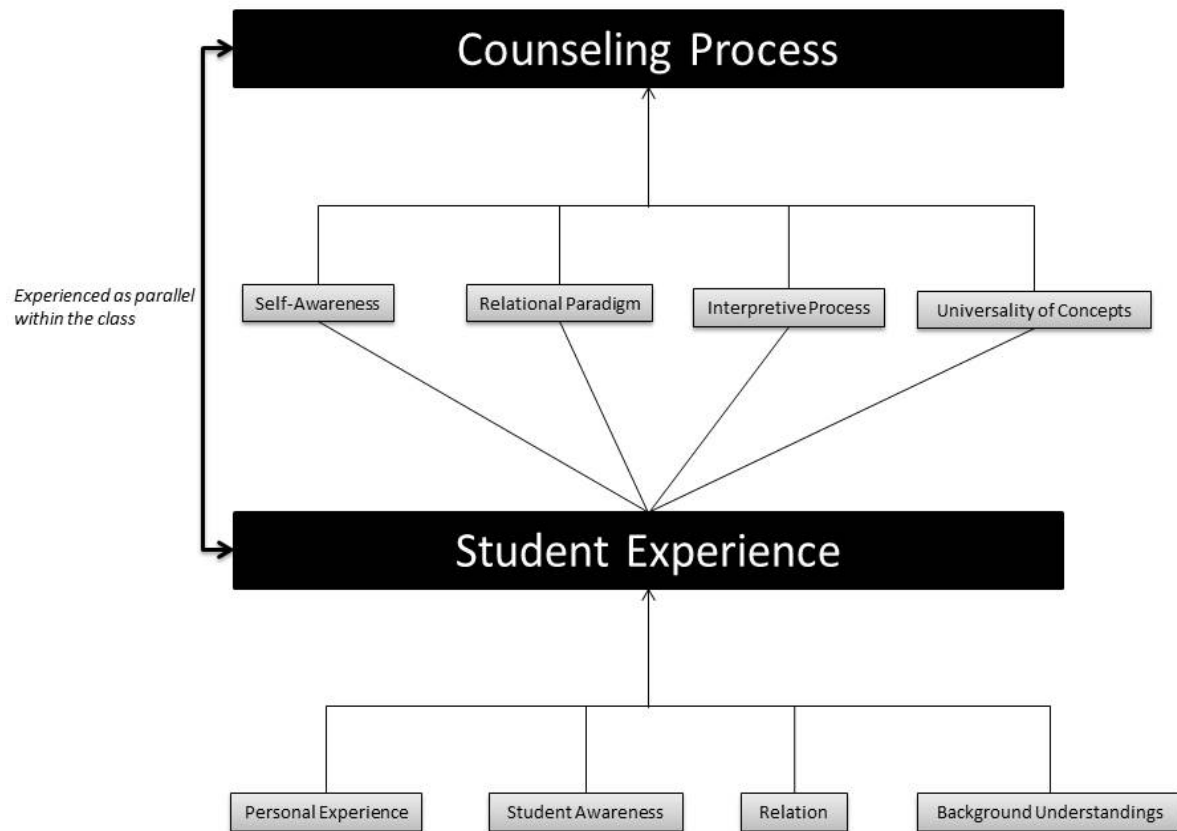
### **Overlaps Across Research Questions**

Many of answers of the original research questions for this project seem to overlap with each other, what was a worthwhile experience for the participants may also have been what shaped their understanding of the counseling process, what was an important component of the class may have been its contribution to the participants personal development. Certainly there are underlying themes that cross the perspectives attended to in answering these research questions. In fact, during the process of coding these interview and focus group transcriptions, it soon became clear that very few codes existed in isolation. This is in line with the nature of the “Philosophy and Counseling” course as whole. It was designed to raise awareness of its students to the pervasiveness of interpretation and how the ideas covered in the class are applicable to all aspects of not only the counseling process but the process of human relation as a whole. Through the parallels found between the experience of the class and the experience of life, students appeared to learn in-vivo the process they are attempting to understand. They are taught to appreciate the holistic nature of the process of interpretation and relation rather than trying to isolate it to a specific set of terms or ideas. The class does not attempt to convey specific

information, rather it tries to help students open themselves up to the universality of what is happening within them and the recognition that the very same thing is happening to every person they encounter whether in a counseling setting or not. As shown in figure 1, the student experience rests on the foundational components of personal experience, student awareness, relation, and background understanding. This experience then informs and makes possible their understanding of self-awareness, the relational paradigm of I-Thou, the interpretative process, and the universality of the concepts as a whole. These aspects of the class are then related to the counseling process through the parallel experiences of the student engaging in the class and the counseling process in general, allowing them to understand the entire thing from a holistic perspective.

That seems to be point of this class: to be bigger or more universal than any one or any group of topics. It is intentionally broad, vague, and dense. It requires concentrated interpretation as a way to parallel and give attention to the interpretation that occurs at all times, in all people, without their conscious intent. The class parallels real life because real life is brought into the class. There are plenty of other classes that transmit concrete material and others that even transmit subjective material. This class is not one of them. It does not try to transmit anything specific, trying instead to have the students bring something of themselves to the table and use that as the focus of the class. The literary works, the paradigmatic explanations and constructs all seem to be intermediaries designed to help the students work towards the greater awareness and understanding that is possible. This suggests that the learning of the class does not end with semester, for if the class is successful, it will have fostered in its students a greater appreciation and awareness of interpretation and relation that will influence their interactions with the world for the rest of their lives.

**Figure 1**



### **Limitations of the Study**

This study is centered on the case of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class itself rather than the specific experience of the students, the intent of the professors, or the course material presented. Although each of these perspectives of the class are addressed and used to present the case, they are by no means exhaustive. This inherently limits a full understanding of the phenomenological experiences present within the study. Also, although both professors involved with the course were interviewed, the sample size of students was limited by the single focus group for each category of student, current and alumni. There are certainly a much wider variety of students from which important data could have been gathered that may have altered the

understanding of the class that is presented here. Additionally, all of the participants in this study reported a positive experience in taking the class; however, the nature of dialectics suggests that there must be students who did not benefit from the class and those who did not find it to be beneficial to their counselor education process. Understanding their experience of the class could be useful in developing a more well-rounded presentation of this case.

Furthermore, the qualitative and phenomenological methods used within this study expose it to the subjective interpretations of the participants' and author's experience. Nothing presented here should be understood as objective or empirical. All views on the power of the class, the important components, its efficacy, and its impact on the students' development are strictly the subjective interpretation of the participants and author. This can be problematic when dealing with education and its requirements for the transmission of information. Although this class seeks to raise awareness rather than transmit specific data, it still exists within the realm of graduate education and must be understood as such. The need for empirically verifiable data cannot be overlooked and possibilities for such explorations are addressed in the section on future directions for research.

### **Connection to Previous Literature**

The components of this class that the participants found valuable, the class' impact on the development of students, its influence on the students' understanding of the counseling process, and its inherent value align themselves well with much of the literature discussed in Chapter 2 of this study. These findings support a lived experience of dialectics as well as provide evidence for the value of dialectics to counselor education.

Hanna (1996) described "several salient characteristics [of dialectics]. It a.) points out the intrinsic flaws within human reasoning itself; b.) is grounded in experience; c.) distills clarity out



of opposing, contradictory views without resorting to reductionism; d.) is eminently practical as well as global and farsighted; and perhaps most important, e.) is a metasystemic, developmentally mature mode of thought that can contemplate, compare, and evaluate many systems of thought simultaneously, including systemic theories.” (p.15). The “Philosophy and Counseling” class exposes students to all of these characteristics through an experiential modality and offers them the opportunity to understand the concept of dialectics by both living the process as well as intellectually learning and discussing it.

Through its focus on background understandings and their role in the interpretative process, the class shows students how people come into their own reasoning process and the flaws that inevitably result. They are raised to a greater sense of awareness for the fragility of human reason while at the same time given a framework to use and work with it in a meaningful way. As has been discussed previously, the class itself is grounded in experience through its focus on the experience of the students as they read through and discuss the assigned literature and then apply it their own life. As part of that discussion and experience, students seem to gain a sense of clarity or “reverence” regarding the opposing and contradictory views that arise. They examine the interpretation of each person in the class and through that gain a greater sense of understanding of the course material by learning that each view point presented offers a new way to understand their own opinions as well as the material of the class. This sense of clarity appears to become ingrained within their background understanding and later applied to other classes in the counselor education program, whereby they are better prepared to work with opposing and contradictory views in the literature along with those that will arise within their clients. They do this without resorting to reductionism because they have learned that by “going deeper” into the opposing views and using all the different perspectives, they find themselves able to form a more

well-rounded and holistic appreciation for the totality of human experience and how it enters reality through the pervasive interpretive process.

The class appears to be eminently practical, global and farsighted. It places its experience within the real world of the students, offering them a way of entering the domain of themselves and their clients. The knowledge gained within the class suggests direct applications to both the students understanding of self, how that understanding can be used within the counseling process, and how the students can appreciate the background understandings of their clients. It also appears global through its focus on the pervasiveness of the interpretative process. The course seeks to expose students to ideas that apply to life beyond the counseling world, to the experience of humans in general. It is a class of universal awareness and understanding. This applicability and universality is what gives the course its farsighted characteristic. Participants regularly reported using the class in their future endeavors during the rest of the counselor education classes, in their clinical work, and in their own life. The class is designed to change the way students proceed throughout the rest of their lives by arming them with a fundamental awareness of the pervasiveness of the interpretive process, the process of relation, and background understandings. Finally and most importantly, the class is metasystemic. It was founded on Professor M's search to find a framework of understanding that was consistent with all the different academic realms in which he was working, that could give him a way of thinking that was compatible with all of them. The class attempts to give students a way to think about all the different systems of thought that go into the counseling process, a way of putting all the pieces of their counselor education together despite the different viewpoints and contradictions that those pieces may contain. Their working knowledge of the process of interpretation and the role that background understandings play within it seems to give students a system of holding all

the pieces together in a compatible way while using the various views and contradictions to more thoroughly inform their own understanding. They thus appear to gain a metasystemic understanding of the human experience and how they can best enter the experience of another by using their own background understandings and predicating experiences.

This metasystemic understanding is exactly what Hanna (1996) called for in his application of dialectics to counselor education. The students of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class seem to have fulfilled Hanna’s suggestion through their gained framework for understanding the countless views of clients, people, and theorists. They can apply this to varying theoretical standpoints, varying client worldviews, and their own evolving opinions. They seem open to greater empathy because they see all views as necessary results of the sum total experience of the person expressing them. This potentially puts the students in a better position to foster the I-Thou relationship of Buber (1958) that Gutsch and Rosenblatt (1973) reported as a major goal for counselors and counselor education.

Lastly, the holistic nature of the class seems to support the dialectical views that there are aspects of life that are beyond our ability to understand intellectually and that we come to know these aspects through relationship and experience with them. The “Philosophy and Counseling” class attempts to do exactly this by teaching the students through an experience of relationship rather than an experience of didactic instruction. They live the process of background understandings making possible and limiting future interpretations. They live the relationship that must be entered in order to appreciate the dynamic nature of another’s experience and worldview.

### **Additional Implications**

This class answers the call present in literature for a global perspective from which to understand the counseling field and does so through the suggested method of dialectics. By providing students with a conceptual framework to use in working with the varied and sometimes contradictory aspects of the field, it seems to better prepare them to navigate the vague and dense nature of the people with whom they will work. It tends to afford them a perspective on the process not traditionally offered in counselor education and offers them a chance to foster “a way of being systematic in choosing among theoretical backgrounds” or perspectives of the counseling process, to quote Professor M. By living the course, they appear to gain a deeper understanding for the process of human interpretation and that understanding serves them by, in Professor J’s words, increasing their “reverence for the fact that the person sitting in front of them, even if they are seemingly crazy, even if they are filled with counter-productive acts and ideas, they are still trying to make sense of the world in the best way they know how. They are trying to create meaning the best way they know how.”

The foundational perspective and increased awareness that the participants so frequently discussed implies the importance that this class played in their development as counselors and suggests the importance that this type of class can have in other programs. While the literature calls for this type of knowledge and understanding, it is not found in other counselor education programs; some address it superficially as an introduction to their theories or techniques course, but it is not addressed as directly as with this class. The “Philosophy and Counseling” class at the University represents the embodiment of what the fields of counseling, psychology, and mental health were founded upon yet have moved away from. It offers students a holistic understanding of where they came from and why they do what they do. This class offers counselor education,

as a field, a template by which it can return to its roots and by so doing provide its students with a foundation that is both eminently necessary and unavailable through other means.

### **Future Directions of Research**

This study provides a wealth of qualitative, conceptual, and suggested data about the “Philosophy and Counseling” class. Using this data, several salient directions for future research projects emerge based on both the content and the style of the course.

Both professor participants discussed assessable outcomes for the class. Professor M reported that student awareness of how the interpretative process works within them along with their alertness to background understandings were the most important outcomes of the class. Professor J discussed a change in the way that students view the counselor-client relationship, a developed patience for the interpretative process of others, and an attunement to the impact that mindfulness has on themselves and their work. Future research can work towards developing a way to more appropriately define and operationalize these outcomes as a means by which to measure how much they are occurring within the students of the class. While the current project sought to identify these components of the class, future research paths might be able to identify how much each component specifically influenced student development as well as the overall efficacy of the class to achieve its stated goals.

Another avenue for future research could also be exploring this style of class in general. Professor M stated that he “teaches all [his] classes like this” whether they are in counseling, theology, or other fields. Offering a class that involves deep readings of dense works and then basing the discussion and content of the class on the experience and interactions of the students could be applicable to wide variety of academic disciplines. Investigating the various classes that Professor M teaches as well as other classes presented in the same style could expose broader

methodological techniques to improve student understanding of holistic concepts and subjective ideas.

### **Conclusion**

This study was not conceived nor designed to prove any particular point or support any particular view. Rather, it was designed to understand a unique class found within the field of counselor education and to try to conceptualize how that class impacted its students. The findings of the study parallel the course itself in that they have served to raise awareness and thus further understanding rather than impart specific knowledge. The “Philosophy and Counseling” class seeks to open its students to the possibilities and power that interpretation has within our lives and likewise this study presents the same possibilities that the class holds for counselor education. Just as each student takes away their own unique interpretation of the “Philosophy and Counseling” class, applying it to their life and work in their own unique way, so too will each reader do the same with this report. If the findings of this report suggest one thing, it is that we cannot escape the impact and growth of our background understandings. Hopefully this report will likewise serve to impact and change the background understandings of its readers in a meaningful way.

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## **Appendix A: Course Syllabus**

CNSL-A706-001

Philosophy and Counseling

Tuesday 4:15 – 6:55 PM

Spring 2010

Timothy F. Dwyer, PhD

Department of Counseling

Office: Mercy 206B

Office Hours: Tuesday 2:00 – 4:15 & by 120pt.

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### Introduction

[The] University's counseling program includes Philosophy and Counseling within its curriculum because counselors are better able to understand counseling theory and practice once they are exposed to the larger and more basic philosophical underpinnings from which the practice of counseling evolved. Such an approach is not unique in Jesuit institutions but it is uncommon in many other academic settings. Philosophy offers many lenses from which to view the world, to guide decision making, identity priorities, and to establish/maintain important relationships within our lives. This course studies several philosophies selected from a larger

group, all of which seek to help us understand the nature of relationships. They share in common a broad focus on the staple of relationship – “conversation”.

### **Course Objectives**

- Understand the philosophical basis for relationships
- Identify patterns of communication
- Evaluate the efficacy of various communication styles
- Gain insight into the ways in which human beings are effected by communication with one another
- Link philosophy to effective clinical practice
- Describe from a philosophical perspective, how and why the conversational aspects of counseling work
- Identify why some conversations produce change while others do not
- Identify patterns within self that encourage good communication along with those that blunt effective communication
- Identify the nature of the relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal communication

### **Grading**

The final grade is based upon three *equally* weighted measures of performance. An essay/short answer mid-term and final exam make up two-thirds of the final grade. A six to eight page reflection paper forms the basis for the final third.

In class reviews will be held before each of the exams and additional class time will be devoted to preparing to write the reflection paper. Tests, the paper and the final grade will be based upon the following scale:

A – 90 to 100

B – 80 to 90

C – 70 to 79

D – 60 to 69

F – 59 or less

### **Required readings:**

#### Primary Texts:

Buber, M. (1958). *I and Thou*.

Hanh, T. N. (2008). *Cultivating the Mind of Love*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax

#### Handouts:

Cowan, M. “The Sacred Game of Conversation”

Cowan, M. & Rieveschl, J. “Healing Relationships”

Plus further readings as assigned, distributed or posted on Blackboard

### **Student Requirements**

As you complete this course you will confront several important challenges, all of which have the potential of dramatically improving your ability to master the subject, learn more about yourselves and ultimately become more effective as a counselor. In order to achieve these goals you will need to prepare very carefully for each class.

While I understand that some of the readings are difficult, please take the time to read over the material and make careful notes about what you have read, what you need explained, and how you have been affected by the material.

Our conversations with each other, the dialogue that you experience in your readings and the dialogue that you develop within are all critical to achieving the goals of the course.

Please approach this course as a willing participant in a process that requires all of us to be open, inquisitive and motivated to share our insights as we progress through the readings. By doing so you will be able to not only gain first-hand experience with the forces that guide conversation but you will come to understand how others are affected

### **Summary of Student Responsibility**

- Attend all classes (2 absences may lower your grade; more than 3 absences will result in a grade of “F”)
- Complete assigned readings; be read and ready to engage
- Actively participate in class by both raising questions and sharing ideas
- Submit all assignments on time; late assignments will result in a lowered grade
- Attend to the standard conventions of professional graduate level work
- Take care to properly cite any reference to the work of others. Acts of plagiarism will be handled according to the protocol outlined in the Graduate Bulletin

### **Other Important Information**

INTERNET: All pertinent information will be communicated via blackboard throughout the semester. Students will be expected to log in to blackboard and to check email accounts regularly. Please make sure your blackboard account is working properly. *In the case of an extended evacuation, the university will resume operations/ classes via blackboard after 3 days.*

\*\*\* STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO USE THEIR [UNIVERSITY] EMAIL ACCOUNTS FOR SCHOOL PURPOSES

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY:** A student with a disability that qualifies for accommodations should contact the Director of Disability Services, Sarah Smith, at 865-2990 (Academic Resource Center, Room 405, Monroe Hall). A student wishing to receive test accommodations (e.g. extended test time) should provide the instructor with an official Accommodation Form from Disability Services in advance of the scheduled test date.

**DIVERSITY:** The dignity and rights of each person are guaranteed and protected by university policy in accordance with Jesuit tradition and state and federal laws. All incidents involving discrimination on the basis of race, class, creed, age, and ethnicity are taken seriously and will be subject to university review.

## Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic and Reading</u>
January 12	Introduction - Syllabus
January 19	“Mind Walk” (video)
January 26	Cowan – “The Sacred Game of Conversation”
February 2	Keen – “Education for Serendipity”
February 9	Buber – <i>I and Thou</i> , Part I
February 16	Mardi Gras – No Class
February 23	Buber – <i>I and Thou</i> , Part II
March 2	Buber – <i>I and Thou</i> , Part II (continued)
March 9	Buber – <i>I and Thou</i> , Part III
March 16	Buber – <i>I and Thou</i> , Part III (continued)
	Review and clinical applications
March 23	Mid-term Examination – Special reading assignment
March 30	Easter Break – No Class
April 6	Hanh – Cultivating the Mind of Love, Chapters 1 – 3
April 13	Hanh – Cultivating the Mind of Love, Chapters 4 – 8
April 20	Hanh – Cultivating the Mind of Love, Chapters 9 – 12
April 27	Cowan – “Healing Relationships”; <u>Reflection paper due</u>
	Review and clinical applications
May 4	Final Exam



## Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter

### ***University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research University of New Orleans***

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*Campus Correspondence*

Principal Investigator: Zarus Watson  
Co-Investigator: Matthew Wegmann  
Date: October 18, 2012  
Protocol Title: "Philosophy and Counseling: A Case Study"  
IRB#: 01Oct12

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2, due to the fact that any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.  
Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair  
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

## **Vita**

Matt Wegmann was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. He obtained his secondary education at Jesuit High School, New Orleans before attending Spring Hill College in Mobile AL, where he received his Bachelor's degree in psychology in 2006. He returned home following Hurricane Katrina and completed his Master's in counseling in 2008 at Loyola University. He entered the University of New Orleans counselor education program to pursue a PhD that same year. Matt enjoys live music, travelling, cooking, and the city of New Orleans with all of its oddities and eccentricities.