

MINDFULNESS IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF
TRAINING AND EXPOSURE

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Mindfulness in Counselor Education: Student Perceptions of Training and Exposure

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to explore the perceptions that Master's level counseling students have regarding their exposure to mindfulness throughout their coursework and training. A mixed-method design was utilized to gather both quantitative and qualitative data using a web-based survey. The survey was sent to students enrolled in CACREP accredited Master's level counseling programs in the NCACES region. It was hypothesized that there is a lack of mindfulness training available to students in counselor education programs. A majority of participants reported being dissatisfied with the mindfulness training offered in their program. The results also indicated that students seem to be exposed to mindfulness as a self-care strategy, and lack training on how to use mindfulness therapeutically.

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DEDICATION

For my parents— thank you for encouraging me to live passionately, and for always leading
by example.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Humans have been utilizing the concepts of mindfulness to alleviate physical and psychological suffering for at least 2,500 years. It has been tied to many Eastern spiritual teachings and philosophies, particularly Buddhism; however, it is known that mindfulness practices date back even farther than the teachings of Buddha and are rooted in ancient yogic practices (Brown, Marquis, & Guiffrida, 2013). Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994), a well-known scholar who has done much work in integrating mindfulness into Western practices, defines mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (p.4). Mindfulness is a state of awareness as well as a practice that fosters awareness (Rofkahr, 2014). The goal is to become nonjudgmentally aware of both internal and external experiences that arise in the present moment, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant (Brown et al., 2013). Epstein (1995) describes this as "literally coming to one's senses" (p.144).

Throughout the past 30 years, the topic of mindfulness has become increasingly common among researchers and practitioners in the fields of counseling and psychotherapy (Brown et al., 2013). Rofkahr (2014) completed a literature search using PsycINFO and the keyword "mindfulness" to address the rapid growth of mindfulness as a topic of interest in the mental health field. The search generated ten articles in 1990 compared to 4,403 in 2014, indicating an obvious and extreme increase in popularity during that time (Rofkahr, 2014). To date, much of the research done on the use of mindfulness in the counseling profession has focused its attention on the benefits gained by practitioners who utilize mindfulness, the possible benefits gained by clients who practice mindfulness, and the impact mindfulness has on the therapeutic process.

A mindfulness practice can be quite valuable to counselors in many ways, especially as a self-care technique. Counselors and other mental health professionals are at a risk for compassion fatigue and burnout due to the intense emotional presence that therapeutic work requires (Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007). Some counseling programs are beginning to incorporate self-care and stress management education into their curriculum. Schure, Christopher, and Christopher (2008) conducted a qualitative study over four years and found that counseling students who participated in a 15-week mindfulness-based stress reduction course believed it had a meaningful effect on many areas of their lives. These students reported that the course was physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and interpersonally impactful (Schure et al., 2008). Mindfulness has also been shown to improve the mental health of graduate students in counseling programs by decreasing stress, rumination, negative affect, and both state and trait anxiety while also increasing positive affect and self-compassion (Shapiro et al., 2007). Mindfulness meditation has also been shown to promote empathy and enhance compassion, two qualities that are essential to successful therapy (Davis & Hayes, 2011).

Mindfulness-based interventions can be useful in counseling and can provide clients with many benefits. By learning about mindfulness, clients begin cultivating a present attitude of acceptance and awareness that neither seeks out pleasant experiences or avoids unpleasant ones. Mindfulness can help clients reduce the common stress-inducing reactions that they have to their own cognitions. This nonjudgmental awareness and decreased emotional reactivity is often therapeutic in and of itself (Brown et al., 2013). Mindfulness meditation has also been shown to have effects on the brain that help develop emotional regulation, enhance attentional abilities and working memory, decrease negative affect, and speed up recovery after negative experiences (Davis & Hayes, 2011).

Research has also shown that a practitioner's mindfulness practice may impact the client's perception of the counseling process. Greason and Welfare (2013) found a positive correlation between counselor mindfulness and client perceptions of common therapeutic factors such as empathy, warmth, congruence, and alliance. These factors have been shown to be an important foundation of effective therapy. Counselor mindfulness has also been positively correlated with client perceptions of counselor unconditionality, level of regard, and both counselor and client ratings of the working alliance (Greason & Welfare, 2013; Padilla, 2010). This means that a counselor's ability to cultivate mindful awareness during sessions has an impact on how positively they perceive the therapeutic relationship (Padilla, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore the perceptions that Master's level counseling students have regarding their exposure to mindfulness throughout their coursework and training. A survey was created with the intention of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data looking at the extent to which mindfulness has been incorporated into Master's level counselor education. The following hypothesis was addressed: There is a lack of mindfulness training available for students enrolled in Master's level counselor education programs. Based on this hypothesis, the following overall research question was formulated: Do students enrolled in CACREP accredited Master's level counseling programs in the North Central Association for Counselor Education and Supervision region report receiving instruction of mindfulness? To address this question more specifically, the following questions were also addressed:

1. How much exposure to mindfulness are students getting throughout their graduate coursework?

2. What perceptions do students have about the mindfulness training in their graduate program?
3. How interested are students in the concept mindfulness?
4. Do students believe mindfulness training is an important aspect of counselor education?
5. What do students perceive as important aspects of mindfulness training?
6. How do students see themselves utilizing mindfulness?

Significance of the Study

Despite the strong empirical support for the beneficial qualities that mindfulness can offer to the counseling field, little research has been done to understand whether pre-professional students in counselor education programs are being exposed to mindfulness and in what ways they are being trained to utilize it both personally and in their work with clients. Research has found that self-care courses that focus on mindfulness have been beneficial to students (Christopher, Christopher, Dunnagan, & Schure, 2006; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Newsome, Christopher, Dahlen, & Christopher, 2006; Shapiro et al., 2007; Schure et al., 2008); however, little is known about the frequency that these courses are being integrated into counselor education curriculum or how competent students feel about utilizing mindfulness in their work. This lack of attention is significant because the many advantages that mindfulness can offer to the counseling field cannot be fully capitalized on if students do not have access to developing an understanding of it. The student perspective is critical in order to gain a deeper understanding of the current extent of mindfulness exposure in counseling education programs, as well as the interest level students have in using mindfulness in their work.

Definition of Terms

The following provides a list of definitions for terms used frequently throughout the present study:

1. Mindfulness: Kabat-Zinn (1994) defined mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (p.4).
2. Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP): Specialized accreditor of Master’s and Doctoral degree programs in counseling and other related specialties. A counselor education program must “fulfill certain requirements or standards with regard to institutional settings, program mission and objectives, program content, practicum experiences, student selection and advising, faculty qualifications and workload, program governance, instructional support, and self-evaluation” in order to become accredited (Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2014).
3. Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES): A division of the American Counseling Association that is dedicated to quality education and supervision of counselors with the purpose of improving the provision of counseling services in all settings. ACES members include counselors, supervisors, graduate students, and faculty members (Association for Counselor Education & Supervision [ACES], 2015).
4. North Central Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (NCACES): A regional association of ACES, representing 13 states including Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma,

South Dakota, and Wisconsin (North Central Association for Counselor Education & Supervision [NCACES], 2013).

5. Lack of: Throughout this thesis the author refers to a lack of mindfulness education and training. In this thesis, the term “lack of” is mostly tied to the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that the participants reported regarding mindfulness education. A lack of education or training could be equated with a dissatisfaction with mindfulness education, as reported by the participants.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Mindfulness

The history of mindfulness is spread throughout the past 2,500 years and is rooted in Eastern culture and traditions (Cigolla & Brown, 2011). Mindfulness is often tied to Buddhism; but, it is thought to go back even further than that, beginning in early spiritual teachings and yogic practices (Brown et al., 2013). The word mindfulness originates from the Pali word "sati," which means having awareness, attention, and remembering (Davis & Hayes, 2011). It has also been described as having bare attention, which allows for the development of insight into the nature, psychological processes, and reality of the mind (Cigolla & Brown, 2011). Mindfulness is considered to be a state and not a trait. In simple terms, mindfulness can be thought of as "maintaining awareness of and attention on one's surroundings" (Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010, p.251). It consists of a state of open, present awareness and a nonjudgmental attitude towards one's experiences. To be mindful, a person must be aware of what is taking place around them while also noticing what they are experiencing internally, such as their emotions, cognitions, and sensations. Jon Kabat-Zinn stated that the goal of cultivating mindful awareness is to help people "live each moment of their lives-even the painful ones- as fully as possible" (Christopher & Maris, 2010). Regardless of where it originated, mindfulness is not applicable or limited to only one particular region. It is a universal concept that can be taught or learned by nearly anyone (Brown et al., 2013).

Meditation and Other Practices

Mindfulness can be cultivated through both formal and informal practices (Greason & Welfare, 2013). Informal practices include small tasks or changes in behavior that can be done on a daily basis to cultivate mindfulness. Opportunities for informal mindfulness practice are

endless (Siegel, 2010) and they can happen spontaneously throughout each day (Greason & Welfare, 2013). Informal practice involves being intentional about bringing awareness to the present moment and cultivating a nonjudgmental attitude about whatever might be happening at that time (Greason & Welfare, 2013). Examples of informal mindfulness practice include noticing the temperature of the water while washing the dishes, feeling the warmth of the sun as it shines, or listening for different sounds while driving down the road (Siegel, 2010).

Formal mindfulness practice happens when time is set aside and dedicated to cultivating mindfulness (Siegel, 2010). Formal practices include activities such as meditation and yoga (Greason & Welfare, 2013). There are many types of meditation that can be used for mindfulness practice (Siegel, 2010). Beginning mindfulness meditations are often referred to as “concentration” practices. They involve focusing on and bringing attention to the breath, and therefore the present moment, when the mind wanders. As this capacity grows, meditation practice can shift focus and become less concentrative by expanding the present-moment awareness (Greason & Welfare, 2013).

Mindfulness in Counseling Practice

Mindfulness is a fairly new concept in the counseling field. It was first introduced with dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) in the early 1990s. Dialectical behavior therapy was developed by Marsha Linehan to be used as a treatment for people with borderline personality disorder, specifically women with a history of suicidal behavior. Linehan combined concepts of cognitive-behavioral therapy with Buddhist concepts such as mindfulness, distress tolerance, acceptance, and emotional regulation when developing DBT (Valentine, Bankoff, Poulin, Reidler, & Pantalone, 2015). It became popular within the counseling field because of its effectiveness, and eventually new treatments began developing that also utilized mindfulness.

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) was developed to stop depressive symptoms and prevent relapse in clients with recurring depression. Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) combined the main ideas of mindfulness, like awareness and acceptance, with cognitive behavioral therapy (Brown et al., 2013). Another form of mindfulness is a meditation practice called mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), which was developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn (Richards et al., 2010) Over 30 years ago, Kabat-Zinn began using mindfulness training for people with chronic health conditions. The acceptance and legitimacy of mindfulness in modern healthcare is largely due to his development of an eight-week MBSR training program. Kabat-Zinn's Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts has seen over 17,000 patients and trains them on the practices of meditation, yoga, and body scan (Christopher & Maris, 2010). Through MBSR practice people begin to "notice, accept, and regulate their emotions and thoughts." MBSR has been used to alleviate psychological distress, physical pain, and emotional pain, such as stress and anxiety (Richards et al., 2010). It has also been found to be beneficial for people experiencing a wide variety of medical conditions, like heart disease, chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorders, and skin conditions (Newsome, Christopher, Dahlen, & Christopher, 2006).

DBT, MBCT, ACT, and MBSR were all created separately and are independent from one another. They were all meant for a particular client population and each approach incorporates a different theoretical orientation; however, each approach utilizes mindfulness and applies it to the counseling process. This means that mindfulness is a concept that could potentially be used by many counselors on a large number of clients with varying presenting problems (Brown et al. 2013).

Mindfulness-Oriented Psychotherapy

Germer, Siegel, and Fulton (2013) describe three ways that mindfulness can be integrated into therapeutic work. These are outlined as a practicing therapist, mindfulness-informed psychotherapy, and mindfulness-based psychotherapy. A practicing therapist or counselor practices mindfulness through either formal or informal practices in order to cultivate therapeutic presence. Therapeutic presence is thought of as “an availability and openness to all aspects of the client’s experience, openness to one’s own experience in being with the client, and the capacity to respond to the client from this experience” (Germer et al., 2013, p. 23). The goal of a practicing therapist is to utilize mindfulness personally so that it has a profound and positive effect on the counseling relationship.

Germer et al. (2013) defines mindfulness-informed psychotherapy as a “theoretical frame of reference informed by insights derived from mindfulness practice, the psychological literature on mindfulness, or Buddhist psychology” (p. 22.) Counselors who utilize mindfulness-informed psychotherapy do not necessarily teach mindfulness practices to their clients; however, they work from a theoretical standpoint that is influenced by the practice and study of mindfulness. On the other hand, mindfulness-based psychotherapy is explicitly teaching clients how to practice mindfulness and encouraging them to practice these exercises between sessions (Germer et al., 2013)

Benefits of Mindfulness-Based Interventions

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) can be quite beneficial for clients. Often, the simple practice of accepting one's experiences without judgment holds a certain therapeutic power on its own. The practice of accepting one's internal processes can be described as a "state of psychological freedom" (Martin, 1997, p.291, as cited in, Brown et al., 2013), which is often

enough for some clients to successfully cope with the issue that brought them to counseling. The usefulness of talk therapies can also be increased by incorporating MBIs. The opportunity to think and talk about unpleasant feelings, thoughts, or behaviors can facilitate significant change for clients. The use of MBIs is unique because the goal is not to change a client's feelings or beliefs, but instead to alter the relationship that the client has with those feelings and beliefs. The goal is not to change thoughts and behaviors, but to change how the client feels about them. MBIs give clients a chance to realize that their emotions and thoughts are often fleeting and separate of themselves (Brown et al., 2013).

People's reactions to their own cognitions often lead to stress, anxiety, or other negative responses. Mindfulness is a mental tool that can reduce negative reactions to particular cognitions that are often negative, as well. It differs from relaxation techniques in that the goal is not replace negative mental states with positive ones. For example, the goal is not the replace an anxious mind with a calm, relaxed mind. Instead, the ultimate goal of mindfulness is to be fully aware and accepting of whatever is being experienced, whether it is positive or negative (Newsome et al., 2006). By reducing harmful reactions to certain thoughts and emotions, a less distressed, more insightful, and more adaptive consciousness can be obtained (Brown et al., 2013). Mindfulness techniques are often used to alleviate negative symptoms; however, they can also be a source of benefits. Mindfulness has been associated with an increase in self-esteem, self-acceptance, physical activity, creativity, and problem solving (Rothaupt & Morgan, 2007).

Mindfulness has also been associated with physical and neurological benefits. It has been shown to enhance functions of the pre-frontal lobe, like insight, morality, fear regulation, and intuition. Research also indicates health benefits of meditation, including increased functioning of the immune system and decreased psychological distress. Neuroplasticity, which is the

rewiring of the brain, is another benefit of mindfulness meditation, and explains how meditation can alter the physical structure of the brain and its functioning (Davis & Hayes, 2011).

Benefits to Mental Health Practitioners

Mindfulness practices have also shown to be beneficial to the therapists who utilize them, specifically by increasing empathy and compassion, decreasing stress and anxiety, and positively effecting counseling skills. Davis and Hayes (2011) organized the benefits of mindfulness as they relate to psychotherapy into three categories, including affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal benefits. Mindfulness research indicates that meditation may "elicit positive emotions, minimize negative affect and rumination, and enable effective emotion regulation" (Davis & Hayes, 2011, p. 200). Mindfulness has also been associated with lower emotional reactivity. Meditation activates regions of the brain associated with more adaptive responses to stressful and negative situations, allowing the brain to eventually recover more quickly after being provoked. Regarding interpersonal benefits, research indicates that mindfulness predicts relationship satisfaction, amount of conflict, ability to respond to relationship stress, empathy, and ability to identify and communicate emotions with one's partner. It also seems as though mindfulness aids in the ability to express oneself in social situations, and protects from the potential negative effects of relationship conflict (David & Hayes, 2011).

Interviews with therapists who had ten or more years of mindfulness experience indicated themes that mindfulness helped therapists to communicate their felt sense of client experiences and to be more present to client suffering. Similarly, Wang (2007) found that therapists who meditate scored higher on self-report empathy measure than therapists who did not meditate. Mindfulness has been found to increase self-compassion, as well. Non-judging and non-reacting are two aspects of mindfulness found to be strongly correlated with self-compassion. Studies of

counselors in training who have exposure to mindfulness interventions suggest that such interventions can reduce stress and anxiety while also fostering emotional intelligence and connectedness (Wang, 2007).

Impact of Mindfulness on Treatment Outcomes

While it is evident that mindfulness has positive implications for counselors and counseling students, the research is mixed on how mindfulness impacts counseling outcomes. A study conducted in Germany found evidence that counselor meditation practice led to greater reduction in client symptoms and faster rates of client change. Clients of counselors who meditated also perceived their treatment as more effective and scored higher on well-being measures than clients whose counselors did not have a meditation practice (Davis & Hayes, 2011). Greason and Welfare (2013) found a positive correlation between counselor mindfulness and client perceptions of common therapeutic factors, such as empathy and unconditionality. They also found that counselors who had adopted a regular meditation practice were rated higher by clients on measures of empathy, congruence, unconditionality, and level of regard. Similarly, Padilla (2010) found a positive relationship between trait mindfulness and treatment outcomes. Mindfulness qualities were also positively correlated with ratings of working alliance by both counselor and client (Padilla, 2010).

Despite these positive findings, other research outcomes have found differing results. A study conducted by Stanley, Reitzel, Wingate, Cukrowicz, Lima, and Joiner (2006) examined the relationship between therapist mindfulness and treatment outcomes. One hundred forty-four clients received therapeutic services from 23 therapists who were all doctoral students enrolled in a clinical psychology program at Florida State University. The measures used included the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), Clinical Global Impressions (CGI), and Global

Assessment of Functioning (GAF) scores. The results showed an inverse correlation between therapist mindfulness and treatment outcomes, and greater therapist mindfulness predicted lower client GAF scores (Stanley et al., 2006). This finding is consistent with other research that also suggests a negative correlation between therapist mindfulness and treatment outcomes; however, it is important to note that the outcome differences in this research may be due to the difference between measuring mindfulness in general and meditation practice. It may be that meditation practices are a better predictor of treatment outcomes than self-reported mindfulness alone (David & Hayes, 2011).

Mindfulness in Counselor Education and Training

Research indicates that introducing mindfulness to counselors in training may contribute to effectiveness, development of important counseling skills, and improvements in mental health (Campbell & Christopher, 2012). Research done on 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction programs for counselors in training highlights that these programs have been associated with decreases in perceived stress and anxiety, rumination, and negative affect. They have also been associated with increases in self-compassion, emotional regulation, and positive affect (Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007). Students have also reported becoming more confident with their bodies and more sensitive to physical changes and sensations associated with stress (Christopher & Maris, 2010).

Further research has been done examining the implications of a semester long mindfulness-based course for Masters-level counseling students. The course, called “Mind-Body Medicine and the Art of Self-Care” was designed by John Chambers Christopher in 1999. Christopher based the course off of MBSR with the intention of providing students with practical self-care tools while also familiarizing them with mindfulness practices and their relevance in the

counseling field. Schure, Christopher, & Christopher (2008) conducted a study that examined the use of mindfulness by counseling students who were enrolled in the above mentioned course. The participants included 33 first and second year students in mental health, school, or marriage and family counseling Master's programs. Data was collected from participants over a period of four years. The course took place twice a week for 75 minutes and focused on mindfulness practices, such as yoga, meditation, and qigong. The students were also required to practice outside of class time for at least 45 minutes, four times a week. Throughout the course, the students completed a journal in which they reflected on their experiences. For their final journal entry, the students were assigned four questions to answer in writing. The questions were meant to address what practice each student found to be most useful, how the course impacted each student personally and professionally, and how the students could integrate what they learned into their professional work. The data was analyzed and conclusions were drawn based on the students' answers (Schure et al., 2008).

The researchers concluded that the course provided the students with "meaningful effects on physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and interpersonal aspects of their lives" (Schure et al., 2008, p.53). Many students indicated that the course had an overall positive outcome for them individually. Students reported progress in dealing with negative emotions, an increased sense of direction in life, a greater understanding of their bodies, and a greater comfort level and increased ability to focus with clients during sessions. A similar study by Christopher, Christopher, Dunnagan, and Schure (2006) found that students expressed finding many of the same results after taking the mindfulness-based course, including obtaining a greater awareness of their clients and increased ability to deal with stress both mentally and emotionally. Students

also expressed an increase in their ability to stay present and focused as well as an increase in their ability to manage and deal with every day stress (Christopher et al., 2006).

In a summary of their research on this course, Campbell and Christopher (2012) indicated that two themes have emerged throughout these studies on student perceptions of “Mind-Body Medicine and the Art of Self-Care.” These themes include both an increase in awareness of and acceptance of self and others. Students also report an ability to respond less reactively to the therapeutic process and an increased ability to elicit genuine therapeutic experiences (Campbell & Christopher, 2012).

Mindfulness as Self-Care

Mental health professionals are at risk for compassion fatigue, vicarious traumatization, and burnout. Burnout is a term used to describe the physical and emotional exhaustion that mental health professionals are susceptible to (Christopher et al., 2006); and, it is commonly noted as a major consequence of chronic stress in the workplace (Schure et al., 2008). This overwhelming amount of stress can result in serious consequences for practitioners and clients (Christopher et al., 2006). Possible negative consequences include increased depression and anxiety, emotional exhaustion, psychosocial isolation, reduced self-esteem, reduced job satisfaction, disrupted interpersonal relationships, and loneliness. Burnout can also negatively impact a professional’s concentration, attention, and decision-making skills, thus reducing the ability to establish healthy relationships with clients (Shapiro et al., 2007). Because mental health professionals are at a high risk for experiencing chronic stress at work, cultivating appropriate self-care practices is important (Schure et al., 2008). Christopher et al. (2006) defined self-care practices as “self-initiated behaviors that promote good health and well-being.”

While many counseling students are aware of the importance of self-care, few counselor in training programs offer specific courses on self-care and stress management. Mindfulness can be used as a self-care tool for students and professionals in the mental health field. MSBR programs have been shown to increase counseling students' mental health by decreasing stress, negative affect, anxiety, and rumination while also increasing positive affect and self-compassion (Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007). Mindfulness has also been linked to counselor self-efficacy, which can be defined as "one's beliefs or judgments about his or her capabilities to effectively counsel a client in the near future" (Larson & Daniels, 1998, p.180, as cited in, Greason & Cashwell, 2009, p.3).

Summary

Chapter two reviewed the literature on mindfulness and the counseling profession, including counselor education. Areas that were reviewed included a mindfulness definition, mindfulness in the counseling practice, the benefits of mindfulness-based interventions for counselors and on treatment outcomes, and mindfulness in counselor education. The literature shows that mindfulness can have a positive impact on counselors, counseling students, and the counseling process; yet, there is a lack of research regarding the degree to which mindfulness is being incorporated into counselor education and training. This gap in the research relates to the overall research question that was formulated: Do students enrolled in CACREP accredited Master's level counseling programs in the North Central Association for Counselor Education and Supervision region report receiving instruction of mindfulness? The lack of attention in this area is significant because the potentially insufficient mindfulness training for counseling students prevents the counseling profession and its clients from fully experiencing the benefits that mindfulness has been shown to offer.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The present study utilized a mixed method design to gather both quantitative and qualitative data using a web-based survey. The purpose of this study was to gather student perceptions of mindfulness instruction in counselor education. The researcher was interested to find whether or not mindfulness is being incorporated into counselor education curriculum; and if so, the ways in which students are learning about it. The study also aimed to identify the general interest level that students have in the topic of mindfulness. The researcher hypothesized that the students would report a lack of mindfulness education and training incorporated into their counseling education courses. A web-based survey was sent to students enrolled in CACREP accredited Master's level counseling programs in the NCACES region in order to obtain this information. In the following sections the author discuss the methodology of this study, including research questions, sampling procedures, research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

Research Questions

The overall research question addressed in the present study was as follows: Do students enrolled in CACREP accredited Master's level counseling programs in the North Central Association for Counselor Education and Supervision region report receiving instruction of mindfulness? To address this overall question more specifically, the following questions were also addressed:

1. How much exposure to mindfulness are students getting throughout their graduate coursework?
2. What perceptions do students have about the mindfulness training in their graduate program?
3. How interested are students in the concept mindfulness?

4. Do students believe mindfulness training is an important aspect of counselor education?
5. What do students perceive as important aspects of mindfulness training?
6. How do students see themselves utilizing mindfulness?

Sampling Procedures

The participants selected for this study included Master's level students who were enrolled in a CACREP accredited counseling program in the NCACES region. NCACES is a regional association of ACES and represents the thirteen states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Programs in the NCACES region were chosen in order to sample a specific region of the country that has already been identified by a counseling association. It was also the most convenient to sample one region because of the time-frame of this research study. Accredited programs in this region were identified using the directory tool on the CACREP website. A total of 76 CACREP accredited counseling programs were identified in the NCACES region.

The participants were recruited through e-mail; however the students were not contacted directly by the researcher. An initial contact person was selected from each of the 76 counseling programs. This person was affiliated with the program in some way, whether a program director, faculty, or staff. An e-mail was sent to each contact person inviting their students to participate in the study and included a hyperlink to the survey. Each contact person was asked to forward the e-mail to the counseling students enrolled in the respective programs. A total of three e-mails were sent, including an initial e-mail and two follow-up e-mails. See Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix C for survey, informed consent, and recruitment letter documents, respectively.

Research Design

The present study utilized a mixed methods research design, which has been defined as "the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.17). Mixed methods research uses multiple approaches of collecting and analyzing data in an attempt to better understand and answer research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The integration of both quantitative and qualitative research took place at the data collection stage of the present study. The survey created for this study included a majority of quantitative items and concluded with four open-ended questions, thus classifying it more specifically as a concurrent nested design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

A concurrent nested design consists of a predominant method of data collection with the other method embedded within and to a lesser degree. The purpose of using a concurrent nested design in the present study was to gain a broader perspective and collect information that could not be gathered through quantitative measures alone. Four open-ended questions were included at the end of the survey to deepen the understanding of the quantitative data and address research questions that could not be answered with quantitative data. There are both advantages and disadvantages to utilizing this type of research design. Advantages include the ability to collect both quantitative and qualitative data during one phase of data collection, while also gaining a broader perspective during data analysis. Disadvantages include a lack of guidance and advice on how to resolve discrepancies between the two different types of data and having unequal evidence when interpreting the results (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Instrumentation

A web-based survey was utilized to collect data. The popularity of web-based surveying grew as the internet became accessible to more people. Prior to the use of web-based surveys, many people were utilizing e-mail surveys. The difference between the two is that web-based surveys use Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) forms, which streamline the data collection process by entering and formatting the collected data into a database (Solomon, 2001). Solomon (2001) suggested the use of e-mail to send a cover letter and the web-based survey hyperlink simultaneously as an especially efficient and effective approach (Solomon, 2001). This was the strategy that was utilized in the present study.

Research has identified both advantages and disadvantages of using web-based surveys. One advantage is that web-based surveys can save time because they allow researchers to collect large amounts of data in a relatively short amount of time (Wright, 2006). Similarly, web-based surveys can be created and made accessible in a matter of days and access to the results is immediate, which saves time on data entry while also reducing human error (Fleming & Bowden, 2009). Another advantage of web-based surveys is that they can save money by reducing the cost otherwise needed for paper, printing, mailing, and data entry (Wright, 2006). Lower cost also enables larger sample sizes to be targeted (Fleming & Bowden, 2009), thus allowing access to individuals and groups of people that may otherwise be difficult to survey (Wright, 2006).

There are also disadvantages to using web-based surveys. Many sampling issues arise because little can be known about the characteristics of people who participate in web-based survey research (Wright, 2006). Another disadvantage is sample frame, which is the exclusion of individuals who do not have access to the internet from participating in web-based research.

Non-response bias is also an issue that arises when utilizing web-based surveys (Fleming & Bowden, 2009). Non-response bias is problematic because regardless of the sample being surveyed, there will be some individuals who are more likely to respond based on differing attitudes and characteristics of the participants. This tendency leads to a systemic bias (Wright, 2009).

Instrument Development

The survey used in this study, titled Mindfulness in Counselor Education, was created by the researcher. A new survey was created because of a lack of existing surveys that address the overall topic that the present study was examining. The overall goal considered while creating this survey was to gather information that would elucidate the perception that Master's level counseling students have regarding the instruction of mindfulness in their graduate programs. The survey consisted of 19 questions in total, including both quantitative and qualitative items. Three of the items aimed to gather demographic information and consisted of short-answer and multiple choice questions. The remaining 16 survey items included three multiple-choice questions, nine Likert scale questions, and four open-ended questions.

Likert scales were included in the survey because of the researcher's desire to identify students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the mindfulness training in their graduate programs. The Likert scale format offers a simple and versatile method for gauging specific opinions (Johns, 2010). The survey included both five and 10-point Likert scales. Five-point scales were utilized to determine the participants' level of agreement or disagreement with seven different statements. A neutral midpoint was offered as an option for these statements so as to avoid forcing participants to express agreement or disagreement if they lacked such a clear opinion, and therefore risk the quality of the data (Johns, 2010). Another consideration of offering a

neutral midpoint was the possibility that some participants had been enrolled for less than a year, thus not yet having taken many graduate courses. This might prevent them from having a clear perspective on mindfulness in their graduate program. Two survey questions offered 10-point Likert scales with the intention of gathering data regarding participant ratings of their level of interest in and understanding of mindfulness.

A review process was utilized to account for both face and content validity. Once the first survey draft was complete, it was reviewed by six students who are currently enrolled in a Master's-level counseling program. These students provided the researcher with feedback and suggestions regarding survey design and question content. Changes were then made to the survey. The second survey draft was reviewed by three counselor education professors who have knowledge of mindfulness and research experience. Two other trained research professionals reviewed the second draft, as well. Further changes were made to the survey using their feedback, and a final draft was completed.

The final survey was sent to the Group Decision Center at North Dakota State University. The Group Decision Center created a web-based version of the survey using Qualtrics, which is widely used web-based data collection and analysis software. The researcher had access to Qualtrics and was able to view, edit, and organize the survey using that software.

Data Collection

The first step of data collection was to receive approval through North Dakota State University's Institutional Review Board. Once approval was granted, an e-mail was sent to each of the program contact persons. The e-mail contained a recruitment letter that explained informed consent and invited them to participate by forwarding the survey hyperlink to the students enrolled in their program; so, potential participants were recruited via e-mail and given

access to a hyperlink that would direct them to the survey. An incentive was also offered to those willing to participate in the study. Upon completion of the survey, each participant had the opportunity to enter their e-mail address into a separate database for inclusion in a drawing to win one of three 25 dollar gift cards to Amazon.com. The incentive was provided by the researcher.

A total of three e-mails were sent to the contact person of each program. The initial e-mail was sent on June 5th, 2015 containing a recruitment letter that briefly explained the purpose of the present study. The recruitment letter also invited each person to assist with the research by forwarding the e-mail to the students enrolled in their counseling program. Potential participants had access to the survey through a hyperlink that was also included in the e-mail. Two follow-up e-mails were sent on June 14th, 2015 and June 19th, 2015. These e-mails contained the same information as the initial recruitment letter along with a reminder to forward the e-mail to the potential research participants. The survey was open from June 5th, 2015 through June 23rd, 2015 and therefore available for a total of 18 days.

Data Analysis

In this section the author discusses the data analysis procedures that were utilized for both the quantitative and qualitative data that was collected using the web-based survey and Qualtrics software.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data that was reported in the survey was collected through Qualtrics and returned in coded format. Nonparametric measures were used to analyze the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics were utilized to organize the data in a meaningful way, by presenting data

sets in simple tables and summarizing the results using means, frequencies, and percentages (Gravetter & Forzano, 2016).

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data that was reported in the survey was also collected through Qualtrics and returned in coded format. Qualitative data was reviewed using thematic analysis, which is a method of identifying and reporting themes within qualitative data. It involves searching across a data set, or in this case the comments received for the open-ended questions within the survey, to identify repeated, meaningful patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined six phases of thematic analysis that were followed during the analysis of the qualitative data collected in the present study. First, the researcher became familiar with the data through immersion. Immersion involves “repeated reading of the data...in an active way—searching for meanings, patterns, and so on” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87). The researcher thoroughly read each qualitative data set at least two times entirely without taking any notes. Next, initial codes were generated through a process of taking notes and using highlighters to identify interesting features and patterns of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interesting phrases, repetitive wording, and patterns were written down as notes in the margins alongside the participant comments. During phase three of thematic analysis, the initial codes were sorted into potential themes using a thematic map. This process required the researcher to re-focus the analysis on broader, potential themes that could be generated from the initial codes.

Phase four included review and refinement of the themes that were generated, during which the researcher re-read the entire data set to determine the accuracy and relevancy of each theme. The accuracy and relevancy of a theme was determined by how clear and noticeable it was when reading through participant comments. If the comments did not seem to support a

potential theme, the researcher re-analyzed the thematic map to determine whether certain themes could be combined or re-worked to better reflect the participant comments. A final thematic map was created at this point that reflected the most meaningful and accurate themes of the data set. Lastly, clear definitions and names were generated for each theme and outlined in writing, including data extracts that demonstrate the prevalence of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Peer debriefing was integrated into the qualitative research process to strengthen the study's credibility. Hays and Singh (2012) define peer debriefing as "a reflexive technique whereby research team members serve as a mirror, reflecting the investigator's responses to the research process...serving as devil's advocates, proposing alternative interpretations to those of the investigator" (p. 151). This process challenges researchers to provide accountability by recognizing and understanding the influence that they have on the interpretation of the data. The purpose of peer debriefing is to better understand the influence that the researcher has on the study as a whole (Hays & Singh, 2012). Peer debriefing was utilized in the present study after the researcher had defined and explained the themes that were initially identified in the qualitative data. A second member of the research team who has had previous experience with qualitative data analysis examined the initial themes and read through the participant comments to determine whether the themes were reflective of each data set. Comments and suggestions were then provided and both researchers had a discussion about any of the discrepancies that arose throughout this process.

Summary

The present study utilized a mixed-methods design to examine student perceptions of mindfulness in counselor education. The researcher created a survey and sent it to 76 CACREP

accredited counselor education programs located in the NCACES region. Data collection took place over a period of 18 days. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data. The author will discuss the results of the data analysis in chapter four.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The present mixed-methods study gathered data regarding Master's level counseling students' perceptions of exposure to and training of mindfulness throughout their graduate programs. A web-based survey was e-mailed to 76 different CACREP accredited counselor education programs at a school located in the NCACES region. Data from a total of 131 surveys was included in the final data set. In the following sections the author will discuss the results of the study, including participant demographic information and both the quantitative and qualitative results as they apply to each research question.

Demographic Information

The participants in this study consisted of 131 Master's level students enrolled in a CACREP accredited counseling program at a school located in the NCACES region. Of the 131 participants, 99 were female, 8 were male, and 24 chose not to disclose their gender. A majority of the participants were enrolled in mental health counseling and school counseling programs, and a small percentage were completing degrees in student affairs, marriage, couple, and family counseling, addictions counseling, or community counseling. Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of the types of degrees that participants were completing. Participants were allowed to select more than one option to account for students completing dual programs, so the total number of responses is greater than 131 and the total percentage is greater than 100.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Types of Degrees Being Completed

Degree	Frequency of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Mental Health Counseling	75	57
School Counseling	50	38
Marriage, Couple, & Family Counseling	8	6
Student Affairs	7	5
Other	6	5
Community Counseling	5	4
Addictions Counseling	2	2
Total	153	117

Table 1 indicates that most of the participants were enrolled in a mental health or school counseling program. Other degrees that participants indicated completing were rehabilitation counseling and family counseling.

The average length of time that the participants had been enrolled in a graduate program was 2.44 years. Table 2 illustrates how long each participant had been enrolled in a counseling graduate program at the time they took the survey.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of Years Enrolled in a Counseling Graduate Program

Number of Years	Frequency of Responses	Percentage of Responses
less than 1 year	22	17
1-2 years	50	38
2-3 years	46	35
3-4 years	8	6
4-5 years	2	2
5+ years	3	2
Total	131	100

Table 2 shows that most of the participants had been enrolled as a graduate counseling student from anywhere between one to three years. Many students had also been enrolled for less than a year at the time of the survey.

Research Questions and Results

The following will discuss the quantitative and qualitative research results of the present study. The survey data that was collected will be discussed and examined in relation to each of the six research questions that were generated during the beginning phases of this study. The research questions include the following:

1. How much exposure to mindfulness are students getting throughout their graduate coursework?
2. What perceptions do students have about the mindfulness training in their graduate program?
3. How interested are students in the concept mindfulness?
4. Do students believe mindfulness training is an important aspect of counselor education?
5. What do students perceive as important aspects of mindfulness training?
6. How do students see themselves utilizing mindfulness?

Quantitative Research Results

Research question 1. The first question in the present study was, “How much exposure to mindfulness are students getting throughout their graduate coursework?” Survey questions four, five, and six corresponded to this research question. Survey question four asked, “Have you taken a graduate course in your current program that specifically focused on mindfulness concepts?” A total of 130 participants answered this survey question. Of the 130 participants, 118 responded no and 12 responded yes, indicating that 91 percent of the participants had not taken a course that directly focused on mindfulness.

Survey question five asked, “In how many of your current graduate courses has mindfulness been explained, discussed, or addressed in some way?” The results showed that students have discussed or been exposed to mindfulness in an average of three courses throughout their graduate coursework. Table 3 illustrates the number of courses that each participant has taken that addressed mindfulness in some way.

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of the Number of Graduate Courses That Have Addressed Mindfulness

Number of Courses	Frequency of Responses	Percentage of Responses
0	32	24
1	25	19
2	25	19
3	28	21
4	8	6
5+	14	10
Total	131	100

Table 3 shows that the majority of students reported not having discussed mindfulness in any of their courses thus far. The students who reported having taken at least one course that addressed mindfulness were then asked to list the courses and briefly explain what they learned. A total of 79 participants answered this question, and many of them reported having discussed mindfulness during a course on counseling theories. Other courses that participants frequently reported discussing mindfulness include counseling skills or techniques, group counseling, and trauma in counseling. Many participants also reported discussing mindfulness during practicum and internship courses, either with fellow classmates or with their supervisor. Participants

indicated that mindfulness practices were encouraged as self-care and many participants reported having done an in-class mindfulness activity, such as meditation.

To assess the students' perception of their understanding of mindfulness, survey question six asked, "On a scale of 1 to 10, where would you rate your current understanding of mindfulness?" On a ten-point Likert scale ranging from "extremely low understanding," to "moderate," to "extremely high understanding," 39 percent of responses ranged from extremely low understanding to moderate understanding, while 61 percent of responses ranged from moderate understanding to extremely high understanding. There were a total of 112 responses to the survey question that corresponded with this research question, and the average level of understanding reported was 6.17 on the ten-point Likert scale.

Research question 2. The second question in the present study was, "What perceptions do students have about the mindfulness training in their graduate program?" Survey questions nine, ten, eleven, thirteen, and fourteen corresponded to this research question. To assess this question, participants were asked to respond to five five-point Likert-scale items indicating the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. Table 4 illustrates the participant responses to the six items by percentages.

Table 4

Percentages of Participants who Agreed or Disagreed with Each Statement

Statement	Strongly Disagree & Disagree Responses	Neutral Responses	Strongly Agree & Agree Responses	Total Number of Responses
I am satisfied with the mindfulness training that has been offered throughout my graduate coursework.	55.89	25.49	18.63	102
In order to utilize mindfulness either personally or professionally, I would need to pursue additional training outside of graduate coursework.	18.10	10.48	71.43	105
My graduate coursework adequately prepared me to utilize mindfulness as a therapeutic intervention with clients.	39.64	30.63	29.73	111
I would feel competent educating clients about how to cultivate a mindfulness practice.	32.43	24.32	43.24	111
My graduate coursework educated me about the ways mindfulness practices can be utilized as self-care.	27.93	27.03	45.05	111

Table 4 shows that about 56 percent of the participants were unsatisfied with the mindfulness training offered throughout their graduate coursework at the time they took the survey and about 71 percent of participants believed they would need to pursue additional mindfulness training outside of their graduate coursework in order to utilize mindfulness either personally or professionally. Additionally, about 40 percent of participants reported believing that their graduate coursework did not adequately educate them on how to utilize mindfulness as

a therapeutic intervention with clients. Table 4 also shows that about 45 percent of participants reported believing that their graduate coursework adequately educated them about how to utilize mindfulness practices as self-care, and about 43 percent of participants reported feeling competent educating clients about mindfulness practices.

Research question 3. The third research question in the present study was, “How interested are students in the concept of mindfulness?” Survey questions seven, eight, twelve, and fifteen corresponded to this research question. Survey question seven asked, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how interested are you in the concept of mindfulness?” On a ten-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all interested,” to “neutral,” to “extremely interested,” 18 percent of the responses ranged from not at all interested to neutral, while the other 82 percent of the responses ranged from neutral to extremely interested. Of the 112 participants who completed the survey question seven, 30 percent reported being extremely interested in the concept of mindfulness. The average interest level reported was 7.81 on the ten-point scale.

Survey question eight asked, “Do you incorporate mindfulness practices into your self-care routine?” A total of 112 participants answered the survey question that corresponded to this research question. Of the 112 participants, 66 answered yes and 46 answered no, indicating that 59 percent of participants incorporate some sort of mindfulness practices into their self-care routine. The participants were asked to briefly explain their mindfulness practice. Of the 66 participants who completed the question, many of them reported practicing mindfulness through meditation, yoga, deep breathing, and mindful walking. Many participants also reported using mindfulness to increase their present moment awareness.

For survey questions 12 and 15, the participants were asked to respond to a five-point Likert-scale item indicating the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement.

Table 5 illustrates the participant responses to the two items by percentages.

Table 5

Percentages of Participants who Agreed or Disagreed with Each Statement

Statement	Strongly Disagree & Disagree Responses	Neutral Responses	Strongly Agree & Agree Responses	Total Number of Responses
I incorporate mindfulness practices into my self-care routine.	25.68	17.43	56.88	109
I am aware of where to find useful resources for mindfulness information.	29.52	20.95	49.53	105

Table 5 shows that about 57 percent of participants incorporate mindfulness practices into their self-care routine. This finding is consistent with the results from survey question eight.

Table 4 also illustrated that approximately 50 percent of participants have an awareness of where to find resources on mindfulness, indicating that perhaps participants have been given resources or have done their own research on where to find mindfulness resources.

Qualitative Research Results

Next, the remaining three research questions will be discussed. Each of these research questions corresponded to open-ended survey questions. Qualitative data was collected for the open-ended questions and analyzed using the method of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), which was outlined in chapter three. The researcher believed it was necessary that open-ended questions were included in order to gather qualitative data that would add to and

further explain the quantitative research results. The author has almost completed a Master's degree in counseling and became interested in the topic of mindfulness during her time in graduate school. Based on her own experiences, she expected the results to indicate that there is a lack of in-depth mindfulness training available to counseling students. The researcher was interested in knowing what counseling students think about the mindfulness exposure and training that has been available to them. She believed it was important to gain a better understanding of the student perspective in regards to what they know and would like to learn about mindfulness, and therefore felt it was necessary to include qualitative research questions in the present study.

An important aspect of qualitative data analysis is researcher reflexivity, which is “the active self-reflection of an investigator in the research process” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p.137). Reflexivity acts as a lens into the research process by allowing the audience to grasp an understanding of the researcher's thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the data (Hays & Singh, 2012); therefore, a reflexive statement has been outlined above. In the following sections, the themes that were identified for each survey question are outlined and discussed in regards to the research questions.

Research question 4. The fourth research question asked in the present study was, “Do students perceive mindfulness training as an important aspect of counselor education?” A total of 102 participants responded to the survey question that corresponded to this research question. A majority of the data supported mindfulness as an important aspect of counselor education. Three themes were identified in this data, including (a) mindfulness offers self-care practices for counselors and clients; (b) it is important that counselors have the ability to educate clients about

mindfulness practices; (c) mindfulness fosters present-moment awareness. The following will discuss each theme and include examples from the data set.

Self-care practices. Many participants believed that mindfulness is an important aspect of counselor training because it offers self-care practices that both counselors and clients can benefit from. One participant expressed the following:

It is imperative that counselors have a clear understanding of mindfulness to help their clients, as well as themselves. Mindfulness can assist counselors in alleviating burnout and provide clients with additional ways to relieve symptoms that caused them to seek counseling.

Other participants stated that mindfulness is “a great tool that can be utilized for clients and counselors alike” and “a beneficial technique to teach clients and also a great self-care tool.” Several participants pointed out that mindfulness practices are simple and accessible, stating that mindfulness “offers realistic and simple techniques we can teach clients in as few as one session” and “all individuals can benefit from mindfulness in some way.” One participant expressed the following:

A very common reason people seek therapy is because they are stressed about events in their past or events coming in their future. I feel that mindfulness is such a simple, accessible, and useful skill to implement in dealing with these stressors.

Counselor ability to educate clients. Many participants expressed a belief that counselors should have the ability to educate clients on the topic of mindfulness and be able to teach clients mindfulness practices. One participant noted that, “Many clients find mindfulness useful and ask for resources. Counselors should at least be able to briefly explain it and provide resources to clients, even if they do not like using it themselves.” Regarding the increasing popularity of

mindfulness, participants stated that “it seems to be a trendy concept lately and clients may request mindfulness concepts be incorporated into therapy” and “I think we should be trained in it because it is something clients may want.”

Present-moment awareness. The third theme identified in support of mindfulness in counselor education was that mindfulness fosters present-moment awareness. Many participants expressed that the ability to remain in the present moment was a crucial aspect of counseling, stating that “being focused and in the present moment is essential to hearing what the client is saying or not saying and is imperative in being able to address the energy in the room” and “mindfulness is a helpful tactic of reminding us to meet the client where they are and be in the present moment.”

Some participants also expressed that present-moment awareness was helpful in fostering positive therapeutic relationships. One participant stated that mindfulness “can be beneficial for enhancing the therapeutic relationship because listening well requires mindfulness.” Another participant stated, “Mindfulness helps counselors tap into the present, giving them stronger attention skills and developing a stronger therapeutic presence. This, in turn, helps the therapeutic relationship and promotes positive outcomes for clients.”

A small number of participants indicated that they were unsure or did not believe mindfulness was an important aspect of counselor education. Some of the reasons given for this perspective included, “No, I didn’t enjoy the experiences,” “I really have not experienced any value in mindfulness,” “Because I’m not fully aware of the benefits of mindfulness, I’m not sure how important I think it is,” and “It may be, but I need more information on how to utilize it in counseling.” One participant expressed the following:

I believe it could be because there is a growing body of information on the subject and there is an increase interest around it in the general population. But as of right now, from the lack of information given to us about it, I don't believe it is.

Research question 5. The fifth research question asked in the present study was, “What do students perceive as important aspects of mindfulness training?” Survey questions 17 and 18 corresponded to this research question. Survey question 17 asked, “Describe the mindfulness training you have had outside of your graduate coursework, if any. What about it was most helpful?” A total of 95 participants responded to this question, of which 51 had experienced some sort of mindfulness training. Two themes were identified regarding the types of training that participants reported, including (a) individual reading and research; (b) cultivation of personal meditation and yoga practice. The following will discuss each theme and include examples from the data set.

Individual research. Many participants expressed having done their own research to gather information about mindfulness, whether from reading books, handouts, and journal articles, conducting undergraduate research, watching online videos, or listening to podcasts. Some of the participant comments included, “My knowledge has exclusively come from my own research and desire to learn more about mindfulness,” “A lot of things I know about mindfulness were researched on my own,” “I conducted research on mindfulness during my undergraduate degree and participated in the meditations,” and “I have downloaded a book on meditation that has audio links for guided meditations.”

Personal practice. Many participants reported having gained knowledge and training of mindfulness through the cultivation of their own mindfulness practices, such as meditation and yoga. One participant stated, “I have participated in yoga and meditation training as a student at a

yoga studio,” and another commented, “I have incorporated meditation into my daily practice for the last five years. I am self-taught.” Another participant stated the following:

I have not had any training in mindfulness outside of my coursework, but I have experienced it through weekly yoga classes where the teacher walks the class through recognizing, processing, and releasing the negative energy we carry around with us.

One theme was identified regarding the aspects of the training that participants found to be helpful. This theme can be identified as personal growth and development. Of the participants who explained what they found to be most helpful from the training or exposure they had had, many of them described things that led to their own personal growth. One participant listed “learning about how it has benefitted my own mental health” as being most helpful. In regards to what they found helpful, other participant comments included, “Feeling a connection to the world around me,” and “Dispelling the myths or misconceptions I had about meditation.”

Survey question 18 asked, “If you were to receive mindfulness training in the future, what information would you like to be included?” A total of 90 participants responded to the survey question. Three themes were identified in this data, including (a) basic overview of mindfulness concepts; (b) information about mindfulness practices; (c) application of mindfulness to the counseling process. The following will discuss each theme and include examples from the data set. The following will discuss each theme and include examples from the data set.

Basic overview. One major theme identified was basic and general information about the topic of mindfulness, including a definition, benefits of using it, and research on outcomes. Regarding the information they would like to be included in future mindfulness training, participant comments included, “A real definition of the word,” “What is really is and how it can

be beneficial,” “Key concepts,” “Why it is helpful, how to do it, when to do it,” “I’d like to know about the theoretical basis behind it,” “Any relevant research on the topic,” “The positive outcomes of the intervention,” and “I would like to see empirical evidence that it is beneficial to those who use it.”

Mindfulness practices. Participants reported that they also desired information regarding mindfulness practices and activities. Many comments indicated that participants would like to have more information about how to utilize mindfulness practices as self-care. One participant stated, “I would like to learn more about how mindfulness can be utilized as self-care” while another commented, “I believe it would be helpful to include specific methods for integrating the practice as a means of self-care.” Regarding what they would like included in future training, other participants commented, “Various types of mindfulness activities to increase mindful awareness,” “More activities for practicing mindfulness,” and “How to utilize it in a self-care capacity.”

Several participants indicated that they would like to have more experiential opportunities in future mindfulness training. One participant expressed, “I’d like to experience multiple mindfulness exercises in order to better understand them.” Similar comments from participants who indicated a desire for experiential opportunities included, “practice sessions” and “specific examples and practice in action.”

Application in the counseling process. The last theme identified regarding the information that students would like to gather from future mindfulness training included a desire to understand how to apply mindfulness to the counseling process. One participant stated, “I would like it to include specific ways we could incorporate mindfulness in our counseling sessions” and another participant commented, “Most importantly, how I can use it as a future

therapist in order to benefit my clients.” Another participant indicated a desire to learn “more ways to perform it and ways to use it in counseling sessions.”

Many participants indicated that they would like information about how to teach mindfulness concepts to clients. Participant comments included, “Specific direction on how to effectively teach it to a client in session,” “I want to learn how to teach others about mindfulness,” “Different strategies for teaching clients how to do it outside of session,” and “I would like to focus on how to help others properly use mindfulness techniques.” Some participants also expressed a desire for practical examples or experiential opportunities to learn more about how to utilize mindfulness in counseling sessions. Regarding future training, one participant expressed a desire for “practical components—such as sessions to practice mindfulness, demonstrations of how we might lead this with clients, and practice doing so.” Other participants requested “seeing examples of it being used and practice using it on myself as well as with clients” and “examples and videos would be helpful along with role-playing.”

Research question 6. The sixth and final research question asked in the present study was, “How do students envision themselves utilizing mindfulness?” Survey question 19 corresponded to this research question and asked, “How do you see yourself incorporating mindfulness into your professional and personal lives?” A total of 89 participants responded to the survey question that corresponded to this research question. Three themes were identified in this data, including (a) personally as a self-care practice; (b) professionally by educating clients about mindfulness; (c) as a strategy to live in the moment.

Self-care practice. Many participants indicated that they would continue to utilize mindfulness practices as self-care, while others indicated a desire to begin implementing these practices. One participant stated, “I already use it personally through meditation, yoga, and self-

talk” while another participant commented, “I could see myself using it as a personal self-care activity.” Other participant comments included, “I currently incorporate mindfulness into my personal life through daily practices,” “I would first like to incorporate it into my own life so that I could speak from experience within my counseling work,” “Using mindfulness as an opportunity to breathe and regroup,” “possibly meditating as a part of self-care,” and “Teach myself more about the practice of mindfulness and actually practicing.”

Educating clients. Another theme that arose was that participants indicated they would utilize mindfulness professionally by educating their clients about the topic. One participant stated, “I can see myself incorporating mindfulness in counseling sessions and encouraging clients to be mindful.” Other participants stated, “Professionally, I would like to help people be able to use mindfulness in their own lives,” “I would like to find creative ways in which to apply it in my clients’ lives,” and “I see myself using it in my professional practice to educate clients on healthy ways to cope.” Some participants indicated that they would use mindfulness specifically with clients who were experiencing anxiety. One participant stated that they would be “most inclined to use mindfulness with clients experiencing anxiety.” Other participants stated, “I also use mindfulness with clients who are anxious in the room by helping them to slow down and notice their body and their emotions,” “I explain and lead guided mindfulness to anxious clients so that they can incorporate it into their repertoire of coping skills,” and “I would use mindfulness professionally on any client who is struggling but with a focus on anxiety.”

Live in the moment. Many participants indicated that they will use mindfulness both personally and professionally as a way to increase their present-moment awareness and to help them live in the moment. One participant stated that they “simply try and stay in the moment during conversations with friends, family and clients because everyone deserves that.” Other

participant comments included, “I want to be able to use it while working with clients and also while having alone time and trying to focus on what is in front of me,” “Using it as a way to stay in the present moment,” “Overall I see mindfulness as a tool to be appreciative and to really live in the moment,” and “Increasing practices of mindfulness will allow me to become more in-tuned to the person sitting in the room with me and I can increase my ability to focus.”

Summary

This chapter presented the results from both the quantitative and qualitative data collected in the present study using a web-based survey. Information gathered from a total of 131 participants was included in the final data set. Demographic information, a descriptive statistical analysis, and a qualitative thematic analysis were presented for each of the six research questions and 19 survey questions. A summary of the study, a discussion of these results, and recommendations are discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the data analysis indicated that overall, the focus of mindfulness in counselor education seems to be on mindfulness as a self-care strategy for students. In addition, the results show that students are not satisfied with the mindfulness training they have had throughout the coursework in their graduate programs. Students seem to be more comfortable with the idea of utilizing mindfulness practices as self-care, but unsure of how to apply mindfulness therapeutically in counseling sessions. Perhaps counselor education programs are exposing students to mindfulness by introducing the topic as a self-care strategy, which is an undoubtedly important part of counselor education; however, it seems as though mindfulness training often stops there, so students are not able to deepen their understanding of the topic and its concepts. In the following sections the author includes (a) a summary of the purpose and methodology of the current study; (b) a discussion of the results; (c) limitations of the current study; (d) recommendations for future research; (e) implications for counselor education programs and counselor educators; and (f) a conclusion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to examine the perceptions that Master's level counseling students have regarding their exposure to mindfulness throughout their graduate education. A survey was created with the intention of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data looking at the extent to which mindfulness has been incorporated into Master's level counselor education. The study focused on gathering data regarding students' perceptions about the mindfulness training and exposure they have had thus far throughout their education, what they would hope to gain from future mindfulness training, and how they envision themselves utilizing mindfulness.

Overview of Methodology

The present study utilized a mixed-methods approach to gather quantitative and qualitative data regarding student perceptions of mindfulness exposure and training in counselor education programs. The researcher created a survey that was eventually formatted into a web-based survey using Qualtrics software. The population consisted of Master's level students enrolled at one of 76 CACREP accredited counseling programs located in the NCACES region. Participants were recruited through e-mail and provided with a hyperlink that directed them to the web-based survey. The survey was available to potential participants for a total of 18 days during data collection. Data from a total of 131 participants was analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative thematic analysis.

Discussion of Results

In this section the author discusses the results of the research analysis outlined in chapter four, including the quantitative and qualitative results as they apply to each of the six research questions.

Research Question 1

The first research question was, "How much exposure to mindfulness are students getting throughout their graduate coursework?" Of the 131 participants who responded to this question, 91% reported not having taken a course that specifically focused on mindfulness concepts. Twelve participants indicated that they had taken a course that directly focused on mindfulness concepts; however, no courses were listed that seemed related to the mindfulness courses that were discussed in the literature, for example "Mind-Body Medicine and the Art of Self-Care" which was a course designed using MBSR concepts by John Chambers Christopher in 1999. While students reported having discussed or addressed mindfulness in an average of three

graduate courses each, it is worth noting that the majority of participants indicated not having discussed mindfulness in any of their graduate courses at the time of the survey. This could have something to do with the fact that some of the participants had been enrolled in a graduate program for less than one year at the time of the survey; however, it is an interesting finding.

Research Question 2

The second research question was, “What perceptions do students have about the mindfulness training in their graduate coursework?” The results of this research question corroborate the overall findings that were discussed at the beginning of this chapter, which was the idea that that counselor education programs may be exposing students to mindfulness mainly through self-care activities and suggestions. Out of 102 participants, nearly 60% indicated being unsatisfied with the mindfulness training offered in their graduate program. Out of 105 participants, about 71% expressed a belief that they would need to pursue additional mindfulness training outside of graduate coursework in order to utilize it. Lastly, less than 30% of participants indicated that their graduate coursework adequately prepared them to use mindfulness as a therapeutic intervention with clients. These findings support the researcher’s hypothesis that there is a lack of mindfulness training available for students enrolled in counselor education programs. On the other hand, the majority of students indicated that they would feel competent teaching clients how to cultivate mindfulness practices. Similarly, the majority of students indicated that their graduate coursework adequately educated them about the ways in which mindfulness practices can be utilized as self-care. These findings highlight the discrepancy between learning about basic mindfulness practices and learning about how mindfulness can be used as a therapeutic intervention and the reasons that these interventions can be beneficial.

Research Question 3

The third research question was, “How interested are students in the concept of mindfulness?” The results for this question made it clear that students have an interest in learning about mindfulness. On a 10-point Likert scale addressing student interest level in the topic, 82% of the responses ranged from above neutral to extremely interested, and the majority of participants indicated being extremely interested in the concept of mindfulness. About 59% of students reported incorporating mindfulness practices into their self-care routine, and about 50% of students indicated that they are aware of where to find resources on useful mindfulness information. Again, these results are congruent with previous findings that students seem to have an interest in mindfulness practices as self-care strategies. An important consideration is that students who are more interested in the topic of mindfulness might be more likely to be dissatisfied with the amount of training they receive on the topic. This could be the case with any topic in counselor education. On the other hand, students who are not interested in mindfulness might be content with much less training and education on the topic.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question was, “Do students perceive mindfulness training as an important aspect of counselor education?” Three themes were identified in the qualitative data for this question, including (a) mindfulness offers self-care practices for counselors and clients; (b) it is important that counselors have the ability to educate clients about mindfulness practices; (c) mindfulness fosters present-moment awareness. The self-care theme is continued in this question. It seems as though the participants may think of mindfulness as more of a preparation strategy for counseling instead of something they would utilize while sitting in a counseling session. The participants are correct that mindfulness fosters present-moment awareness;

however, there is more to mindfulness than just being present. Kabat-Zinn (1994) defined mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (p.4). This definition highlights the three components that together lead to mindfulness. While the three main themes of this research question are all accurate and insightful, there does seem to be a lack of understanding of mindfulness as a whole concept. The participants seem to be lacking an understanding of the subtle differences between the ways mindfulness can be incorporated into counseling, as outlined by Germer et al. (2013). The focus on having an ability to educate clients about mindfulness practices aligns with mindfulness-based psychotherapy; but, students seem to have missed the other ways mindfulness can be incorporated into the counseling process.

Research Question 5

The fifth research question was, “What do students perceive as important aspects of mindfulness training?” Three themes were identified in the qualitative data for this question, including (a) basic overview of mindfulness concepts; (b) information about mindfulness practices; (c) application of mindfulness to the counseling process. The researcher was surprised by the number of students who indicated that they would like more information about basic mindfulness concepts, such as a definition. Many students indicated that they would like to know more about what mindfulness actually is, how mindfulness practices can be beneficial, and how mindfulness can be incorporated into counseling. This was somewhat consistent with the average level of understanding being rated at about six on a 10-point Likert scale, which would be slightly above a moderate level of understanding. The three themes identified for this question align with what participants seem to be missing in previous questions. This is interesting because it suggests that students are aware of the possible confusion they might be experiencing

regarding mindfulness as a concept, mindfulness as a resource, and mindfulness as a therapeutic intervention.

Research Question 6

The sixth and final research question was, “How do students see themselves utilizing mindfulness?” Three themes were identified in the qualitative data for this question, including (a) personally as a self-care practice; (b) professionally by educating clients about mindfulness; (c) as a strategy to live in the moment. These three themes are very similar to the themes identified in research question four. This is interesting because even though a holistic understanding of mindfulness seems to be missing in both data sets, students are reporting that the reasons they believe mindfulness is an important aspect of counselor education align with the ways that they would like to incorporate mindfulness into their professional and personal lives. There is congruence between the ways that students would like to utilize mindfulness and the reasons they believe mindfulness is important. This leads the researcher to believe that deepening the students’ understanding of mindfulness and how it can be applied to the counseling process would also increase their desire and ability to use it correctly, both for personal self-care and growth and to increase their therapeutic skills as counselors.

Study Limitations

While this research study was thoroughly planned and thought out, the author is aware of its limitations. First, the sample was limited mainly due to the time limit of the research. It was also necessary to rely on counselor educators and staff to refer their students to participate in the study because the researcher did not have access to student e-mail addresses. Another limitation is that the sample was self-selected. Therefore, students who have experience with mindfulness or are interested in the topic may have been more likely to complete the survey and participate in

the research, which could skew some of the results. A new survey had to be created for this study, which leads to limitations regarding instrumentation. It was difficult to account for the validity and reliability of the survey other than utilizing a review process and collaboration with fellow researchers and students. Lastly, there are limitations regarding the study methodology, specifically the web-based nature of the survey. Little can be known about the characteristics of people who participate in web-based survey research (Wright, 2006). It is likely that most students have access to internet and e-mail; however, it is unknown how many of them were given access to the survey.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the information gathered throughout the data analysis and the discussion of research results, the following recommendations have been made for future research in the area of mindfulness in counselor education:

- 1. Survey other regions of ACES.** The purpose of the present research study was to gain an understanding of the perspectives that students enrolled in Master's programs located in the NCACES region had regarding mindfulness in counselor education. Future research studies could expand to examine other regions of ACES.
- 2. Examine the perspectives that counselor educators have regarding the importance of mindfulness in counselor education.** The present study examined the student perspective. Future research could examine counselor educator's beliefs about the same topic.
- 3. Examine counselor educator's level of comfort regarding teaching mindfulness to students.** It might be interesting to assess how comfortable counselor educators are discussing mindfulness with students and how competent they feel teaching

mindfulness concepts. It would also be interesting to examine counselor educator's beliefs about how much mindfulness training and experience is required to teach mindfulness concepts more in-depth.

- 4. Conduct qualitative interviews with students to gain a better idea of their level of understanding of mindfulness.** In the present study, it seemed as though students might be missing out on some mindfulness information and therefore do not have a holistic understanding of the concepts. Future research might include interviews where further questions could be asked to better assess how informed the students are regarding mindfulness.
- 5. Consider adding additional variables to the survey in order to examine and include inferential statistics.** An example of additional variables could be including recent graduates or counselors who have been practicing for a number of years and comparing their level of understanding of mindfulness or what information they would like to gain.

Implications for Counselor Education

Based on the information gathered throughout the data analysis and the discussion of research results, the following implications are offered for counselor education programs and counselor educators:

- 1. Counselor education programs should focus on incorporating mindfulness training into the coursework.** The results of the present study showed that mindfulness is a concept that students are interested in and would like to learn more about. It seems as though many counselor education programs are currently offering students exposure to mindfulness through suggestion of self-care practices. Offering more holistic information

on the topic, such as a definition of mindfulness, mindfulness practices, benefits of using mindfulness, and research related to counseling, would provide students with a more well-rounded training of mindfulness. This is important considering mindfulness is a topic that is growing in popularity, and many students commented that they could envision future clients requesting information about mindfulness. It is crucial for counselors to have a solid understanding of the concepts they discuss with and resources they give to their clients.

2. Consider offering students more experiential opportunities to practice mindfulness.

The results indicated that students desire more opportunities to learn about mindfulness practices and how they can be utilized as self-care. Students also seemed to want more information about how to teach clients about cultivating mindfulness practices. Providing experiential opportunities for students will allow them to gain first-hand experience which will help them better understand the concepts. In turn, this will help students discuss mindfulness with their future clients.

3. Discussions should take place among counselor educators regarding the challenges of offering mindfulness training in counselor education.

It is important to assess whether or not mindfulness is a topic that counselor educators feel comfortable discussing in depth with their students. Examining what it is that makes someone qualified to teach mindfulness is a topic that should be addressed. Similarly, it might also be helpful for counselor educators to examine the reasons that they either have or have not included mindfulness training in their graduate programs.

4. Discuss with students the reasons they believe mindfulness is important.

It would be interesting to know why students indicate such a high level of interest in the topic of

mindfulness. Are students interested because mindfulness is a term that is growing in popularity in the general population or because they believe it is an important aspect of counseling? Perhaps the reasons that students give could guide how it is discussed and introduced during coursework.

Conclusion

As the term mindfulness continues to grow in popularity, it also becomes increasingly established in the counseling field. Research indicates that mindfulness can be a valuable practice for counselors in many different ways; however, very little research has been done to understand whether counseling students are being exposed to mindfulness and in what ways they are being trained to utilize it both professionally and personally.

The student perception was an important aspect of this study. While students express a strong interest in mindfulness and grasp some of the concepts very well, it seems that they lack a holistic and in-depth understanding of the term and how it can be utilized by a professional counselor. Many students indicated that they had an interest in discussing mindfulness with clients and teaching clients about mindfulness practices. Some students even reported that they expected future clients to inquire about mindfulness.

A major part of a counselor's job is to provide clients with tools and resources that can be used to facilitate self-care and healing; thus, it is imperative that counselors have a strong understanding of the techniques they utilize therapeutically. It is important that counselor education programs adequately train students to utilize mindfulness as a therapeutic technique, as well as expose them to experiential opportunities and helpful resources. If students are able to obtain a more holistic understanding of a concept they are interested in and excited to utilize,

they will be better suited to help the clients they work with as well as take better care of themselves.

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APPENDIX A. SURVEY

1. What gender do you identify with?: _____

2. How many years have you been enrolled as a counseling graduate student?

- less than 1 year 3-4 years
- 1-2 years 4-5 years
- 2-3 years 5+ years

3. What type of counseling degree are you completing? (Check all that apply)

- Mental Health Counseling Community Counseling
- School Counseling Family Counseling
- Student Affairs Addictions Counseling
- Other: _____

4. Have you taken a graduate course in your current program that specifically focused on mindfulness concepts?

- Yes No

5. In how many of your current graduate courses has mindfulness been explained, discussed, or addressed in some way?

- 0 3
- 1 4
- 2 5+

5a. Please list each course and describe how mindfulness was included or addressed.

Text Box

6. On a scale of 1 to 10, where would you rate your current understanding of mindfulness?

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Extremely
Low
Understanding | | | | Moderate
Understanding | | | | | Extremely
High
Understanding |

7. On a scale of 1 to 10, how interested are you in the concept of mindfulness?

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---------|---|---|---|---|-------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Not at all
Interested | | | | Neutral | | | | | Extremely
Interested |

8. Do you incorporate mindfulness practices into your self-care routine?

Yes No

8a. If yes, please describe your mindfulness practice.

Text Box

For the following questions, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement as it applies to you.

9. My graduate coursework adequately prepared me to utilize mindfulness as a therapeutic intervention with clients.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	---------	-------	----------------

10. I would feel competent educating clients about how to cultivate a mindfulness practice.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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11. My graduate coursework educated me about the ways mindfulness practices can be utilized as self-care.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	---------	-------	----------------

12. I incorporate mindfulness practices into my self-care routine.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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13. I am satisfied with the mindfulness training that has been offered throughout my graduate coursework.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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14. In order to utilize mindfulness practices either personally or professionally, I would need to pursue additional training outside of graduate coursework.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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15. I am aware of where to find useful resources for mindfulness information.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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16. Do you believe mindfulness is an important aspect of counselor training? Why or why not?

Text Box

17. Describe the mindfulness training you have had outside of your graduate coursework, if any. What about it was most helpful?

Text Box

18. If you were to receive mindfulness training in the future, what information would you like to be included?

Text Box

19. How do you see yourself incorporating mindfulness into your professional and personal lives?

Text Box

APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT

NDSU

NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Title of Research Study: Mindfulness in Counselor Education

This study is being conducted by: The principal investigator of this research is Dr. Brenda Hall. Please contact her with any questions or concerns at (701) 231-8077.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study? You qualify to participate in this research study because you are enrolled in a Master's level counseling program. Your perceptions, beliefs, and thoughts regarding your education are important to the research team. In order to participate, you must be enrolled in a CACREP accredited Master's level counseling program and working towards a degree in school counseling, mental health counseling, community counseling, addictions counseling, family counseling, or student affairs.

What is the reason for doing the study? The goal of this research is to gather more information about the ways that mindfulness training is being incorporated into counselor education program curriculum. The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions that Master's level counseling students have regarding their exposure to mindfulness throughout their coursework and training.

What will I be asked to do? By participating in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey that includes questions regarding your perception of mindfulness training in your graduate program. The survey will be completed online. You will not be required to share any identifying information.

Where is the study going to take place, and how long will it take? The survey can be completed wherever you have computer and internet access. The survey will be completed online and will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

What are the risks and discomforts? It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to the participant. The information you provide will be kept in a secure database, however loss of confidentiality is a potential risk of participating in this research.

What are the benefits to me? You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this research study.

What are the benefits to other people? Your participation in this research may lead to increased knowledge about mindfulness training in counselor education, which could benefit counselor education programs and future counseling students.

Do I have to take part in the study? Your participation in this research is your choice. If you decide to participate in the study, you may change your mind and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are already entitled.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study? Instead of being in this research study, you can choose not to participate.

Who will see the information that I give? We will keep private all research records that identify you. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study, we will write about the combined information that we have gathered. We may publish the results of the study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

Will I receive any compensation for taking part in this study? Upon completion of the survey, you will have an opportunity to enter yourself into a drawing to win one of three \$25 gift cards to Amazon.com.

What if I have questions? Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the research study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have any questions about the study, you can contact the researcher, Dr. Brenda Hall, at (701) 231-8077 or at brenda.hall@ndsu.edu

What are my rights as a research participant? You have rights as a participant in research. If you have questions about your rights, or complaints about this research, you may talk to the researcher or contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program by:

- Telephone: 701.231.8908 or toll-free 1.855.800.6717
- Email: ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu
- Mail: NDSU HRPP Office, NDSU Dept. 4000, PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050.

The role of the Human Research Protection Program is to see that your rights are protected in this research; more information about your rights can be found at: www.ndsu.edu/irb .

Documentation of Informed Consent:

You are freely making a decision whether to be in this research study. Completing the survey and participating in this research study means that:

1. you have read and understood this consent form
2. you have had your questions answered, and
3. you have decided to be in the study.

APPENDIX C. RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear _____,

I am a Master's student in the Clinical Mental Health program at North Dakota State University. I am writing to request your participation in a study exploring the perceptions that students have of mindfulness in counselor education programs. Your help is vital to this research endeavor and will help to promote an understanding of the mindfulness training that counseling students have exposure to throughout their education.

I am asking that you please forward this to the Master's students enrolled in your counseling program, regardless of what track they have chosen. Please do so as soon as possible, as **student responses are requested by June 19th, 2015**. Follow up reminders will be sent following this initial message.

The use of Internet as a mode for data collection brings minimal risk to participant confidentiality. Risk to confidentiality using the Internet is inherent in normal use of web technology with the risk that information may be intercepted and read by a third party; however, data collected will remain confidential, with access only permitted to the primary and co-investigator. No individual data will be reported in this study and no link will be made between your identity and responses. If you have concerns regarding the right of human participants, please contact the primary investigator, Dr. Brenda Hall at (701) 231-8077 or the Institutional Review Board of North Dakota State University at (701) 231-8908.

Completion and submission of the survey implies informed consent to use the data for research purposes. If you would like a copy of the research findings upon completion of this study, please contact me by e-mail at a.wheeler@outlook.com

If you agree to participate in this study, please visit the following address to complete the survey. Participation is voluntary and will take approximately 15 minutes of your time. You are free to exit the survey at any time; however, your responses will not be recorded until the "I'm finished. Store my answers." button is clicked. Once you have completed the survey, you will have an opportunity to be entered into a drawing to **win one of three \$25 gift cards to Amazon.com**.

Survey Link: https://ndstate.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9S9Ab9Lm1Zh6ExT

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate and contribute to this research!

Sincerely,

Andi Wheeler
Graduate Student, Clinical Mental Health Counseling
North Dakota State University