Article 81

Humanistic Helpers: Finding a Shared Counseling Student Identity

Travis W. Schermer, Michelle S. Hinkle, Lynne Guillot Miller, and Cristen Chiri

Schermer, Travis W., is an Assistant Professor and Internship Coordinator in the Department of Psychology and Counseling at Carlow University in Pittsburgh, PA. His professional interests focus on men's issues, constructivist counselor education, and Q methodology in mental health research.

Hinkle, Michelle S., is an Assistant Professor in the Professional Counseling Program at William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ. Her professional interests include counselor education pedagogy, collaborative supervision, counseling children and families, and creativity in counseling and supervision.

Miller, Lynne Guillot, is currently an Associate Professor in the Counseling and Human Development Program at Kent State University. Her teaching, professional, and research interests include school counseling, counseling children, counselor preparation, legal and ethical issues, and political advocacy.

Chiri, Cristen, is a licensed professional counselor at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and Relationship Resolutions in Pittsburgh, PA. Her practice focuses on providing a place for clients to gain strength in times of change and processing life experiences in a collaborative, egalitarian, and non-judgmental space.

Abstract

The study used Q methodology to explore how mental health and school counseling students defined counseling. Students sorted 34 statements about the counseling profession from "most like" to "most unlike" their views. A consensus perception emerged from the data—Humanistic Helpers, which accounted for all responses and emphasized a humanistic identity. Two specificities of the consensus perception also emerged, (a) Shared Benefits and (b) Responsibility, which provided additional nuanced views of the profession. Implications for counselor education and counselor identity are explored.

Counselor identity has been a concern for most of the profession's history. As Gibson, Dollarhide, and Moss (2010) outlined, this long-standing issue continues to plague the field. The contents of the recent program guide from the American Counseling Association (ACA) National Conference in San Francisco reveal that counselors are still interested in this topic (American Counseling Association, 2012). Over the last 100 years, the profession of counseling has made remarkable strides in grounding its theory, accreditation, and licensure (Gladding, 2012). However, because counseling's origins lie in and continue to be influenced by multiple disciplines, a unified identity has been challenging to achieve (Leahy, Rak, & Zanskas, 2009). The lack of a

clear identity may be resultant, in part, to the divisions that have been constructed in the field (Gale & Austin, 2003). These divisions are often first introduced to counseling students as they enter concentration-specific coursework in their respective master's programs. It is often during their education that counselors are initiated into the professional discourse (Dollarhide & Granello, 2012).

Professional Division

Division is best displayed, perhaps, within counseling's national organization; the American Counseling Association (ACA). The ACA encompasses a vast array of specializations as indicated by the 20 divisions and 56 branches. This includes diverse concentrations such as addictions counseling, career counseling, college counseling, marriage and family counseling, mental health counseling, rehabilitation counseling, and school counseling, among others. All of these diverse service areas fall under the heading of "counseling" and are aspects of the ACA professional organization.

In several recent *Counseling Today* articles, ACA leaders have highlighted the importance of this issue (e.g., Locke, 2012; Shallcross, 2012). They have reflected that counselors are identifying more closely with specialty areas than with the field as a whole; however, the future of the field is dependent upon the inverse. According to Canfield (2008), roughly 85% of American School Counselor Association (ASCA) members do not hold membership in ACA. This suggests that while ASCA is a division of ACA, there are many members identifying with the division over the association.

Having a shared identity within the counseling profession may also help the profession become more recognizable to the public on national and international levels (Hawley & Calley, 2009; Ostvik-de Wilde, Hammes, Sharma, Kang, & Park, 2012). With these implications in hand, the ACA convened a taskforce in the middle of the last decade to address these issues (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). Termed the "20/20 Delegation," the group came together in the hopes of creating principles that reflected counseling as a whole. Unfortunately, not all divisions agreed that their identities were reflected in the final product (ACA, 2010).

Professional Unity

The counseling profession continues to find substantial similarities across divisions. Over the course of the ACA's 60 year history, it has gone through multiple name changes in order to reflect the unity of its membership (Gladding, 2012). This tradition of inclusion continues up to the present date, wherein the ACA is seeking out ways to more fully incorporate the diverse voices of its members (Yep, 2012). Through a shared history and shared values, the counseling profession still works on maintaining its unity.

The field of counseling has a shared history in the vocational movement (Bradley & Cox, 2001). The origins of the profession have been credited to Frank Parsons. Although educated as an engineer; he is best known for his work in the career field (Gladding, 2012). The tenets of his work and the vocational movement are similar to those espoused in humanism (Hansen, 2005). This school of thought is typified by the work of Carl Rogers, who fundamentally shaped the field with his non-directive

humanistic approach to counseling (Nugent & Jones, 2005). The basis of humanism has been heralded as a core part of counseling's history and identity (Hansen, 2007; McLaughlin & Boettcher, 2009).

In a review of the history of humanism and counseling, Hansen (2005) noted that the person-centered philosophy mirrored the early vocational values of the counseling profession. These entailed focusing on client potential, honoring client uniqueness, and limiting the emphasis on pathology. Scholl, McGowan, and Hansen (2012) summarized this philosophy by writing, "humanism is unified by an overarching philosophy of human irreducibility" (p. 7). This means that human beings are more, rather than less, complex in their inner subjective experiences and cannot be reduced to one identifier or process. This form of honoring the human experience is central to the identity of the counseling profession (Hansen, 2005).

Research has examined shared counseling identity; for example, work by Mellin, Hunt, and Nichols (2011) explored how counseling professionals defined the counseling profession. Their participants largely consisted of school and mental health counselors, all of whom had graduated and worked in the field. Using short answer qualitative data collection procedures, they captured a picture of how participants defined the profession. They identified three categories including (a) a shared set of tasks and services, (b) training and credentials, and (c) an emphasis on wellness and development. While the first two categories are of interest, they also vary considerably by concentration (e.g., school, mental health, career) and state (Kaplan, 2012; Rollins, 2012). Therefore, the core philosophy of the counseling profession might be best reflected in the third category of wellness and development.

According to Myers, Clarke, Brown, and Champion (2012) wellness is closely aligned with the humanistic and counseling philosophies. They highlighted three areas wherein wellness models had consensus. They are: (a) the individual is a whole and not merely parts, (b) an individual has autonomy in taking responsibility and making choices, and (c) an individual's experience and understanding as central to any intervention. How central these beliefs are to counseling professional identity is unclear. In Mellin et al.'s (2011) study, only 25 out of 204 respondents endorsed wellness and development as aspects of their identity. Therefore, the issue of identity warrants further exploration as a potential connecting and rallying point for the larger counseling profession. As implicated above, finding this common ground may assist in unifying the profession as it continues to grow into the future.

Present Study

The present study examined how school and mental health counseling students responded to the prompt, "What is counseling?" Students were chosen because of their status as future members of the counseling profession. They were surveyed at the beginning of their graduate studies to examine the views that they were bringing with them into the program. This was done to explore those pre-existing views that might transcend concentration-specific learning. The researchers sought to honor the unique views of students throughout the research process. Therefore, a combination of incomplete sentence blanks and Q methodology was utilized, both of which allowed students to express their subjective perceptions.

Methods

Q methodology was chosen for its ability to capture the unique and universal perceptions of participants, while also showing the statistical strength of relationships between those perceptions (Shinebourne & Adams, 2007). Some researchers have viewed Q as a quantitative approach due to its use of a by-person correlation and factor analysis (Brown, 1996). However, due to its philosophical emphasis on the subjective, it has found strong support from qualitative researchers (Watts & Stenner, 2005). As a result, it is often viewed as a mixed methods approach to research.

For readers unfamiliar with Q methodology, a brief description of Q is provided in this section. Researchers typically start by examining a concourse, or the viewpoints, about the topic under consideration. The term concourse is akin to a concourse at an airport, wherein many different terminals connect in a main area. Similarly, many different views converge in the Q concourse to populate the space with related content (e.g., statements, images, sounds, scents). The concourse is sampled (i.e., Q sample) on theoretical grounds (i.e., structured) or on the views that emerge naturally in the concourse (i.e., unstructured; McKeown & Thomas, 1988). The Q sample is transferred to individual cards for sorting (i.e., Q sort) and then administered to participants (i.e., P set). The sorting process typically involves ranking statements in order of preference on a semi-normal distribution grid. After sorting, participants are given an opportunity to share additional information about their viewpoints. This latter part assists researchers in the process of factor interpretation, which is addressed more fully in the findings and discussion section.

Instrumentation: The Q Sample

The concourse was assessed through an incomplete sentence blank tool developed specifically for the study. Incomplete sentence blanks are pseudo-projective tests that consist of sentence stems (i.e., several words to start a sentence) followed by blanks that are completed by the participant (Lah, 2001). The tool for the present study was comprised of ten sentence stems related to counselors, clients, or counseling in general. The incomplete sentence blank is located in the Appendix. Graduate counseling students enrolled in introductory school and mental health counseling courses completed the incomplete sentence stems (see "Participants" for demographic information). The resultant statements populated the Q concourse for the present study.

An unstructured Q sample was utilized because the researchers were not theory testing, but rather allowing the perceptions of the students to emerge. The responses to the incomplete sentence blanks were grouped by stem and were independently coded by each of the researchers. The researchers convened, compared findings, and established common themes. The researchers selected the most representative statements of the themes for inclusion in the Q sample, which yielded 32 statements. Two additional statements of interest relating to multicultural awareness were inserted into the Q sample. This allowed researchers to examine the relative level of importance that students placed upon cultural awareness, which has been highlighted as congruent with humanistic thought (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2012; Hansen, 2005). Thus, the total Q sample of the concourse was 34, which are listed in the leftmost column of Table 1.

Table 1

Q Sample Statements and Average Rank Order of Statements by Factor

	Consensus Factor: Humanistic Helper	Specificity One: Shared Benefit	Specificity Two: Responsibility
1. Counseling is about listening to clients.	4	-3	3
2. Counseling is about working with clients to find solutions to their problems.	2	-1	1
3. Counseling is a way to explore thoughts and feelings of clients.	2	1	1
4. Counseling is giving people the tools to live and enjoy life.	1	4	-4
5. Counseling is about giving clients advice.	-4	-1	1
6. Counseling is a brief process that takes a short amount of time.	-3	-2	2
7. Counseling is helping others.	1	2	-2
8. Counseling is about making a difference in people's lives.	0	3	-3
9. Counseling allows people to learn about themselves.	3	0	0
10. Counseling is about assisting people to deal with psychological issues.	-1	0	0
11. Counseling is about the counselor improving the quality of clients' lives.	-1	1	-1
12. Counseling is a well paid profession.	-3	1	-1
13. Counseling is an appreciated profession.	-2	1	-1
14. Counseling is a respected profession	-1	2	-2
15. Counseling requires effort from the client.	3	-1	1
16. Counseling requires effort from the counselor.	1	0	0
17. Counseling is supported by those outside the profession (e.g. community, government).	-2	0	0
18. Counselors are well educated and well read.	0	2	-2
19. Counseling programs inform students about the realities of the counseling profession.	-1	1	-1
20. Counselors are responsible for the well being of the clients for which they are charged.	-1	-4	4
21. Counseling is unique because it is a holistic approach to mental health.	0	4	-4
22. Counseling is a rewarding career.	1	3	-3
23. Counseling responsibilities extend beyond the therapeutic relationship with clients (e.g. responsibilities to the community).	0	-1	1
24. Counseling as a profession will be beneficial to me.	0	3	-3
25. Counseling requires that counselors put clients before themselves.	-2	-4	4
26. Counselors should be open-minded.	4	0	0
27. Counseling is about being unbiased.	1	-2	2
28. Counselors are caring and compassionate beings.	0	2	-2
29. Counseling is about gaining the client's trust.	3	-3	3
30. Counselors are seen by the clients as all knowing.	-2	-2	2
31. Counseling does work for everyone.	-3	0	0
32. Counselors need to solve problems for people.	-4	-1	1
33. Counselors should be aware of the influence of their culture.	2	-3	3
34 .Counselors should be aware of the influence of their client's culture.	2	-2	2

Participants

The study utilized a convenient sample of 53 graduate level counseling student volunteers from a large university in the Midwestern United States. According to Q

methodological theorists, a sample of 53 people is sufficient to assess the range of views present on an issue (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). All of the participants were enrolled in an entry-level orientation course for either school ($n = 22$) or mental health ($n = 31$) counseling. These participants participated in both the incomplete sentence blanks and the Q sort.

Forty-five of the participants were female (84.9%) and eight were male (15.1%), with a mean age of 28.7 years ($SD = 6.7$). Of these participants, 42 identified as Caucasian (79.2%), seven as African American (13.2%), two as Biracial (3.7%), one as Asian (1.8%), and one as Hispanic (1.8%). Twenty-six (49%) participants indicated that this was their first semester in the counseling program, 12 (22.6%) indicated it was their second, five (9.4%) indicated it was their third, nine (16.9%) indicated they had been there four or more semesters, and one (1.8%) did not answer this question.

The Q Sort

Participants were approached in their class and briefed on the study. Those who agreed to participate were given the 34 statements to sort from -4 "Most unlike my view of counseling/Most Strongly Disagree" to +4 "Most like my view of counseling/Most Strongly Agree." Once the sort was completed, participants recorded their rankings on response grids. Participants then completed a post-sort questionnaire concerning the ranking of statements (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Questions included, "Describe how the two items you ranked at 4 (Most like my view of counseling) are important to your view," "Describe why the two items that you placed at the -4 (Most unlike my view of counseling) are less important to your view," "Describe other statements that you think help define your view (either positive, negative, or neutrally ranked statements)," and "What were other specific statements that you had difficulty placing? Please indicate your dilemma." The participants were also given space to describe any other thoughts or ideas they had about counseling that emerged during the sort.

Analysis

The Q sorts were analyzed using PQMethod 2.11 (Schmolck & Atkinson, 2002). The program computed a by-person correlation matrix, wherein the coefficient was the relationship between participants' individual sorts (Watts & Stenner, 2005). The matrix was factor analyzed using principle components analysis. The between factor correlations were above ± 0.7, which suggested a common underlying factor. Brown (1981) termed this a "consensus factor," meaning that there was consensus or universal agreement on this perspective (p. 631). Similar to Brown, the most representative solution for the present study was a single consensus factor. This was obtained through an unrotated principle components analysis.

Factor loadings are significant ($p < 0.01$) if they are greater than ± 2.58 (SE), where $SE = 1/\sqrt{N}$ and N is the number of statements in the Q sample (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). For the present study, a sort with a factor loading of ± 0.44 was statistically significant. As indicated previously, all participants had a significant loading on the first factor. However, some had significant loadings on more than one factor. This indicated that while in agreement with the consensus factor, there were nuances, or specificities, to their perspectives that were not captured in the first factor (i.e., dispersed significantly across other factors; Brown, 1981; Stephenson, 1953). These specificities

were included in the results if they had more than one significant factor loading, which is common practice in Q methodology (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Five loadings on one factor met these criteria and are described below.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis indicated that all participants loaded significantly on the first factor, which means that everyone ranked the statements in a similar manner. The second factor was bipolar (i.e., positive and negative loadings) and contained five significant factor loadings. When a bipolar factor emerges, each pole is analyzed as a unique perspective (Brown, 1980). Thus a total of three factors emerged from the data, one that captured all participant responses (i.e., consensus) and two that reflected specificities. The list of Q sort statements and their average rankings (i.e., factor arrays) for the three factors are presented in Table 1.

Factor interpretation in Q methodology takes several pieces of data into consideration. First, the factor arrays are examined, which are the average rankings of statements for people loading on the factor. These are typically not a perfect correlation with any of the individual sorts from the factor. McKeown and Thomas (1988) referred to them as the "model Q sort" (p. 53) because they are the models for particular factors. The second piece of data is the post-sort qualitative responses. These provide information about the participants' thinking that goes beyond the statements provided. The meaning participants imbue upon statements can be made clear through these responses. This can provide greater clarity and/or depth to the factors, which are interpreted and contextualized in the literature below.

Consensus Factor: Humanistic Helpers

The consensus factor was shared by all the participants and reflected ideals evidenced in humanistic counseling. The participants endorsed the importance of counselors listening to, being open with, and trusting of the clients they serve. This perception highlighted the importance of clients actively participating in counseling and finding their own solutions to their difficulties. It emphasized that counselors cannot fix everything for clients, but rather, clients need to be actively working, too. These views are congruent with humanist traditions in the counseling profession (Hansen, 2005). The humanist perspective is elucidated below with special consideration given to the statements about multiculturalism. Additionally, part of the perspective reflected professional issues in the field, which are also discussed below.

The humanist ideals were reflected in the highly ranked statements, or those that were most like the perception of the common factor (i.e., ranked at 4). These were "Counseling is about listening to clients" and "Counselors should be open-minded." The next most important statements (i.e., ranked at 3) were "Counseling requires effort from the client," "Counseling is about gaining the client's trust," and "Counseling allows people to learn about themselves." As a third semester school counseling student noted, "Because you cannot make progress without trust, the counselor needs to be open-minded in listening to the client (creating trust)."

The above statements reflect the basic tenets for a person-centered humanistic approach to counseling (Rogers, 1957). An open-minded orientation towards a client's

expression (i.e., listening with an open-mind) is central to humanist traditions. As Rogers (1961) indicated, "the major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove, the statement of the other person (p. 330)." If counselors listen without judgment (i.e., with an open mind), they will be more effective at understanding the speaker. This puts the uniqueness of the individual in a primary position, because a counselor must listen in order to learn about the distinctiveness of a person.

The statements that were most unlike (i.e., ranked -4) the common factor's perception were "Counselors need to solve problems for people," and "Counseling is about giving clients advice." By giving advice or solving problems for clients, counselors may take away their sense of autonomy. Both the humanistic and wellness viewpoints encourage people to take responsibility for their lives and their choices (Hansen, 2010; Myers et al., 2012). Ultimately, humanists believe in the potential of human beings (Hansen, 2005). If a counselor gives advice, he or she is disavowing the individual of his or her own potential. Even early in their education, these students seemed to believe in these philosophical viewpoints. A mental health counseling student in her first semester noted that this responsibility was congruent with the role of a counselor, "Counseling is not just about giving advice. It's really about focusing on strengths. Counselors do not need to solve problems for people because that should be the client's job." A school counseling student in her second semester reinforced this point by indicating that, "it could hurt the client by them not learning ways to help themselves." This humanist viewpoint was extended to the ranking of multicultural statements.

Multiculturalism. As indicated in the methods section, two statements of theoretical interest addressing multiculturalism were included in the Q sample. The common perception ranked both of the statements about multiculturalism at 2, which is in a positive to neutral region. Statements at the poles tend to be viewed as being more defining of a perspective because they were "most like" or "most unlike" the perception (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Being that these statements were ranked in between the positive pole and the neutral center suggests that the respondents agreed with the statements, but they were not valued as highly by this perception.

Humanism and multiculturalism have been described as being congruent concepts (Hansen, 2005). D'Andrea and Daniels (2012) highlighted four complementing components of the humanism-multicultural connection as (a) integrity, (b) self-actualization, (c) holism, and (d) irreducibility. Being that the more highly ranked statements (e.g., "Counseling is about listening to clients") were all in line with humanist ideals, the ranking of the multicultural statements could be conceptualized similarly. In other words, these statements may be viewed in the context of the overall humanistic viewpoint.

The ranking of the statements, or their relative importance, takes shape in the context provided by the respondents. A first semester mental health counseling student related the importance of being open-minded to multicultural awareness, "I believe that counselors should be very open-minded and aware of the influence of their client's culture because there are so many different types of people which one should be prepared for!" She went on to indicate that being unbiased was also central to multiculturalism, "We should definitely be unbiased because of the many different types of people." A third semester school counseling student also provided her support for these statements

by simply responding, "It is important for counselors to know about their own and their clients' cultures to be most helpful." The perspective departed slightly from this view, as it also addressed professional issues in the counseling profession.

Professional issues in counseling. Several lowly ranked statements seemed to reflect professional aspects of counseling, namely misunderstandings from those outside the field. These were, "Counseling works for everyone," "Counseling is a brief process that takes a short amount of time," and "Counseling is a well paid profession." The latter seemed to be connected to the mental health system as a whole, which was viewed as being under funded. As a first semester mental health counseling student stated, "I don't think counseling is supported by the community or government. Agencies don't have enough money to appropriately function."

The issue of the public's awareness or respect for the profession also seemed to be an issue. A student, in her first semester of school counseling, stated, "Counseling is not an appreciated, respected, or well paid profession. People are uneducated about the profession." These types of statements depict a view that acknowledges the importance of the counseling field, but also sees the struggles and limitations. The professional aspects of the counseling profession were central to the two specificities of the consensus factor. Specificities are additional views that overlay the common factor, thereby creating a new nuanced view. This relationship is depicted in Figure 1. The first of the specificities was focused on counseling being beneficial.

Specificity One: Shared Benefits

This specificity to the consensus perception was termed "Shared Benefits" because it presented how counseling could be beneficial to both client and counselor alike. This factor was the positive loading of the second factor, which was bipolar. It was comprised of three respondents, two mental health counseling students and one school counseling student. Each of these respondents were in their first semester of the program. The statements and post-sort responses reflected an emphasis on a general experience of being a counselor in the future. It appeared to focus more on the outcome of being a counselor (i.e., it will be positive and beneficial).

The highest ranked statements were "Counseling is unique because it is a holistic approach to mental health" and "Counseling is giving people the tools to live and enjoy life." These were followed by "Counseling as a profession will be beneficial to me," "Counseling is about making a difference in people's lives," and "Counseling is a rewarding career." Each of these statements addressed a benefit of counseling, suggesting that the field has something to offer both clinician and client.

In elucidation of his view, a first semester school counseling student proffered, "I believe the profession of counseling can benefit the client and me." Similarly, a first semester mental health counseling student emphasized the personal reward of helping others as a counselor, "When I think of counseling I think of helping others and making their lives easier/better/different which is what I think is rewarding." She went on to indicate, "I think I'll make a difference." Another first semester mental health counseling student noted, "Counseling is making a difference in people's lives, why else would you get into the profession?"

Being that this specificity was solely comprised of first semester students, the factor might be reflective of a novice's viewpoint. This specificity might not know

enough about the field to be able to endorse anything beyond the general benefit of counseling. Because this is a specificity, the perspective endorsed humanist ideals (i.e., Humanistic Helper) by virtue of loading on the consensus factor. Its specificity emphasized the beneficial role the profession would have in clinicians' lives. The second specificity, by contrast, focused more on the responsibilities associated with working in the counseling field.
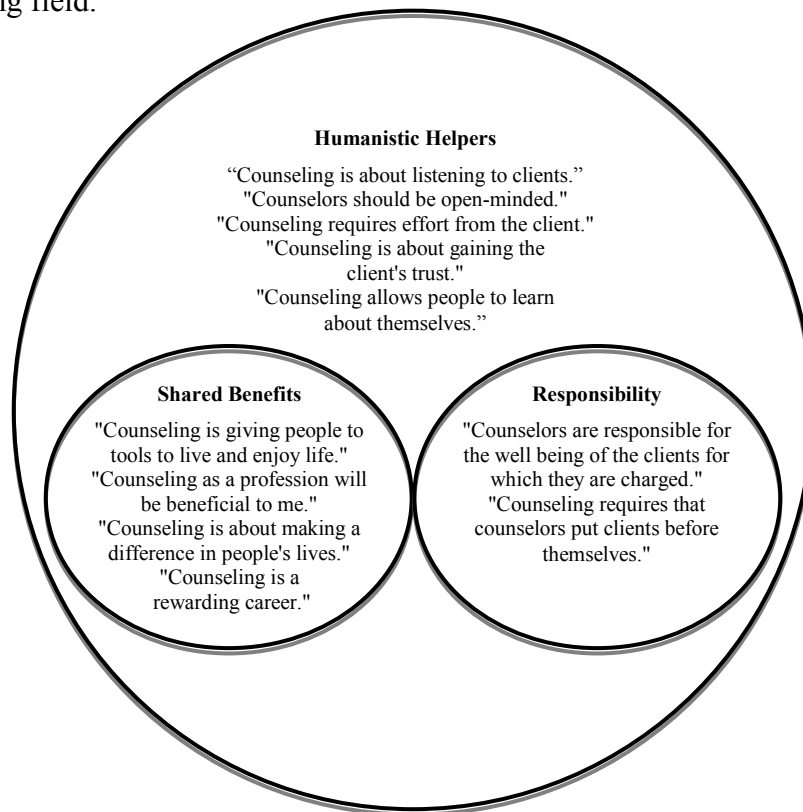

Humanistic Helpers

"Counseling is about listening to clients."
"Counselors should be open-minded."
"Counseling requires effort from the client."
"Counseling is about gaining the
client's trust."
"Counseling allows people to learn
about themselves."

Shared Benefits

"Counseling is giving people to
tools to live and enjoy life."
"Counseling as a profession will
be beneficial to me."
"Counseling is about making a
difference in people's lives."
"Counseling is a
rewarding career."

Responsibility

"Counselors are responsible for
the well being of the clients for
which they are charged."
"Counseling requires that
counselors put clients before
themselves."

Figure 1. Venn diagram of factor results. The consensus factor of Humanistic Helpers was evident among all participants and included two additional factors of Specificity 1: Professional Issues and Specificity 2: Responsibility.

Specificity Two: Responsibility

This specificity of the consensus perception emphasized the responsibility that a counselor takes on by working with clients. This was the negative pole of the second factor and was comprised of two significant loadings, two mental health counseling students with four or more semesters in the program. In contrast to the above specificity that focused on the result of being a counselor, this was more oriented towards the responsibilities of actively engaging in the counseling process. To that end, it highlighted the duties that counselors will need to perform.

The highly ranked statements for this specificity were, "Counselors are responsible for the well being of the clients for which they are charged," and "Counseling requires that counselors put clients before themselves." These statements reflected a selfless sacrifice on the part of the counselor in order to properly serve the client. One respondent emphasized this in her response: "The well being of the client is part of the counselor's responsibility." This responsibility may be a product of the respondents'

advanced status in the program. They may be preparing for or enrolled in practicum. This advanced, but not yet experienced, standing in the program could heighten their awareness of the potential responsibilities involved in counseling.

The next highly ranked statements were: "Counseling is about gaining the client's trust," "Counseling is about listening to clients," and "Counselors should be aware of the influence of their culture." The two former statements are focused on the process of counseling, which is similar to the consensus factor. A respondent listed the requirements of what a counselor must do: "Counselors must be open-minded, has to gain the trust of clients in order to help them, and counselors must listen to clients." Similar to the highest ranked statements (e.g., "Counselors are responsible for the well being of the clients for which they are charged."), these were judged to be a set of requirements for counselors to follow. It was as if the respondents were highlighting the specific tasks that counselors needed to complete in their work.

This specificity prized cultural awareness, above that of the consensus factor, by ranking the theoretical statements at a +3 and +2. This suggested that the statements were of equal or greater importance to this specificity's overall perception. One respondent indicated the reason for her ranking was, "Because culture plays a big role in counseling from both perspectives (i.e., client and counselor)." This perspective may have been a result of the students' having taken more classes or preparing for practicum, which may afford a wider perspective of the counseling profession. This specificity, along with the other emergent perceptions (i.e., Humanistic Helpers and Mutual Benefit), has implications for strengthening unity in the counseling field.

Implications

Counseling has long had a struggle with unifying the disperse divisions in the profession. This struggle has continued into the present day, being an issue of national attention (Gibson et al., 2010). The present findings inform this struggle and offer a potential foundation for unifying, at the very least, two of the professional divisions (i.e., school and mental health counseling). In turn, the findings have implications for counselor educators who are training future counselors and thereby responsible for imparting parts of this foundational identity.

The findings suggest that mental health and school counseling have more, rather than less, in common. The consensus factor that emerged suggested that humanistic ideals are present within these definitions of counseling, from both school and mental health counseling students. The present study consisted of 53 respondents from both school and mental health counseling programs. All of these individuals loaded on the same factor, which indicates a shared perspective. Some have proffered humanism as a unifying foundation for the counseling profession (Hansen, 2007; McLaughlin & Boettcher, 2009). The present study supports this assertion as a tenable foundation and delineates the structure of these perspectives.

With the perceptual commonality evidenced in the present study, it is vital that counselor educators ensure that humanism is present in counseling coursework. Dollarhide and Granello (2012) outlined a humanistic orientation towards counselor education. As they indicated, the educational process is the manner in which counselors are "inducted" into the counseling field (p. 277). As such, the implications of the present study suggest that counselor educators integrate humanism in whatever capacity possible.

It might be presented through content (e.g., readings, lectures) or through process (i.e., teaching style, experiential activities), but the humanistic foundation needs to be more fully cemented in counselor training.

Finally, the two specificities that emerged appeared to be connected to the respondents' levels of experience in the program. First semester students populated Mutual Benefit, while Responsibility consisted of students who had completed four or more semesters. It may behoove counselor educators to provide targeted support and education for students at such times in their course sequence. In particular, students who may share the specificity of Responsibility may find it helpful to learn about self-care. This specificity was placing the client's needs above those of the counselor, and these types of inappropriate boundaries can lead to burnout in counselors (Nugent & Jones, 2005).

Limitations and Future Research

The present study is limited by its person sample, which shapes the suggestions for future research on the topic. First, the findings are reflective of only two divisions of the counseling profession. There are many groups who were not included in the study but who identify as a part of the counseling profession. Future research should be more inclusive of the various specializations within the profession (e.g., career counseling, rehabilitation counseling, marriage and family counseling). Diversifying the P sample in this way might widen the discourse occurring around this concept. As such, researchers may need to reassess the concourse to include other subgroups of the counseling population. This new concourse would require a new Q sample and resultant sorting conditions.

Second, the perceptions that emerged were reflective of students in a counseling program, which may reflect the naiveté of a newcomer to a profession. These perspectives may depict a more humanist basis, which may or may not be evidenced in the field. Based on the results, it is unclear whether seasoned counselors working in the field would provide similar responses. Mellin et al.'s (2011) study solicited counselors in the field after graduating. Their results indicated that there was a greater emphasis on wellness and development. Future research may benefit from examining the perceptions embedded in a more seasoned population. There may be an element to practicing counseling that alters the perceptions of counselors over time.

Conclusion

The present study utilized graduate counseling student participants to construct and then complete a Q sort answering, "What is counseling?" The sort was administered to both mental health and school counseling students who were largely new to their fields of study. The results showed no differences in factor loadings based on counseling specialization. Notably, there was one consensus factor (i.e., shared by all participants) that emerged and two specificity factors. This suggested that regardless of differences in career trajectory, mental health and school counseling students have similar ideas about what counseling is—a humanistic profession.

References

American Counseling Association. (2010). *20/20: A vision for the future of counseling. Consensus definition of counseling.* Retrieved from http://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/20-20-a-vision-for-the-future-of-counseling/consensus-definition-of-counseling

American Counseling Association. (2012, March). *American Counseling Association conference and expo: Program guide.* Retrieved from http://www.counseling.org/Convention/2012/PG2012–FA.pdf

Bradley, R., & Cox, J. (2001). Counseling: Evolution of the profession. In D. Locke, J. Myers, & E. Herr (Eds.), *The handbook of counseling* (pp. 27-41). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Brown, S. R. (1980). *Political subjectivity: Applications of Q methodology in political science.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Brown, S. R. (1981). Intensive analysis. In D. D. Nimmo & K. R. Sanders (Eds.), *Handbook of political communication* (pp. 627-649). Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publication.

Brown, S. R. (1996). Q methodology and qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research, 6*(4), 561-567. doi:10.1177/104973239600600408

Canfield, B. S. (2008, March). The vital role of school counselors in the counseling profession. *Counseling Today. 50*(9), 5. Retrieved from http://ct.counseling.org/

D'Andrea, M., & Daniels, J. (2012). Humanism and multiculturalism. In M. B. Scholl, A. S. McGowan, & J. T. Hansen (Eds.), *Humanistic perspectives on contemporary counseling issues* (pp. 45-62). New York, NY: Routledge.

Dollarhide, C. T., & Granello, D. H. (2012). Humanistic perspectives on counselor education and supervision. In M. B. Scholl, A. S. McGowan, & J. T. Hansen (Eds.), *Humanistic perspectives on contemporary counseling issues* (pp. 277-303). New York, NY: Routledge.

Gale, A. U., & Austin, B. D. (2003). Professionalism's challenges to professional counselors' collective identity. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 81*(1), 3-10. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6678.2003.tb00219.x

Gibson, D. M., Dollarhide, C. T., & Moss, J. M. (2010). Professional identity development: A grounded theory of transformational tasks of new counselors. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 50,* 21-51. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6978.2010.tb00106.x

Gladding, S. T. (2012). *Counseling: A comprehensive profession* (7th ed.). Columbus, OH: Pearson.

Hansen, J. T. (2005). The devaluation of inner subjective experiences by the counseling profession: A plea to reclaim the essence of the profession. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *83*(4), 406-415. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6678.2005.tb00362.x

Hansen, J. T. (2007). Relational and transcendental humanism: Exploring the consequences of a thoroughly pragmatic humanism. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development, 46*(2), 131. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1939.2007.tb00031.x

Hansen, J. T. (2010). Counseling practice: In defense of passive modes of professional engagement. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education & Development*, *49*(1), 5-15. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1939.2010.tb00083.x

Hawley, L. D., & Calley, N. G. (2009). Professional identity of counseling: A template for action. *Michigan Journal of Counseling: Research, Theory, and Practice, 36*(1), 1-12.

Kaplan, D. (2012, January). Licensure reciprocity: A critical public protection issue that needs action. *Counseling Today.* Retrieved from http://ct.counseling.org/

Kaplan, D. M., & Gladding, S. T. (2011). A vision for the future of counseling: The 20/20 principles for unifying and strengthening the profession. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 89*, 367-372. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6678.2011.tb00101.x

Lah, M. I. (2001). Sentence completion test. In W. I. Dorfman & M. Hersen (Eds.), *Understanding psychological assessment* (pp. 135-144). New York, NY: Kluwer Academic.

Leahy, M. J., Rak, E., & Zanskas, S. A. (2009). A brief history of counseling specialty areas of practice. In I. Marini & M. A. Stebnicki (Eds.), *The Professional Counselor's Desk Reference* (pp. 3-14). New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co.

Locke, D. W. (2012, April). From the president: A critical time. *Counseling Today, 54*(10), 5. Retrieved from http://tinyurl.com/cayv6dh

McKeown, B., & Thomas, D. (1988). *Q methodology.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

McLaughlin, J. E., & Boettcher, K. (2009). Counselor identity: Conformity or distinction? *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling, 48*(20), 132-143. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1939.2009.tb00074.x

Mellin, E. A., Hunt, B., & Nichols, L. M. (2011). Counselor professional identity: Findings and implications for counseling and interprofessional collaboration. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 89,* 140-147. doi:1002/j.15566678.2011.tb00071.x

Myers, J. E., Clarke, P., Brown, J. B., & Champion, D. A. (2012). Wellness: Theory, research, and applications for counselors. In M. B. Scholl, A. S. McGowan, & J. T. Hansen (Eds.), *Humanistic perspectives on contemporary counseling issues* (pp. 17-44). New York, NY: Routledge.

Nugent, F. A. & Jones, K. D. (2005). *Introduction to the profession of counseling* (4th ed.). Columbus, OH: Pearson.

Ostivik-de Wilde, M., Hammes, J. P., Sharma, G., Kang, Z., & Park, D. (2012, June). A student perspective on 20/20: A vision for the future of counseling. *Counseling Today*. Retrieved from http://ct.counseling.org/2012/06/a-student-perspective-on-2020-a-vision-for-the-future-of-counseling/

Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 21*(2), 95-103. doi:10.1037//0022-006X.60.6.827

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Rollins, J. (2012, July). Creating a common language. *Counseling Today.* Retrieved from http://ct.counseling.org/2012/07/creating-a-common-language/

Schmolck, P., & Atkinson, J. (2002). *PQMethod* (Version 2.11). [Computer Software]. Retrieved from http://www.rz.unibw-muenchen.de/~p41bsmk/qmethod/

Scholl, M. B., McGowan, A. S., & Hansen, J. T. (2012). Introduction to humanistic perspectives on contemporary counseling issues. In M. B. Scholl, A. S. McGowan, & J. T. Hansen (Eds.), *Humanistic perspectives on contemporary counseling issues* (pp. 3-14). New York, NY: Routledge.

Shallcross, L. (2012, March). What the future holds for the counseling profession. *Counseling Today*. Retrieved from http://ct.counseling.org/

Shinebourne, P., & Adams, M. (2007). Q-Methodology as a phenomenological research method. *Existential Analysis, 18*(1), 103- 116.

Stephenson, W. (1953). *The study of behavior: Q technique and its methodology.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Watts, S., & Stenner, P. (2005). Doing Q methodology: Theory, method, and interpretation. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 2,* 67-91.

Yep, R. (2012, April). Why Al and Barack make sense. *Counseling Today*. Retrieved from http://ct.counseling.org/2012/04/why-al-and-barack-make-sense/

Appendix

Counselor Incomplete Sentence Blank (CISB)

Below are ten unfinished sentences related to counseling. Read the first part of the sentence provided and complete the sentence in your own words. Please try to ensure that each of the sentences reflects your own thoughts or feelings.

1. Counseling is…_____

2. I think counselors… _____

3. What makes counseling unique is…_____

4. People who are students in a counseling program…_____

5. As a counselor, I…_____

6. Counseling does…_____

7. Counseling is NOT…_____

8. I think being a counselor will be…_____

9. Typically, clients…_____

10. Counseling is all about…_____