

WHO LET THE DOCS OUT? AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
OF COUNSELOR EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES GATEKEEPING DOCTORAL
STUDENTS

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State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Gatekeeping in counselor education is a critical responsibility primarily emphasized for faculty working with master's-level counseling students. However, counselor educators are also responsible for graduating competent doctoral students in the areas of counseling, supervision, teaching, leadership, and research. Knowledge about faculty's experiences as gatekeepers of doctoral students is limited. In this qualitative study, five counselor educators ($N = 5$) participated in semi-structured, individual interviews to discuss their in-depth experiences and perceptions of gatekeeping doctoral-level students. Participants included two assistant and three full professors from different CACREP-accredited institutions across the United States with between five and 30 years of experience ($M = 16.2$). The study's methodological procedures were driven by interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to understand how participants made sense of their doctoral gatekeeping experiences, which were then interpreted by the researcher. Individual and cross-case themes were identified.

Findings revealed three super-ordinate themes with contextual overlap and connection to six salient sub-ordinate themes. The first super-ordinate theme was *Ambiguity in Gatekeeping and Growing Future Faculty* with two subthemes: (a) Who let the docs in? Screening for goal congruence and (b) Post-admission gates of competency. The second super-ordinate theme was *The Unique Aspects of Corrective Remediation in Doctoral Programs* with two subthemes: (a) Inherent complexities and challenges and (b) The hierarchy of harm in gateslipping. Finally, the third super-ordinate theme was *Developing a Doctoral Gatekeeper Identity* with two subthemes: (a) The impact of program culture and faculty involvement and (b) Experiential learning as gatekeeper training. Results suggest that counselor educators' experiences as doctoral gatekeepers are both unique and similar to their master's gatekeeping experiences. Participants

offered several recommendations to improve doctoral gatekeeping and enhance gatekeeper training. Further research is needed to better understand the process of doctoral gatekeeping in counselor education. Implications, recommendations, and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: doctoral gatekeeping, remediation, counselor educator, counselor education, supervision, CACREP, interpretative phenomenological analysis, qualitative methods

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DEDICATION

To those who act as gatekeepers – may you recognize the significance of your role, understand the impact of your voice, and remain committed to protecting the integrity of the profession.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CACREP	Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs
ACA	American Counseling Association
NBCC.....	National Board for Certified Counselors
ACES	Association for Counselor Education and Supervision
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974
ADA.....	Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
PPC	Problems of professional competency
IPA	Interpretative phenomenological analysis

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of mental health issues continues to rise annually with approximately one in five adults reporting a diagnosis in the United States (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2020). Among the 51.5 million individuals living with these conditions, nearly 45% received mental health treatment in 2019 (SAMHSA, 2020). More recently, there has been a significant increase in the number of people seeking counseling services for depression, anxiety, and addiction related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Czeisler et al., 2020; National Council for Behavioral Health, 2020; Vahratian, et al., 2021). Mental health counselors are master's-level clinicians trained to help individuals of all ages better understand and overcome obstacles while simultaneously providing support in improving their overall wellness and functioning (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2020).

Unfortunately, counseling experiences are not always perceived as positive or beneficial. In fact, some individuals report negative or even harmful outcomes because of their therapy (Curran et al., 2019). Researchers estimate between 5 and 8.2% of clients report a worsening of symptoms at the end of counseling than they experienced before they started (Barkham et al., 2001; Hansen et al., 2002). Unhelpful counselor behaviors such as limited multicultural awareness and boundary violations have been associated with clients feeling disempowered, unheard, or devalued (Curran et al., 2019). These reasons alone highlight the importance of counselors receiving adequate training in order to practice ethically and effectively. As master's-level counselors are in higher demand within the mental health field, the counselor educators and supervisors who teach and prepare them must continue to ensure graduates are competently trained.

Consistent findings in the literature indicate faculty in counseling programs frequently admit and graduate students whose academic, personal, or professional conduct fails to meet the defined requirements (Brear et al., 2008; Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002, 2006; Jorgensen et al., 2017). In their research investigating master's-level counselor competency, Gaubatz and Vera (2002) discovered that one in 10 graduates were viewed by faculty as unsuitable for the field whereas in their later study (2006), student estimates of peers who appeared professionally deficient were as high as one in five students. Consequently, it appears as many as 21% of incompetent students may go unaddressed in training programs, which translates to as many as 2,800 inept counselors potentially entering the profession a year (CACREP, 2019; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002, 2006).

These statistics are frightening and can be further illuminated by Enochs and Etzbach's (2004) statement, "In the helping profession, peoples' lives are in the mental health professional's hands" (p.396). Hence, all the more reason the counselor educators training these master's students are competently doing their job to graduate effective counselors. Interestingly, a fundamental but often covert part of this equation are the doctoral students training to be future faculty members. These counselor education doctoral students are often co-teaching, supervising, mentoring, researching, and working with both the faculty and master's-level students (Dickens et al., 2016; Dollarhide et al., 2013). It is imperative not to forget how critical of a role doctoral students have in this cycle of counselor competency and avoidance of harm. Therefore, it is equally important counselor educators train and graduate competent doctoral students.

Overview of Gatekeeping

Faculty in counselor education programs are inherently responsible for protecting both the integrity of the counseling profession and the public's welfare by ensuring graduates are

competent, ethical, and professionally effective counselors (Brear et al., 2008). Counselor educators' ongoing practice of evaluating trainee progress and suitability to enter the profession is described as *gatekeeping* (ACA, 2014). The gatekeeper role performed by faculty is complex and demanding involving both ethical and educational obligations to control access to the counseling field (Brear & Dorrian, 2010). Although a clear and consistent definition of gatekeeping is not observed within the published literature, counselor educators agree it is a vital responsibility (Gaubatz & Vera, 2006; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Schuermann et al., 2018).

The task of gatekeeping stems from professional ethical codes and accreditation standards where educators are provided directives and general considerations for implementation (Wood et al., 2016). For example, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs' (CACREP) *2016 Standards* (2015) require student handbooks contain statements and policies on student expectations, retention, appeals, remediation, and dismissal from the program. Correspondingly, the American Counseling Association's (ACA) *Code of Ethics* (2014) outlines gatekeeping protocol specifically in section F code 6.b, noting supervisors must continually monitor, document, consult, establish remediation options, and recommend dismissal when needed. However, each counseling program is expected to develop performance assessments and institutional policies on their own to ensure these ethical directives are being met. Programs must also inform graduate students of their policies on gatekeeping (CACREP, 2015).

Gatekeeping has been identified as a major concern in counselor training programs (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2016; Foster & McAdams, 2009; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Rust et al., 2013; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Despite increased research attention on gatekeeping in counselor education, few studies address the distinction in counselor educators'

gatekeeping practices toward master's and doctoral students. Swank and Smith-Adcock (2014) compared CACREP-accredited master's and doctoral-level admission procedures and requirements and found that test scores, writing samples, clinical and research experience, prerequisite courses, and portfolios were more common screening methods in doctoral programs. The researchers discovered letters of recommendation, personal statements, and grade point average were used similarly at both levels. However, no studies were found that compared gatekeeping procedures between master's or doctoral programs after admission.

Gateslipping

Counselor education students are required to pass through a series of checkpoints or “gates” to demonstrate adequate professional competencies (Homrich & Henderson, 2018). *Gateslipping* occurs when unqualified students are admitted into programs, incompetent counselors are allowed to graduate, or unfit supervisees are endorsed for licensure (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). Brear and Dorrian (2010) discovered more than half (58%) of 63 counselor educators reported passing a master's student who they believed were not suitable for the counseling profession. Despite over 90% of faculty reporting a strong sense of responsibility toward the counseling profession, gateslipping continued to occur. These findings suggest that even with ethical standards, professional mandates, and a strong sense of responsibility, counselor educators continue to pass students who they deem unfit.

Counselor educators have described multiple elements of master's-level gatekeeping to be challenging (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Homrich, 2009). Gatekeeping roles present faculty with a variety of difficulties as multiple subjective factors can influence the process (Chang & Rubel, 2019). Even with well-established policies, counselor educators may differ in their approach to evaluation, expectations of trainees,

and sensitivity to personal bias (Chang & Rubel, 2019; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). Faculty often note unclear signs of problematic issues, fears of appearing culturally insensitive, and worries of legal actions from students as deterrents in pursuing further gatekeeping actions (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Glance et al., 2012; Goodrich & Shin, 2013; Homrich, 2018).

In general, counselor educators typically strive to be supportive, encouraging, and optimistic toward students (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). As a result, many faculty report struggling emotionally to balance their empathy toward a problematic student and their gatekeeping obligations (Brown-Rice and Furr, 2014 & 2016). Although many programs now have formalized gatekeeping procedures based on student skills and competencies, gatekeeping follow-through is often left up to the individual faculty member and can lead to students' gateslipping or going unnoticed (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). Thus, it is reasonable to assume counselor educators may also experience barriers or struggle to enforce their gatekeeper role with doctoral students.

Post-Master's Competency Problems

There is currently no published research on counselor educators' perceptions or experiences of gatekeeping students in doctoral programs. Yet several researchers have explored post-master's competency from multiple perspectives: doctoral students' peers (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019; Parker et al., 2014), licensed counselors' supervisees and coworkers (Jorgensen et al., 2017; Olson et al., 2016) and counselor educators' colleagues (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015). In one of the quantitative studies examining 345 CACREP-accredited doctoral students' knowledge of peers with problems of professional competency (PPC), Brown-Rice and Furr (2019) discovered over half of the participants (68%) were aware of peers with inadequate

clinical skills and dispositional issues. The researchers' results also revealed how doctoral students are negatively impacted by their peers with PPC (47.9%) and frustrated with faculty for allowing peers with PPC to continue their doctoral training (70%). Over three-fourths (78.3%) of the doctoral students conveyed concern over peers with PPC being allowed to obtain doctoral degrees. Furthermore, the respondents expressed concern about the quality of the field due to peers with PPC obtaining doctoral degrees (66.7%). Over half (49.7%) of the doctoral students reported that peers' PPC disrupted their learning environments leading them to feel stressed. These findings demonstrate the significant impact that students who gateslip can have on their peers' experience.

A related study on 335 counselor educators' knowledge of their CACREP-accredited colleagues with competency issues indicated a similar percentage of counselor education faculty (75%) reported encountering a colleague with PPC (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015). These findings were noted as rather surprising considering counselor educators are assumed to be evaluated for dispositions throughout their graduate training and are knowledgeable about the ethical standards. Therefore, there is an expectation of appropriate behaviors from this group. However, this evidence may suggest that doctoral students who graduated and went on to be faculty were not appropriately gatekept as PPC exists among counselor educators. The results of these two studies support the importance of doctoral training programs assessing for students with PPC and that counselor education faculty may need to be more diligent in their gatekeeping practices.

Statement of the Problem

The effects of gateslipping can endanger the wellbeing of future clients, harm peers or colleagues, and compromise the reputation of the counseling field (Homrich & Henderson, 2018). Gatekeeping research in counselor education has primarily focused on issues involving

master's-level students (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006). Consequently, the process of gatekeeping at the doctoral level is not well understood or documented. Specifically, counselor educators' experiences or perceptions of their gatekeeping responsibilities at this level have yet to be explored. The absence of clarity regarding these practices is problematic as faculty must also assess and address PPC with doctoral students. These actions are critical as doctoral students are next in line as counselor educators and gatekeepers themselves. Equally important, Brown-Rice and Furr demonstrated PPC issues exist not only for doctoral students (2019) but also among counselor educators (2016), which may illustrate systemic or cyclical gateslippage. Thus, gaining a rich understanding of counselor educators' experiences of doctoral gatekeeping could help prevent gateslipping in future generations of counselors and counselor educators.

Purpose of the Study

The central purpose of this research study is to obtain a deeper understanding of counselor educators' experiences of engaging in gatekeeping functions directed toward doctoral students. More specifically, the three research goals are to: (a) describe how counselor educators understand and perceive the gatekeeping process within doctoral programs; (b) examine how counselor educators make sense of their role as gatekeepers of doctoral-level trainees; and (c) clarify counselor educators' experiences of gatekeeping doctoral students in comparison to their understanding of gatekeeping master's level students. An awareness and understanding of faculty's process of gatekeeping doctoral-level students is important for doctoral training programs and the counseling field as a whole.

Need for the Study

Gatekeeping is a critical responsibility primarily emphasized for faculty working with master's-level counselor-trainees as all studies examining counselor educators' experiences of gatekeeping have been conducted in the context of master's students (Brear & Dorrian, 2008, 2010; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016, 2019; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006). However, faculty are not only responsible for master's students but are also required to graduate doctoral students who are competent and have advanced knowledge as clinicians, supervisors, educators, researchers, and leaders (CACREP, 2015; DeDeigo & Burgin, 2016; Dollarhide et al., 2013). Despite the significance of effective gatekeeping practices, counselor educators' experiences of directing these tasks toward doctoral trainees have been overlooked by researchers (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). There remains a need for clarification regarding this process and how faculty view their role as gatekeepers of doctoral students.

Several implications for faculty, training programs, supervision, and research may be cultivated from this study. The results may help in clarifying doctoral gatekeeping policies, increasing awareness of doctoral gatekeeping practices in graduate programs, and developing procedures to fit the needs of doctoral programs. Identifying the practice of doctoral gatekeeping from counselor educators' perspectives and experiences will provide the field with rich data regarding the gatekeeping process, doctoral program culture, and doctoral student development.

This study is important because research in this area could lead to more prepared, effective, and competent doctoral gatekeepers, which could then trickle down to future counselor educators, supervisors, doctoral peers, master's students, and most importantly, counselors. The findings of this qualitative study may provide opportunities to inform subsequent research. Answering the study's research questions could guide future researchers in developing a doctoral

gatekeeping grounded theory or framework. Furthermore, quantitative studies could be utilized to ask counselor educators to confirm the presence of remediation, dispositions, or gateslipping in doctoral programs. Taken together, further exploration in this area is warranted.

Research Questions

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative methodological design that emerged in the mid 1990s with theoretical underpinnings in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Smith, 1996). Within an IPA approach, participants' lived experiences are emphasized, interpreted, and particularly focused on and understood in specific contexts (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). The current qualitative study utilized IPA to investigate one central and two peripheral research questions. The overarching question guiding the study is followed by the secondary research questions:

1. How do counselor educators experience the process of gatekeeping doctoral-level students?
 - a. How do counselor educators perceive their identity as gatekeepers in doctoral programs?
 - b. To what extent can counselor educators' accounts of doctoral gatekeeping be explained by their knowledge of gatekeeping master's students?

Definition of Terms

Gatekeeping is the process counselor educators engage in in order to monitor and evaluate student development throughout program training in addition to intervening when a student demonstrates problematic behavior of professional concerns (Homrich & Henderson, 2018). *Master's gatekeeping* typically refers to the action's faculty engage in to ensure master's graduates are adequately prepared to practice effective, ethical counseling and prevent

incompetent counselor-trainees from entering the profession (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Foster & McAdams, 2009; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

Doctoral gatekeeping occurs when counselor educators evaluate and monitor doctoral students' suitability to effectively practice as clinicians, supervisors, teachers, researchers, and advocates within the fields of counseling and counselor education (CACREP, 2015). Parallel to master's gatekeeping, counselor educators are responsible for "the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students' competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate" (ACA, p. 20).

According to Homrich and Henderson (2018), qualified trainees are expected to progress through a series of predetermined checkpoints, or *gates*, signifying the student has met minimal requirements, with admissions often representing the first gate of the training sequence. Counselor educators are responsible for assessing master's and doctoral students' development at these checkpoints to confirm appropriate progress. These gates include but are not limited to progress reviews, practicum, internship, advising meetings, graduation, licensure for master's students in addition to comprehensive exams and dissertation for doctoral students.

Gateslipping occurs when faculty fail to prevent students identified as unqualified, unethical, or harmful from progressing through gates without remediation or dismissal (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; 2006). Consequently, if a trainee is recognized as problematic and is not "gatekept" they are said to have "gateslipped." An example of master's gateslipping is a counselor who is unfit for the field working with clients, and an example of doctoral gateslipping is a counselor educator unfit for the field working with counseling students.

Gatekeepers are counselor education faculty members, clinical supervisors, and doctoral supervisors-in-training responsible for overseeing the gatekeeping process to assess trainee

development at their institution or agency” (Homrich & Henderson, 2018, p. 21). Counselor educators and supervisors are gatekeepers in both master’s and doctoral programs.

Professional competence is defined as the regular demonstration of a combination of ethical and effective academic skills and professional dispositions necessary for the practice of clinical counseling or counselor education (McAdams, Foster, & Ward, 2007). Counselor educators evaluate students’ level of professional competence.

Problems of professional competency (PPC) is the phrase that has generally replaced “impairment” in the current literature to encompass a wide range of problematic behavior (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Shen-Miller et al., 2015). According to Brown-Rice & Furr (2019), students’ problematic behaviors typically fall into two categories: classroom performance concerns, such as academic or clinical skills, and dispositional problems, like personality, interpersonal, or psychological issues. A student exhibiting PPC may warrant a counselor educator to implement a remedial gatekeeping intervention.

Professional dispositions refer to nonacademic concerns or “the commitments, characteristics, values, beliefs, interpersonal functioning, and behaviors that influence the counselor’s professional growth and interactions with clients and colleagues” (CACREP, 2015, p. 43). Counselor educators evaluate aspects of doctoral students’ personal and professional functioning. According to Miller et al. (2020), faculty view dispositions as both critical requirements and predictors of professional competence. Examples of dispositional factors include boundaries, professionalism, self-control, ethics, self-care, responsiveness, and suitability for the profession (Miller et al., 2020).

Remediation is part of the gatekeeping process where a counselor educator directly intervenes or implements strategies to help trainees develop or regain sufficient levels of

professional competence (Henderson & Dufrene, 2012). Remedial interventions may incorporate the use of a written professional development plan that outline requirements such as additional supervision or course repetition (Homrich & Henderson, 2018).

Organization of Chapters

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides a brief overview of the impact of gatekeeping in counselor education and the gaps within doctoral programs while establishing the purpose, key research questions, and significance of the current study. Chapter Two reviews the key elements of gatekeeping while analyzing and synthesizing the available and relevant literature. In Chapter Three, the conceptual framework, qualitative design, data collection, researcher reflexivity, and analysis are outlined. The participants and findings of the study are illustrated in Chapter Four. To conclude, Chapter Five offers a summary of the research study, which includes the limitations of the project, implications for counselor education, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Two begins with a broad overview of gatekeeping practices in counselor education programs, including faculty members' roles and responsibilities as gatekeepers and the impact of gateslipping. Next, master's-level gatekeeping and remediation procedures are discussed along with perceptions of faculty and counselor-trainees. The complexity of the process is outlined along with various roadblocks to effective gatekeeping. Literature on master's-level gatekeeping will be the primary framework to understand the concept of gatekeeping at the doctoral-level since most research in this field focuses on master's programs. Finally, the chapter will conclude with critical examination of this information that depicts the current state of doctoral gatekeeping practices. A summary and synthesis of the literature will reiterate the rationale for exploring counselor educators' experiences of doctoral-level gatekeeping.

Gatekeeping in Counselor Education

The practice of gatekeeping is crucial for the training of competent professionals in many helping disciplines, including counseling, social work, and psychology. These professions are obligated to regulate themselves by policing their own standards of conduct and ethics (Enochs & Etzbach, 2004). If a trainee entering the workforce is not prepared or suitable, clients are at risk for significant harm (Erbes et al., 2015). Over the last two decades, counselor educators' awareness of gatekeeping has noticeably increased after issues of student incompetence rose (Homrich, 2009). In the mid-1990s, the first counseling gatekeeping models were introduced in the literature (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). Early research on gatekeeping continued to examine the general process and development of effective evaluation strategies (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Lumadue & Duffy, 1999; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen,

2010). The focus of research progressed to explore the perceptions and experiences of faculty, students, clinical supervisors, colleagues, and licensed counselors (Brown-Rice & Fur, 2013, 2015, 2016; Jorgensen et al., 2017; Olson et al., 2016).

Although a universal definition of gatekeeping does not currently exist within the available literature, counselor educators agree it is a critical responsibility (Brear et al., 2008; Homrich, 2009). The concept of gatekeeping is unique in that it represents a process, response, and action. One of the most fundamental aspects of gatekeeping is the ongoing nature of the gatekeeper's role and responsibility (Homrich & Henderson, 2018). Gatekeeping generally refers to the actions or responses counselor educators engage in to ensure graduates are adequately prepared to practice effective, ethical counseling and prevent incompetent counselors from entering the profession (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Foster & McAdams, 2009; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Some definitions of gatekeeping are somewhat restrictive by only focusing on master's students or counselors that work with clients and leave out doctoral students and even counselor educators who engage with clients, peers, counselors-in-training, and faculty (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). These individuals are important to include in definitions of gatekeeping as they make up integral parts of the larger system of counseling, counselor education, and supervision. Doctoral students specifically are at the core of these systems as co-teachers, supervisors-in-training, gatekeepers, and future faculty members.

Ethical and Educational Mandates

Counselor educators have multiple responsibilities regarding gatekeeping including screening, evaluation, and remediation. Faculty must fulfill their role as gatekeepers to maintain the integrity of the profession and quality of care provided by graduates of counseling programs (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Foster & McAdams, 2009; Frick & Glosoff, 2014; Ziomek-Daigle &

Christensen, 2010). Faculty members and supervisors are not the only professionals obligated to serve as gatekeepers in counselor education programs. Doctoral students are also deemed responsible for “screening, remediation, and gatekeeping” associated with teaching and clinical supervision (CACREP, 2015, Section 6.B). Counselor educators’ gatekeeping obligations stem from professional ethical codes, accreditation standards, educational mandates, and professional associations (Homrich & Henderson, 2018; Wood et al., 2016). Four sources that guide ethical behavior and educational standards are the *ACA Code of Ethics* (2014), the 2016 CACREP *Standards* (2015), the National Board for Certified Counselors (2016) *Code of Ethics*, and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (2011) *Best Practices in Clinical Supervision*.

CACREP (2015) is an accrediting body for master’s and doctoral degree counselor education programs and sets the required standards necessary for professional preparation. A CACREP-accredited program demonstrates it was designed to meet the requirements set by the profession. According to their most recent CACREP (2019) *Annual Report*, 405 institutions were accredited by the end of 2018, bringing the total number of accredited counseling programs to 871 with more than 53,000 enrolled students and 14,000 graduates across the country. 2,817 full-time faculty members also reported working in CACREP programs during 2018. Both doctoral programs and masters-level programs reported an increase in student enrollment and the number of graduates in 2018, which demonstrates CACREP’s continued growth in an expanding universe of counselor education programs, students, and graduates.

Gatekeeping Master’s Students

While the field of psychology has developed a formalized model of expected competency standards to assess students in their graduate training programs, counselor education has not

established an official gatekeeping model for evaluating professional competency (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). However, numerous articles have been published on the topic of gatekeeping in master's programs, which has resulted in an emergent theory of gatekeeping practices (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010), transparent remediation procedures (Foster & McAdams, 2009), and strategies for evaluating competence (Lumadue & Duffy, 1999).

There are a number of different models offered by researchers that address gatekeeping in counselor education (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Foster & McAdams, 2009; Letourneau 2016; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Rust et al., 2013; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). It is beyond the scope of this literature review to describe each framework of evaluation and remediation, but the most widely referenced and utilized models are described. One approach developed by Lumadue and Duffy (1999), proposes that gatekeeping should stress early evaluation beginning at admissions. In addition to assessing academic competence, “counseling students are expected to possess personal qualities, characteristics, and evidence of readiness conducive to effective therapeutic practice” (p. 2). The researchers’ model includes an instrument measuring specific behavior rather than abstract qualities, which gives students the ability to self-monitor and faculty better consistency in evaluation.

Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010) developed the most widely known model that described gatekeeping as an activity that includes four phases: preadmission screening, postadmission screening, remediation plan, and remediation outcome. Remediation processes and behaviors are necessary for the professional development of students and the protection of clients (Freeman et al., 2019). Homrich and Henderson (2018) describe remediation as a:

direct and active effort by faculty and supervisors to provide a trainee with an opportunity to achieve success on a competence the trainee has either (a) yet to master at a basic level

though provided with opportunities to do so (i.e., through traditional classroom strategies or informal comment) or (b) demonstrated challenges maintaining mastery at a basic level (p. 221).

Examples of remediation include directing students to repeat or enroll in additional courses, receive personal counseling, obtain additional supervision, take an academic leave, or withdraw from the program (Henderson & Dufrene, 2018). The authors also outline the best practice of incorporating a written remediation that includes clear remedial goals, requirements, a timeline, and consequences of compliance and noncompliance.

Counselor Educators as Gatekeepers

Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) documented 370 counselor educators' recognition of gatekeeping roles in CACREP programs. While 94% faculty members reported knowing their program's policies on counselor-trainee problematic behavior and 87% recognized the appropriate intervention to take with gatekeeping concerns, still only 38% of counselor educators noted being trained in how to approach a problematic student. Participants also discussed how some problems were dismissed. For example, one educator stated, "While there is often a policy in place . . . I find that colleagues fail to follow that policy in practice." Half of the participants reported wanting more knowledge regarding their ability to recognize students with competency problems, and 61% noted a desire to learn how to respond to these students.

In order to identify faculty's perceptions, Schuermann, et al. (2018) developed a qualitative study to examine potential differences in views of gatekeeping based on faculty member role. Participants included nine counselor educators equally represented in assistant, associate, and adjunct professor positions. Participants' years of experience in counselor education ranged from 2 to 19 years with an average of 7.5 years. Participants discussed

experiencing the fluctuation in gatekeeping procedures, expectations, and implementation across and within programs. An assistant professor reported, “I often find that I would think something is an extreme issue and my colleagues don’t think it’s an issue at all” (p. 58). The respondents’ perspectives were consistent with existing findings that untenured professors are typically more concerned about the consequences of gatekeeping (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002), highlighting the impact institutional culture has on effective gatekeeping procedures. The authors of a similar study found differences in gatekeeping views based on positions such as department heads and program coordinators who do not engage as closely with students (Brear & Dorrian, 2010). Two-thirds of participants (64%) also denied having received specific training in addressing students with problems of professional competency.

In contrast, Teixeira (2017) found a majority (88%) of the 99 counselor educators in their study were experienced in remediating. Many (66%) had also been involved in trainee remediation by serving in several roles during the process, such as being an advisor, professor, or clinical supervisor of the student. Counselor educator demographics indicated a large percentage of participants were experienced faculty members, ages of 36 and 65, with more than six years of experience. Most of the participants were also members of ACA, suggesting that participants had strong, ethical counselor identities. Results may indicate a relationship between practicing effective gatekeeping the and level of experience as a counselor educator.

It appears counselor educators develop their gatekeeper role over time. Different levels of experience, academic roles, and perceived competence may impact faculty members’ views (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Teixeira, 2017). In each of the studies examining preparation experiences, the perspectives of gatekeeping were examined based on the role of the participants as student or educator. In general, as counselor educators develop their

professional identity through time, training, remediation experiences, academic positions, tenure process, and personal attitudes may change about the gatekeeping role (Schuermann et al., 2018). Different levels of experience, academic roles, and perceived competence impacted gatekeepers' views (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; DeDiego & Burgin, 2016; Frick & Glossoff, 2014; Teixeira, 2017).

Problems of Professional Competency (PPC)

According to Brown-Rice & Furr (2019), counseling students' problematic behaviors can fall into two categories: skills and dispositions. Counselor trainees' skills refer to both their academic and clinical performance, while their dispositions relate to the expression of their personality (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). Counselor education students are more likely to be removed from a program due to their dispositional issues rather than classroom performance (Brear et al., 2008). Lumadue and Duffy (1999) noted the importance of relational dispositions and the ability to be open to feedback.

Professional counseling competency skills need to be learned and supervised during training but maintained throughout the entire career of a professional counselor (ACA, 2014). There are multiple terms within the literature used to indicate trainees' inability to meet acceptable professional standards: impaired, unqualified, incompetent, or unsuitable (Foster et al., 2014). A shift in the literature supports the use of the term "problems of professional competency" (PPC) to describe issues of competency as it encompasses a wider range of problematic behaviors (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016 & 2019; Shen-Miller et al., 2015). Due to the possible legal conflict with the current Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) disability legislation, counselor education professionals are advised to not use the word impairment when addressing a trainee's professional competence

(for a review, see Falender et al., 2009 & Homrich, 2009). When evaluating for PPC, the most important consideration is determining the risk it presents to the well-being of clients, peers, and the public (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019).

Impact of Gateslipping

Counselor educators who doubt a counselor-trainee's clinical, academic, or dispositional fitness and fail to intervene when that student demonstrates problematic behavior run the risk of endorsing a student who is not ready for the profession. This concept is referred to as *gateslipping* (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). Brown-Rice and Furr (2014) found that consequences of gateslipping can impact client care, other trainees, and the entire counseling profession. Researchers have investigated the concepts of gatekeeping, gateslipping, and PPC within the context of master's program from multiple vantage points, including counselor-trainees' and educators' perceptions of PPC among their fellow peers, students, and colleagues (e.g., Gaubatz & Vera, 2002).

Two researchers collected a series of more recent quantitative data comparable to that of Gaubatz and Vera (2002 & 2006) and Brear and Dorrian (2010) to identify rates of gateslippage in counselor education programs, which sets the stage for understanding the significance of gateslipping in counselor education. Brown-Rice and Furr (2013, 2015, 2016) explored the prevalence of PPC students and faculty witnessed in CACREP-accredited master's programs. The researchers' findings indicated a similar percentage of master's students (74%) stated they had observed peers with PPC as was later reported by counselor educators (75%) who noted encountering a colleague with PPC (2013, 2015). In their later study, a majority (91%) of counselor educators indicated knowledge of students demonstrating PPC in their master's

programs, with the most frequently reported problematic behaviors being inadequate clinical, interpersonal, and academic skills (2016).

Along similar lines, Foster et al. (2014) designed a single case study to explore master's students' experiences of gatekeeping through in-depth interviews. All 10 participants reported awareness and concern about peers exhibiting PPC. For instance, one student shared, "And I hate, I hate to say this but at one point I was thinking, this person should not even be in this program...I just shake my head sometimes like how did they get in?" while another counselor-trainee added, "I see people get by academically, but they lack empathy and a genuine desire to be a counselor" (p. 197). The participants reported specific traits of peers with PPC, including several not mentioned in previous literature: "emotional instability, low self-esteem, inability to accept responsibility, apathetic attitude toward the counseling profession, and inability to demonstrate warmth and empathy" (p. 201).

Barriers to Gatekeeping

Previous research proposes many counselor educators feel hesitant about implementing their gatekeeping duties (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). The absence of a recognized formal model for gatekeeping procedures and defined benchmarks for trainee competency standards are overarching obstacles (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). The challenges surrounding gatekeeping have been well documented (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2014, 2016; Chang & Rubel, 2019; DeCino et al., 2020; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Homrich & Henderson, 2018; Rapp et al., 2018).

Gatekeeping is a complex process requiring the ability to support student development while also holding them professionally accountable Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) explored 370 CACREP-accredited counselor educators' perceptions of roadblocks impacting gatekeeping

practices. The researchers identified that despite 92% of participants reported a concern about student gateslipping, 53% still struggled emotionally to balance their empathy toward a problematic student and their gatekeeping obligations. Respondents also noted reluctance to address a trainee's incompetence for fear of appearing culturally insensitive.

Breiar and Dorrian (2010) discovered one in three participants confirmed a fear of legal actions from the student being gatekept. Due process, the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) of 1990, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 are the primary guidelines and laws related to gatekeeping issues. Due process refers to a student's right to obtain sufficient notice and a chance for defense, and FERPA (1974) is the federal law that protects the privacy of students' educational records, which ensures faculty do not discuss students' remediations or dismissal interventions with other students. See Burkholder et al. (2014), McAdams et al. (2007), and Ziomek-Daigle (2018) to review the rise of lawsuits brought against counselor education programs for dismissing students with competency concerns.

Gatekeeping Doctoral Students

Despite the importance of doctoral student training in counselor education programs and a considerable amount of research on gatekeeping in master's programs over the past two decades (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019; Foster & McAdams, 2009; Foster et al., 2014; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Parker et al., 2014; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010), there is an absence in the professional discourse examining counselor educators' experiences gatekeeping doctoral-level students. Researchers in the field of psychology have conducted multiple studies related to gatekeeping doctoral graduate students (See Fouad et al., 2009; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016, 2017; Oliver et al., 2004; Rosenberg et al., 2005; Veilleux et al., 2012). Due to the current focus on counselor

education and supervision, reviewing studies on gatekeeping practices within psychology doctoral programs is out of the scope of this study. The psychology research findings may also not reflect the views of doctoral counselor education faculty and students. In terms of the proposed study, doctoral gatekeeping is defined as counselor educators' ethical responsibility to evaluate student suitability for professional practice in any of the five main areas: counselor, supervisor, teacher, scholar, or advocate (CACREP, 2015).

Doctorate Program and Degree

The master's degree in counselor education serves as the entry-level degree in the field to become a counselor. Students entering a doctoral program in counselor education and supervision are believed to have already met the standards of an entry-level clinician (Goodrich et al., 2011). Therefore, the doctoral degree in CES is to prepare counselors for leadership in the profession within a variety of roles including supervision, teaching, research and scholarship, and leadership and advocacy, as well as counseling practice (Bernard, 2006; CACREP, 2015; Goodrich et al., 2011; Sackett et al., 2015). When applying for and entering a doctoral-level program, it is typically assumed that the student has achieved the competencies of an entry-level clinician and has met the requirements of a CACREP accredited master's program (Goodrich et al., 2011).

Doctoral students in CACREP-accredited programs are training to gain advanced knowledge and skills in five main areas: counseling, clinical supervision, teaching, scholarship, and leadership (CACREP, 2015). Faculty members' ability to manage each of these professional identities allows them to function as gatekeepers in the educational and training environments (DeDiego & Burgin, 2016). Therefore, it is important for doctoral preparation programs to prepare their students for the multidimensional role of gatekeeper as future counselor educators

(Rapp et al., 2018). CACREP (2015) provides specific standards regarding professional orientation, courses, and internship experiences and requires that doctoral admissions determine applicants' "fitness for the profession, including self-awareness and emotional stability" (CACREP, 2015, p. 38). However, similar to master's programs, there are no defined benchmarks related to professional competence (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019).

Doctoral Students

The American Counseling Association (ACA) *Code of Ethics* (2014) indicates doctoral students act as gatekeepers when functioning in the role of counselor educator or supervisor and defines gatekeeping as "the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students' competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate" (p. 20). Consequently, the learning of gatekeeping tasks is essential for doctoral students to assume the roles of future faculty in counselor education programs (Rapp et al., 2018).

Doctoral students enrolled in CACREP-accredited programs are required to learn, understand, and demonstrate professional identities as educators, supervisors, clinicians, researchers, and leaders (CACREP, 2015; DeDiego & Burgin, 2016; Rapp et al., 2018). Consequently, multiple roles and relationships are unavoidable as a doctoral student in counselor education and supervision (Dickens et al., 2016). CES faculty must prepare doctoral students in each of the roles and responsibilities expected of a future faculty member (Rapp et al., 2018).

Dickens et al. (2016) used interpretive phenomenological analysis to investigate doctoral students' current experiences with multiple roles and relationships. Participants included 10 counselor education doctoral students in different stages of their studies but had completed at least one year in their CACREP-accredited program. During the interviews, all respondents

reported insufficient clarity around their defined roles, responsibilities, and relationships in their programs. One participant commented, “It would be really nice to have that clear discussion about that change in roles” (p. 242). A theme of wanting increased open, ongoing conversations with faculty about the existence of multiple roles and expectations appeared in the study. While the participants noted distress from role confusion and apprehension of expectations, they also recognized their difficult experiences as an essential part of their personal development and process of forming their identities as potential counselor educators.

Considering the various roles doctoral students assume relevant to the five CACREP learning outcomes, previous research has looked at identity, development, and experience in these areas. For example, Dollarhide et al. (2013) applied grounded theory to explore the professional identity development of 23 counselor education doctoral students (ten first year students, five second year students, two students after comprehensive exams, and six individuals after completing their dissertations). Participants reported increased understanding of the multiple roles with practical experiences. The researchers indicated the transformational responsibilities encountered by doctoral students include the combination of research identity, supervisor identity, teacher identity, clinician identity, and student identity. While these identity roles are warranted and essential, the study did not mention aspects of gatekeeping.

Brown (2013) conducted a content analysis on electronically accessible policies used by 58 CACREP-accredited doctoral programs to explore how problematic behavior was defined, assessed, and remediated. Data sources included publicly available program handbooks, university catalogs, and problematic behavior assessment tools. The findings confirmed that the doctoral programs used various language to define and describe problematic behavior and appear to rely on predominantly subjective ways of evaluating problematic behavior. Additionally,

remediation procedures varied across programs. The researchers pointed out their concern about how many programs had already developed the remediation plan before meeting with the student based on possible consequences of due process. Common remedial interventions included personal counseling, more supervision, taking time off, reduced clinical hours, and dismissal.

Gatekeeper Training and Role Conflict

Doctoral students report struggling with not knowing how to gatekeep, yet they feel pressure to evaluate supervisees, knowing they are evaluated on their performance as evaluators (Corley et al., 2020). One aspect of gatekeeping that has been researched with doctoral students is clinical supervision. For instance, DeDiego and Burgin (2016) explored the literature on doctoral students' gatekeeping practices as university supervisors-in-training. The authors provided a case example to illuminate skills gained and challenges encountered by doctoral students when supervising master's students during practicum and internship. The authors recognized a clear need for doctoral students to receive more training and opportunities to perform gatekeeping tasks like evaluation and remediation. Doctoral students' awareness of their role in executing a supervisee remediation plan is important. Even though a supervision class may provide information on similar concepts, Rapp et al. (2018) argued using supervision coursework as training and depending on consultation instead of receiving formal preparation could involve substantial risks. Especially since DeDiego and Burgin (2016) noted most new doctoral students do not have the chance to officially take part as an evaluator or gatekeeper in an educational setting.

Along with exploring supervisor identity development, Frick and Glossoff (2014) used focus groups to examine 16 doctoral students' experiences and feelings of competence as supervisor-trainees. All participants reported uncertainty about working in the 'middle tier,'

which describes the position of supervising counselor-trainees while also being supervised by faculty. The respondents also expressed worries about their role when remediation plans were required and expressed the desire for better preparation in identifying critical events. Thirteen of the 16 doctoral students expressed interest in being part of the remediation process of their supervisees in collaboration with faculty (Frick & Glossoff, 2014).

In a similar study, Gazzola et al. (2013) interviewed 10 student supervisors who recently completed their first year of doctoral studies in a counseling psychology program. Results confirmed students' challenges in managing gatekeeping functions of supervision. Participants described regularly questioning how to evaluate supervisees' competence when there were no clear indicators to assess lower limits of competency. The participants appeared unanimous in pronouncing that clearer expectations and opportunities to debrief help develop their supervisor identity. Parallel to Rapp et al.'s (2018) argument, these researchers agree that program curriculum is important but cannot provide all potential supervision scenarios and events.

Limited research exists regarding the development of doctoral student's gatekeeper identity (Rapp et al., 2018). Doctoral students are less experienced than faculty members but "have the same ethical obligations as counselor educators, trainers, and supervisors" (ACA, 2014, p. 14). Counselor educators have described elements of gatekeeping to be challenging (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brear et al., 2008; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Gaubatz & Verga, 2002). It is reasonable to assume doctoral students may also struggle transitioning into this intricate role.

Doctoral Peers with PPC

Almost all counselor research exploring trainee's PPC has focused on the impact of the student's behavior on clients within master's programs. Yet, concerns of PPC among counselor

education doctoral students appear more significant due to doctoral students' roles and close interactions with master's students, supervisees, peers, clients, and faculty (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). Although there is limited research on the process of gatekeeping doctoral-level students, one study attempted to address the phenomenon of students with PPC issues in doctoral programs (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). Additionally, several other studies have addressed a related phenomenon of post-master's competency issues from peers' or colleagues' perspectives: licensed counselors' supervisees and coworkers (Jorgensen et al., 2017; Olson et al., 2016) and counselor educators' colleagues (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015).

Brown-Rice and Furr (2019) explored the impact, prevalence, types, and knowledge of peers' PPC among 345 doctoral students in various stages of their programs. Their quantitative study utilized the Problems of Professional Competency Survey-Doctoral (PPCS-D) to collect their data (see Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013). Brown-Rice and Furr's (2019) results indicated a majority (68%) of doctoral students observed peers with PPC in their program and were negatively influenced by peers' dispositions, with approximately half reporting feelings of resentment. Just a little over half (53.4%) of the participants noted that their faculty did review their program's gatekeeping protocol on how doctoral students with PPC were addressed, and less than one-quarter (21.2%) reported knowing what steps to take to intervene with a classmate exhibiting PPC. Overall, most wanted to know more about how to recognize (75%) and respond (83%) to a peer with PPC. Although almost all participants thought it was the faculty's duty to be aware of peers' PPC (97.8%), the students' responses on if they thought being aware of peers with PPC was their responsibility, a sizeable percentage of responses were "neither disagree or agree" (31%), which could illustrate doctoral students' uncertainty about their role in attending to peer PPC.

The results of Brown-Rice & Furr's (2019) study echo previous findings that doctoral students want clear steps for reporting peers (Parker et al., 2014) and rates of PPC observed among master's-level students and faculty (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2016; Foster et al., 2014). However, Brown-Rice and Furr's (2019) study is the first to comprehensively investigate this issue at the doctoral level. These findings, coupled with previously reported PPC and rates of gateslippage, highlight the significance of the gatekeeper role: to only admit and graduate students with suitable personal and professional competence, since students who slip past the gate can have a significant impact on their peers' experiences.

Conclusion

In the past two decades, researchers have examined the following aspects of gatekeeping: student selection; retention; remediation; policies and procedures; and experiences of faculty members, counseling students, and clinical supervisors (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2016; Foster & McAdams, 2009; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Homrich et al., 2014; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Parker et al., 2014; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Although these areas of study are needed to address the complex facets of the gatekeeping process, a noticeable lack of research examining how faculty experience gatekeeping doctoral students is evident. In response to Brown-Rice & Furr's (2019) suggestions for future research, the current study will offer a more in-depth understanding of how counselor educators make sense of their gatekeeper role in relation to addressing PPC in doctoral students.

A gap in the literature examining doctoral-level gatekeeping practices could theoretically result in underprepared future counselor educators and leaders in the profession. The assessment of doctoral students' competency is important as they have a large impact, potentially with even more reach than master's students, since they not only can work with clients but act as teachers,

supervisors, researchers, and leaders in their programs (Dollarhide et al., 2013). Ineffective future faculty could also lead to more gateslipping of master's students, which in turn impacts future clients.

Overall Summary

The purpose of Chapter 2 was to critically review and summarize two decades of gatekeeping research in counselor education. This chapter introduced readers to the counselor education field through a review of gatekeeping literature in the context of master's and doctoral programs, highlighted strengths and weaknesses within the key contributions to the field, and presented an argument demonstrating why the proposed study will make a useful contribution to the profession. This review of literature clarified issues relevant to gatekeeping, PPC, models of evaluation, legal considerations, and remediation.

Previous research has yet to address counselor educators' perceptions and experiences of gatekeeping doctoral students. The current study is designed to fill this void by increasing our understanding of faculty members' experiences of gatekeeping doctoral students. This focus is important because research in this area could result in less doctoral students gateslipping, which could lead to more prepared and competent future counselor educators, supervisors, master's trainees, and most importantly, mental health counselors. The proposed methodological and procedural approaches are described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In the previous two chapters, the researcher reviewed and synthesized the existing literature on gatekeeping in counselor education, clarified the implications of scholarly gaps in these practices in doctoral programs, and proposed a study to examine how counselor educators understand their experience of gatekeeping doctoral-level students. In this chapter, descriptions of the research design, conceptual framework, participant selection, data collection, analysis, and trustworthiness are outlined. Each of these methodological procedures are described in detail.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to uncover the lived experiences of counselor educators who have participated in the gatekeeping of doctoral students. The central goals of this research were to explore how counselor educators understand their experience of doctoral gatekeeping, make sense of their role as gatekeepers of doctoral students, and compare their perceptions of master's and doctoral gatekeeping. The main research question guiding the study was: "How do counselor educators experience the process of gatekeeping doctoral-level students?" The two sub-questions were: "How do counselor educators perceive their identity as gatekeepers in doctoral programs?" and "To what extent can counselor educators' accounts of doctoral gatekeeping be explained by their views of gatekeeping master's students?"

These three research questions were exploratory, process-oriented, and focused on the meaning of events, which aligns with the methodology (Smith et al., 2009). The secondary questions were viewed as theory driven and included for purposes of conceptualization. For example, the last question can be used to evaluate the existing master's gatekeeping models referenced in the literature review. These questions were not hypotheses as they did not test a theory but rather may interact with theory (Smith et al., 2009).

Research Design and Conceptual Framework

In this qualitative study, the researcher utilized an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design with a social constructivist lens to answer the previously stated research questions. The IPA framework guided the research design, method, analysis, and interpretation of findings. This section briefly details the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of IPA, basic concepts of social constructivism, and the purpose of their combined framework within the study.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA is a qualitative methodological design that emerged in the mid 1990s with a focus on exploring how individuals made sense of their significant life experiences (Smith, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The IPA research approach provides an in-depth examination of participants' lived experiences in specific circumstances by drawing on three main theoretical tenets: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). The phenomenological view was based on the work of multiple philosophical writers throughout history (see Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology was originally formulated by philosopher Edmund Husserl as a method of conducting qualitative research (Wertz, 2005). Husserl's work informed IPA researchers to focus centrally on the process of reflection, which is commonly known as bracketing (Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutics is the second theoretical foundation underlying IPA, which is defined as the theory of interpretation (Smith, 2004, Smith et al., 2009). The interpretative analyst is explained by Smith et al. (2009): "The IPA researcher is engaged in a double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (p. 3). This process emphasizes the researcher's duality and amplification of

meaning. The third theoretical perspective guiding IPA is idiographic, which focuses on the particular as opposed to the general (Smith, 2004). Due to the complex role of gatekeeping and the aim to explore this process in detail in a specific context, an IPA design was most applicable for the current study (Smith & Osborne, 2008).

IPA was utilized to examine the similarities, differences, descriptions, and interpretations of experiences across the sample (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). Instead of only emphasizing the similarities in participants' accounts with generalizations, an IPA approach allowed this researcher the ability to thoroughly highlight and value each participant's voice (Smith, 2004). This researcher aimed to contribute to the qualitative exploration of how participants make *meaning* of their gatekeeper identity at the doctoral level (Hays & Singh, 2012). To understand counselor educators' experience of gatekeeping doctoral students in a holistic manner while honoring the complexity of meaningful social interactions, an IPA approach was most appropriate for the current study.

Social Constructivism and IPA

A social constructivist paradigm provided the underlying conceptual framework for this study. Social constructivism is a belief system that claims knowledge is an outcome of subjective language and communication (Hays & Singh, 2012). Social constructivists argue that an experience is not individually formed but instead cocreated by relationships with people and open to interpretation (Cottone, 2001). According to Hays and Singh (2012), these social interactions lead to the construction of knowledge and contextual or cultural events may also influence these interactions. The researcher utilized this philosophical framework as a lens to view participants and understand the overall research process.

As explained by Hays and Singh (2012), the five core philosophies of science embedded within this paradigm were used to help construct the current study on doctoral gatekeeping. The *ontology* of the social constructivism approach involved recognizing gatekeeping as a relative construct that can be understood only within the social and relational context of the participants experiencing it. Thus, multiple realities of gatekeeping exist, and each narrative fluctuates with unique experiences. *Epistemologically*, an understanding of doctoral gatekeeping is constructed jointly with the participants and the researcher, resulting in a general working knowledge of the phenomenon. In terms of *axiology*, the participants' and researcher's beliefs, values, and experiences are important and influence the research process. The *rhetoric* emphasizes how the study's findings largely reflect participants' voices and respect individual differences. Lastly, the *methodology* was considered relevant and established trustworthiness.

In Cottone's (2001) social constructivist model of ethical decision-making, he emphasized the factors of collaboration and systems in counseling. The researcher described how individuals base their decisions on external social factors instead of internal motivations. For instance, if a faculty member determines whether or not to gatekeep a doctoral student's behaviors, social constructivism explains how the counselor educator is tied to a social and cultural system (e.g., clients, students, faculty, program institution, CACREP) when making their choice. According to Cottone (2001), "a decision is never made in a social vacuum" (p. 40).

There are multiple interrelationships between social constructivism and IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Complimentary to IPA, context and interpretation are key factors of social constructivist principles (Guterman & Rudes, 2008). According to Guterman and Rudes (2008), "From a social constructivist perspective, ethical codes are responsive to context, are culturally dependent, and are always local" (p. 137). A social constructivist approach allowed the researcher to interact

with the participants while discovering their unique, subjective realities as gatekeepers of doctoral students (Hays & Sing, 2012). Similar to principles of IPA, researcher objectivity is impossible, and subjectivity is something that should be readily acknowledged and valued (Cottone, 2001). Collaboration between the researcher and participants in defining, understanding, and interpreting the research leads to increased transparency and advocacy throughout the process.

Procedures

A research proposal application was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at North Dakota State University with a description of the study and a sound rationale for soliciting participants (See Appendix A). The accepted protocol emphasized participant safety, data security, potential benefits and risks, and how the results will add to the knowledge base of the counseling profession. Information in the general protocol was included in the informed consent for participants to review. A revised IRB protocol was submitted and accepted with a modified sampling procedure to obtain an adequate number of participants for the study (see Appendix B).

Sampling Methods

Following IRB approval, participants were first identified via purposeful homogeneous sampling with requested assistance from the researcher's professional network of faculty and recruited through a professional counselor education and supervision email listserv. Nonrandom, purposive homogenous sampling was the most appropriate for intentionally selecting individuals with certain characteristics related to the phenomenon of interest, which was doctoral gatekeeping (Sheperis et al., 2017). This allowed the researcher to obtain narrative data from information-rich sources. Convenience sampling was not appropriate for this study as it was

necessary for participants to have specifically engaged in gatekeeping doctoral students, which is not the case for all counselor educators (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Criterion sampling is a form of purposeful sampling that ensures all participants are selected based on the fact they have experienced a similar phenomenon (Sheperis et al., 2017). With IPA, participants are chosen because they represent a perspective rather than a population (Smith et al., 2009). Due to the idiographic principle of focusing on specific individuals in a particular context, IPA employs small, homogenous sample sizes (Smith, 2011). Hence, quality over quantity is preferred for sample size with this approach. Based on the researcher's novice experience with IPA and goal of obtaining in-depth and detailed accounts, the goal was to obtain a sample of between three and six participants (Smith et al., 2009). The literature identifies this as an adequate sample size to provide significant points of similarity and difference across participants (Miller et al., 2018; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Ultimately, five individuals were recruited and participated in the study, aligning with IPA and promoting the rigor of the study.

Participant Inclusion and Recruitment Methods

Participants were suitable for inclusion in this study if they: (a) were at least 18 years old, (b) identified as a faculty member in a doctoral CACREP-accredited counseling program, (c) had completed at least one year as a counselor educator in a doctoral program, and (d) had experiences of engaging in gatekeeping or remediating doctoral-level students. There was no exclusion of gender, ethnicity, or race. A CACREP-accredited institution was selected as a criterion based on CACREP's (2015) standards specifically promoting professional competencies of their students with faculty identifying as gatekeepers along with the emphasis placed on the five core areas of doctoral knowledge. In IPA, participants are viewed as

experiential experts on the topic being studied (Smith et al., 2009). The goal was to find a small group of counselor educators who were comparable in terms of employment factors, but most importantly, all acknowledge and engage in gatekeeping practices directed toward doctoral-level students.

Potential participants were identified through a nomination process. The researcher e-mailed all faculty members from one Midwest counselor education program in the United States, provided the definition and a description of doctoral gatekeeping, and asked them to identify up to three counselor educators who meet the inclusion criteria and who they believe may have experienced the gatekeeper role at the doctoral level (See Appendix C). The nominators were encouraged to contact these referrals with a provided email script informing the suggested counselor educators of the study and the researcher's e-mail address for follow-up contact or interest in participation. (See Appendix D). Nominators' names were not collected to maintain their privacy. Interested individuals emailed this researcher and were answered using an initial contact email response (See Appendix E). After obtaining only one participant through the nomination process, the method was modified to simple purposive sampling after IRB approval. The researcher obtained permission to email the Counselor Education and Supervision Network (CESNET) listserv (See Appendix F). Four additional individuals reached out to the researcher with interest in participation and were included in the study.

Data Collection

The researcher was considered the key instrument of this study as the collector and interpreter of the data (Hays & Singh, 2012). The primary method of data collection was individual participant interviews. When interest was indicated by an individual, the researcher emailed the informed consent for them to review the nature and purpose of the study, the rights

of the participant, and measures to protect their identity (See Appendix G). Once a participant responded with verbal consent and an interview time was scheduled, they received a copy of the interview questions (See Appendix H).

Individual Interviews

Participants were invited to participate in a 60 to 90-minute interview to discuss their in-depth experiences and perceptions of gatekeeping doctoral-level students. The primary goal of an IPA researcher is to gather rich, detailed, and first-person accounts of experiences phenomena under investigation (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). As recommended by Smith et al. (2009), a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions was utilized to elicit participants' detailed stories, thoughts, and feelings about their experience gatekeeping doctoral-level students (See Appendix H). This list of questions and prompts served as a guide during the interview, and the flexible design allows questions to be added or modified based on the participants' responses (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher provided space and time for participants to speak freely and reflectively and ask them to expand or clarify relevant issues for an increased opportunity for rich responses (Jalongo & Saracho, 2016). The interview questions were informed by the study's research questions and aimed at reflecting on the significance of participants' gatekeeping experiences. The questions were peer reviewed to enhance trustworthiness (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The researcher conducted interviews via Zoom, an online video conferencing system. Everyone chose their preferred private setting with secure internet. A comfortably familiar, safe, a reasonably quiet and free from interruptions space was recommended to the participant. Before starting the interview, the researcher provided the written informed consent, verbally reviewed confidentiality and anonymity, and addressed immediate questions or concerns. After the

participant verbally reported understanding and agreement of the informed consent, the interview began. In line with the emergent design of qualitative research, probing and clarifying questions were asked to allow variation depending on the participant's unique response (Hays & Singh, 2012). Participants were asked if they agreed to be contacted for any follow up or additional clarifications if needed. Participants were reminded that their involvement is voluntary, and they could choose not to participate or end their participation at any time without risks or consequences. The researcher periodically took field notes and recorded observations during and after the interviews (see Appendix I). An informal debriefing occurred at the end of the interview (Smith et al., 2009).

Participants

Demographic information was collected from each participant during the individual interview to provide a detailed description of the participants' unique characteristics. Participant profiles were compiled from information provided by participants' responses to specific questions that arose at the beginning of the initial interviews and from additional material gained both verbally and nonverbally throughout the duration of data collection. Limited demographic questions were gathered to protect people's privacy. General information such as their years of experience and job title were obtained (See Appendix H). Consequently, the individual profiles aided in presenting the data in a narrative context of the specific participant (Sheperis et al., 2017).

Safety and Security Measures

A signature waiver was obtained as a precaution to further protect the participants' identities as no additional paperwork links them to this study. All data was de-identified and every effort was made to safeguard participants' confidentiality and privacy. Participants'

interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. The audio recordings were deleted from the recorder after being transferred to a password protected computer, and then permanently deleted after data analysis. Immediately following the interviews, the researcher logged impressions to create memos of their thoughts, feelings, and reactions regarding the participants' disclosures (see Appendix I). Next, the researcher transcribed all interview data verbatim into text format. Interviews were transcribed in combination by the researcher and a professional transcription service and confidentiality was maintained through a privacy agreement (See Appendix J).

All transcriptions were page numbered and all identifying information altered or removed to protect confidentiality. The researcher journaled throughout the duration of data collection and analysis and recorded observations, insights, feelings, and questions as they occurred. Participants were assigned pseudonyms for anonymity and based on their preferences. When participants' comments described unique gatekeeping situations, brackets and ellipses were used in their supporting quotes to protect their identities. All identifying information was altered or removed for anonymity (Smith et al., 2009). All recordings and transcriptions were kept in a secure cabinet in the researcher's home for the duration of the study and will be kept for five years beyond the successful defense of their dissertation. The researcher will destroy the data five years after the dissertation defense to follow ACA's (2014) ethical guidelines. Data collection occurred for approximately three months.

Data Analysis

The researcher used IPA to systematically analyze the data and identify emerging codes and themes. To align fully with IPA's approach, each participant interview was "examined independently and thoroughly for themes before moving on to explore patterns between cases" (Miller et al., 2018, p. 246). The researcher prioritized illuminating ways in which participants'

experiences were similar and different throughout data analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The goal of the analysis was not to present generalizations but rather to identify the essential lived experiences of participants. The fluid method of data analysis and identification of themes was guided by Smith et al. (2009) and adapted from the works of Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), Hays and Singh (2012), and Miller et al. (2018).

Prior to analysis, the researcher reviewed IPA writings and consulted with researchers who have previously utilized this method. The researcher's goal was to ultimately go beyond a descriptive level of analysis by examining what the participants said and did to understand and interpret their meaning, attitudes, and values (Jalongo & Saracho, 2016). Overall, a detailed case analysis of each participant was performed with a subsequent micro-analysis of similarities and differences across cases (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher analyzed the data with a heuristic framework by following Smith et al.'s (2009) six-step, multidirectional process. This IPA approach began with reflective engagement of the participant's account and ended with an account of how the researcher thought about what the participant was thinking, which illuminated the double hermeneutic. The first participant's data analysis was completed on physical paper, and the remaining four were all completed electronically.

Step One: Reading and Re-Reading

During the first step, the researcher listened to the first participant's audio recording two times. Next, the researcher read the participant's printed transcript multiple times without making any notes. At this point, the researcher was fully immersed in the raw, original data of the narrative. Any preconceptions or assumptions that initially appear while listening or reading were bracketed in a notebook to maintain an open mind (Smith et al., 2009). Next, the researcher listened to the audio recording a third time while following along with the printed words.

Step Two: Initial Noting

The second step involved the most time and detail as observations on the data were recorded on the explicit content in addition to ideas about their meaning (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher began by highlighting or underlying all significant or interesting expressions and listed descriptive (*emic*) or interpretative (*etic*) words and phrases that appeared to accurately summarize what the participant was saying (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). For example, when a statement illustrated an experience of not knowing how to define a gatekeeping issue, the researcher uses the descriptor “unclear.” This process is referred to as *horizontalization* (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The researcher generated a comprehensive and detailed set of notes by including additional types of exploratory comments, as suggested by Smith et al. (2009). Linguistic notes pointed out how specific language was presented. For example, these notes signified metaphors, tone, rate of speech, or laughter. Conceptual comments emphasized interpretation and other questions that were posed while reading. Lastly, deconstructive remarks focused on comprehending participant’s words and meanings in and out of context. Different colored pen and highlighters were used to differentiate the type of note. All initial comments, phrases, and key words were documented in the right margin (Smith et al., 2009).

Step Three: Developing Emergent Themes

Next, the researcher transformed their detailed and comprehensive notes into emerging themes for that single case. This involved reducing this initial list of phrases and notes by removing redundant or vague expressions in the right margin. The remaining unique concepts were termed as the codes (meaning units) of the experience. Codes are segments of text that each contain one main idea (Hays & Singh, 2012). These remaining emergent themes were

documented in the left margin. The themes directly represented and reflected the participant's and researcher's understanding of the participant's experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Step Four: Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes

During the fourth step, the researcher copied the left margin codes into a typed list of themes. They were cut and pasted into separate sections of a word document to see how they related to each other using spatial representation and color-coded noting. Any opposite themes were on the far ends of the document and examined through polarization. Subsequently, related codes were placed or grouped into categories through abstraction and similar codes are collapsed into core themes and sub-themes through subsumption (Smith et al., 2009).

The researcher synthesized the codes and themes by locating participant verbatim examples from the transcript, the *textural descriptions*, to better understand the depth of the experience (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher documented the evolving list of themes, potential meanings, and numbered lines from transcripts for quotes to represent the integrated experiences of the participants, also known as the *structural description*. These direct quotes and meaningful participant expressions were utilized to accurately portray their unique voices and deepen interpretations (Miller et al., 2018). This led to the construction of a code book table representing the emergent themes with annotated line numbers and participants' key words and quotes (Smith et al., 2009).

Step Five: Moving to the Next Case

Next, the researcher bracketed the previous participant's themes and transitioned to the next transcript and repeat the previous four steps. At this point, the researcher bracketed the ideas that emerged from the analysis of the first case while working on the second transcript. Bracketing in IPA is viewed as cyclical process and something that can only be partially

accomplished (Smith et al., 2009), so reflective practices will continue for the duration of the study. These five steps occurred individually and separately for each participant.

Step Six: Looking for Patterns across Cases

After themes were identified for each participant, the researcher shifted and searched for patterns across cases. Overarching themes for the entire sample were examined and analyzed for similarities and differences across participants (Smith, 2004). This was done by viewing each electronic table developed in stage four and examining the possible connections, parallels, clarifications, interactions, and contrasts across the cases. The findings incorporate a master table of themes, descriptions of the findings, and utilization of the participants' words to define and describe concepts (Sheperis et al., 2017). The final table displays the super-ordinate themes for the entire sample in addition to the individual themes per participant. The findings of the IPA analysis are described as tentative and subjective.

Establishing Trustworthiness

The soundness of a qualitative study is evaluated using several standards in terms of the research design and execution (Hays and Singh, 2012; Sheperis et al., 2017). The current study used the following criteria to evaluate and establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, substantive validation, and authenticity (Hays & Singh, 2012). *Credibility* refers to the internal validity of a qualitative study, which reflects confidence in the truth of the findings (Sheperis et al., 2017). By incorporating several strategies of trustworthiness, the researcher promoted the study's rigor and credibility (Flamez et al., 2017). This study is identified as credible as the findings represent a truthful analysis of the participants' experiences with gatekeeping doctoral students. The researcher documented field notes and contact summary sheets to comprehend the interview process while simultaneously

understanding the participants' experiences. The researcher's thoughts, noteworthy observations, future questions, and the participants' presentation were captured for a more in-depth conceptualization of the participants.

Transferability represents the study's external validity, which occurred by generating coherent, insightful, and useful knowledge (Hays and Singh, 2012). Smith et al. (2009) refers to IPA's ability to offer theoretical transferability, which occurs when a reader examines the case findings from their personal viewpoint and experience and start to think of the implications for their own work. This was achieved by presenting a rich, transparent, and contextualized analysis of the accounts of the participants. Additionally, the study's *authenticity* is acknowledged through accurate theoretical representation through deliberately engaging in IPA with a social constructivism framework (Hays and Singh, 2012). The researcher provided thick descriptions of the findings by include participants' own words, context, and details as much as possible to further portray their voices and ensure the researcher's voice was not the only one heard (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Dependability is described as the consistency of findings and similar to the idea of reliability in quantitative research (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher managed an independent audit trail to provide physical proof of methodical and raw data collection and analysis including transcriptions, reflexive journal, contact summary sheets, codebook drafts, field notes, interview protocols, and quote tables. The field notes, contact sheets, and audit trail reflect dependability (Hays & Singh, 2012). *Confirmability* refers to how accurately the participants are represented (Hays & Singh, 2012). In order to decrease the likelihood of the researcher's subjectivity interfering with data collection and analysis, they clarified and explored their assumptions, opinions, biases, and motives through reflexivity to directly address

confirmability (Sheperis et al., 2017). The researcher engaged in reflexive journaling and peer debriefing to remain aware of how blind spots influence the research process (Smith et al., 2009). Unaffiliated peers or faculty members reviewed interview questions to help identify potential biases and refine wording.

Lastly, *substantive validation* refers to determining if the research is a worthwhile contribution by adding new knowledge about an existing phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher developed an overall research objective in order to answer the initial research questions: describe the key features of doctoral gatekeeping as it is understood by counselor educators engaging in this process. These features may include participants' perceptions, thoughts, feelings, or sense of self. These descriptions and findings will significantly contribute to the counseling profession and field of counselor education.

Role of the Researcher

The author of this dissertation served as the primary researcher and facilitator of the study with guidance from their dissertation chair and committee. The researcher's training as a counselor has been described by Sheperis et al. (2017) to be synonymous with a qualitative researcher's preparation. Qualitative traditions also emphasize the situation of researcher bias and the importance of addressing the researcher's role to promote trustworthiness (Hays and Singh, 2012; Sheperis et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2009). As the central instrument in for data collection and analysis, it is important the researcher recognizes their influence, motives, and expectations.

Reflexivity Statement

In order for the researcher to actively reflect on how they personally impact the research process, they must be aware of how their identity and culture directly influence their experiences.

Understanding biases, life events, values, and assumptions in relation to the research agenda is necessary to promote trustworthiness. The researcher is a 28-year-old, White, heterosexual, cisgender female working toward a doctorate in counselor education and supervision. They have spent the last ten consecutive years as a full-time student in higher education and went directly from her master's to doctoral program. The researcher currently works as a licensed professional clinical counselor at a private practice with a focus on couples counseling, trauma and EMDR, farming and rural stressors, and chronic health issues.

The researcher is originally from a small town in southwestern North Dakota and was raised on a fifth-generation family farm. She graduated alongside 16 classmates as valedictorian. The culture of education and academia has also played a very significant role in the researcher's life. As a first-generation college student and the first person in their family to get a graduate degree, they were continually encouraged to pursue their dreams and obtain their goals. The researcher's most persistent and longstanding identity is being a student. They have been attending school their entire life and actively involved in their academic institutions.

The researcher feels passionate about gatekeeping in doctoral programs for a variety of reasons, including personal experiences as a student, professional encounters as a therapist, and within collaborative educational settings as a peer. The researcher has witnessed and experienced disrupted learning and work environments due to peers' or colleagues' lack of clinical competence or personal characteristics negatively impacting others. These hindering situations have occurred at both master's and doctoral levels. Unaddressed gatekeeping and remediation opportunities with doctoral peers have led to frustrating and overwhelming situations. These compounded experiences have led the researcher to question their fit in academia.

The researcher's primary assumption underlying this research endeavor is that gatekeeping interventions in doctoral programs are limited and perceived as less important compared to master's programs. However, it is also important to acknowledge their belief that most faculty are doing the best they can and are responding to additional legal, institutional, and systematic barriers. The researcher's biases reflect the demanding nature of gatekeeping as a process and responsibility. The researcher understands these are personal assumptions and may not be shared or experienced by others. They also believe knowledge is subjective with no one universal truth. The researcher will attempt to withhold assumptions and reduce researcher bias during data collection and analysis through consistent self-reflection and evaluation of their values, attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and personal connection to the study.

Academic experiences have also encouraged additional exploration in this area. The researcher conducted a traditional phenomenological pilot study in a qualitative research methods course two years ago to examine three counselor educators' views of gatekeeping doctoral students. The preliminary findings revealed a need for clarification regarding the perspectives and process of doctoral gatekeeping.

The researcher recognizes both their insider and outsider status in terms of connection to the topic and participants. Some of their insider roles include being: 1) a doctoral student in a CACREP-accredited counselor education program; 2) familiar with policies and ethics related to gatekeeping; 3) aquatinted with remediation and dispositional concepts; and 4) knowledgeable of gatekeeping literature. Their outsider roles involve: 1) identifying as a doctoral student while participants are counselor educators; 2) being unaware of what remediation plans entail along with removal procedures; 3) not having power over or dual relationships with other doctoral students; and 4) currently practicing as a counselor while this identity is not shared by all

participants. Overall, the researcher has noticed themselves becoming more protective of the counseling field.

With a possible career in counselor education in the future, the researcher seeks a better understanding of the situations they anticipate facing as a potential faculty member. Their personal experiences as a student have left them interested in understanding how counselor educators make sense of their gatekeeper role at the doctoral level. As a current doctoral student, the researcher is also aware they have gatekeeping responsibilities related to teaching and supervising master's students. The researcher's motivation for conducting this study aligns with their imaginable future role as a gatekeeper and how this process impacts students, colleagues, clients, programs, and the public. The researcher recognizes their insider and outsider status in terms of their connection to the topic and potential participants.

Priori Limitations

It is important to note this study relies on the assumption that doctoral gatekeeping is both a process that occurs and that counselor educators have experienced. There is no existing qualitative literature describing this specific phenomenon at the doctoral level from the perspective of a counselor educator. Therefore, a potential drawback is locating participants willing to discuss a potentially novel topic. A prospective level of triangulation would involve collecting information from participants' program handbooks, de-identified remediation plans, or dispositional meetings. Due to FERPA regulations, there is uncertainty in how this would be done ethically. These limitations were important to acknowledge before moving forward with the current study.

Chapter Two highlights the barrier of unclear and inconsistent terminology within the gatekeeping literature. The fact there is no singular, recognized definition of gatekeeping,

remediation, dispositions, competency, or within counselor education may complicate the ability for effective communication between the participant and researcher during the interview process. This challenge emphasizes the importance of piloting the interview questions and avoiding leading questions. Other possible limitations related to collecting data through online interviews includes scheduling complications, technological interference, uncontrolled distractions or interruptions, and the ability to observe participants' body language. Despite these potential shortcomings, the researcher believes the proposed study's benefits to the participants, counseling profession, and general public outweigh the risks.

Summary

Chapter Three defined the methodological procedures for the study by outlining participant selection and sampling, data collection with semi-structured interviews, and IPA data analysis. The potential limitations and strategies of trustworthiness were also described. The overarching goal of the proposed study is to gain a deeper understanding of counselor educators' experiences of gatekeeping doctoral-level students. An awareness of faculty's process and perception of gatekeeping in doctoral programs is critical as doctoral students are the next in line as gatekeepers and future counselor educators.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter briefly reviews the study's methodological procedures, describes the research participants, and presents the comprehensive findings of the dissertation study. The purpose of this study was to allow counselor educators to share their stories and voice their first-hand accounts of doctoral gatekeeping. These accounts spoke directly to their perceptions of their lived experiences engaging in gatekeeping functions within the context of doctoral programs. The researcher's goal was to obtain a deeper understanding of how counselor educators make sense of their experiences of gatekeeping doctoral-level students. Currently there is a dearth of literature regarding counselor educators' views and feelings about their gatekeeper role in doctoral programs. Thus, an awareness of faculty's process of gatekeeping in doctoral training programs is important for the counseling field as doctoral students are next in line as future counselor educators.

Research Questions and Goals

The findings of this study were guided by one central research question and two sub-questions. The researcher constructed the following objectives to aid in defining and answering the research questions:

1. How do counselor educators experience the process of gatekeeping doctoral-level students?
 - a. *Objective:* Describe how counselor educators understand and perceive the gatekeeping process within doctoral programs.
2. How do counselor educators perceive their identity as gatekeepers in doctoral programs?

- a. *Objective:* Examine how counselor educators make sense of their role as gatekeepers of doctoral-level trainees.
3. To what extent can counselor educators' accounts of doctoral gatekeeping be explained by their knowledge of gatekeeping master's students?
 - a. *Objective:* Clarify counselor educators' experiences of gatekeeping doctoral students in comparison to their understanding of gatekeeping master's students.

Overview of Research Methodology

Procedures

In line with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research design, the researcher used non-random, purposeful sampling to obtain a small and realistically homogenous group of five participants (Larkin et al., 2019). During data collection, the researcher used a semi-structured interview guide to allow for flexibility and rapport development when meeting with the individual (See Appendix H). Some of the open-ended questions participants were asked involved them sharing one of their most memorable doctoral gatekeeping experiences, describing how their gatekeeper role impacts their relationships with students, and discussing their internal reactions related to making gatekeeping related decisions. The researcher also utilized probing questions such as “Can you tell me more about what you were feeling or thinking?” to explore participants' experiences in greater depth and extract detailed accounts for clarity (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). To increase confidentiality the researcher obtained a signature waiver, and participants chose pseudonyms for anonymity.

Data Analysis

The unit of analysis was based on how the researcher made sense of the participants making sense of their world and lived experiences (Larkin et al., 2019). Each participant was viewed as an individual case and analyzed at an idiographic level. Data analysis proceeded with a cross-case analysis of all participants. This was repeated for each participant's interview. Further analysis then focused on thematic development across cases. A set of themes representing the multiple perspectives of the five participants was generated.

To aid in the development of the overarching super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes, the researcher utilized analytic strategies offered by Larkin et al., (2019) which work to draw out patterns of meaning across participants. Reviewing these tactics helped the researcher illuminate patterns of convergence and divergence among the participants. For example, the *Hierarchy of harm in gateslipping* subtheme was developed using the “conflict of perspectives” strategy, which points out clear disagreements between participants. Additionally, the *Who let the docs in? Screening for goal congruence* subtheme theme was identified through the “lines of argument” tactic by providing a narrative of the structural and procedural aspects gatekeeping and counselor education preparation. The *Experiential learning as gatekeeper training* subtheme was identified through “conceptual overlap” since the participants all noted a lack of training while the researcher connected the implicit undertones in their stories.

Participants

All participants ($N = 5$) met the study's inclusion criteria and were therefore over the age of 18 and counselor educators working in a doctoral CACREP-accredited counseling program for at least one year with experiences gatekeeping doctoral-level students. They all indicated currently working with both master's and doctoral students. Based on the focus of this study, in-

depth demographics were not gathered such as age, gender, or ethnicity. Some participants provided that information voluntarily throughout their interview. For example, all participants referred to their gender identity at some point during their interview. Two participants identified as males and three identified as females. Three participants acknowledged themselves as white and two did not state their ethnicity. Their years employed as a counselor educator ranged from five to 30 with a mean of 16.2 years. They all worked at different CACREP-accredited programs and public universities. Using the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) regions, three participants were from the Southern ACES, one from the North Central ACES, and one from the Rocky Mountain ACES. Participants chose a pseudonym for confidentiality. A brief summary of participant demographics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Yrs. Exp	Rank	Program Faculty Role	ACES Region
Jack	Male	27	Full	Coordinator	SACES
Moana	Female	5	Assistant	N/A	RMACES
Krys	Female	13	Full	Director	SACES
Dean	Male	30	Full	Chair	SACES
Claire	Female	6	Assistant	CSI Chapter Advisor	NCACES

Notes. Yrs. Exp = Years working as a counselor educator. For program faculty role, participants' responses were recorded verbatim.

Findings: Participant Profiles & Individual Themes

The results of the study were derived from individual interviews conducted with five counselor educators regarding their experiences and perceptions of gatekeeping in doctoral programs. A summary of the participants' characteristics was presented before providing more detailed background information about each individual. The following participant profiles also

include their emergent individual themes. Lastly, the cross-case superordinate and sub-ordinate themes are described and outlined (see Figure 1).

The participant’s background information is included to get a better sense of each of them as individuals and counselor educators. Their major themes are highlighted with quotes, and a summary of how their individual themes are nested within the cross-case analysis is presented in Table 2. The individual cases are presented in the order in which the participants were interviewed.

Table 2

Cross-Case Analysis: Super-ordinate Group and Individual Themes by Participant

Group	Jack	Moana	Krys	Dean	Claire
Ambiguity in Gatekeeping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Who let the docs in?</i> • <i>Gates</i> 	1. Initial and dispositional gates are crucial	1. Gatekeeping, The tab that’s always open	1. Investment in growing new faculty	1. Doctoral degree as a career transformation	1. Struggle to define faculty best practices
Corrective Remediation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Challenges</i> • <i>Harm</i> 	2. Less harm equals less remediation	2. Emotional impact of remediation	2. Carrying a heavy load as remediator	2. Time limited remediation: minimal and selective	2. Emotional responses to remedial gatekeeping
Doctoral Gatekeeper Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Culture of program</i> • <i>Experiential learning</i> 	3. Relationships pave the way for feedback 4. Developmental gatekeeper approach	3. Humanistic culture and approach 4. Lack of gatekeeper training	3. Systematic & relational gatekeeper 4. Lack of faculty support	3. Gatekeeping as an act of integrity 4. Ethical and pragmatic gatekeeper identity	3. Student-centered & diverse culture 4. Consultative gatekeeper approach

Jack

The first participant, Jack, is a full professor who self-identified as a white, Christian, able-bodied male with 27 years of experience working as a counselor educator and supervisor. Jack obtained his PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision. At Jack’s R2 institution, which

is located in the Southern ACES (SACES) region, he currently acts as the program coordinator and will soon take over as director of the doctoral program. He also holds both national and state counselor licensure and the approved supervisor credential in addition to maintaining a small clinical practice over the last 30 years. Jack has worked at a total of three institutions and is finishing his first year at a new university after 20 years in his previous position. He currently works face-to-face and online.

Four individual themes resulted from a single case analysis of Jack's interview: (a) *the initial and dispositional gates are crucial*, (b) *less corrective remediation and gateslipping harm*, (c) *relationships pave the way to feedback*, and (d) *developmental gatekeeper approach*. Jack's style of gatekeeping focuses on development, feedback, and relationships. Jack sets a precedent and communicates an expectation to doctoral students "right from the get-go" at interviews and student orientation:

You're gonna get a lot of feedback, it is just part of the culture here. It is normal, it is not personal, and most of its gonna have some utility, some of it maybe not. Like I might give you some feedback that's not helpful, that's not accurate or helpful, but you won't get better if you're just deflecting everything, if you're pushing everything off. [I] encourage people to make peace with it... Some of it's not gonna feel good, right? If all we do is pat you on the back, tell you, "You're doing a great job," I don't know why we're here... So, I try to normalize that a lot...so when I make that decision to have a conversation...if I'm honest when I'm at my best is always based on what I think is useful for the student to hear.

Jack believes gatekeeping and remediation occur less at this level as doctoral students are more open to feedback, self-aware, and mature in comparison to master's students since "they've been

through a master's program and feel connected to this discipline in a way that they wanna go on and teach." Jack also commented on his responsibility as a relational gatekeeper:

... I love RCT, and I think RCT has a lot of implications for supervision, and I cannot let, completely let go of the fact that I'm gonna be assigning a grade at the end of the semester, and that could have a gatekeeping responsibility for the student, so, I mean, and I will act in that more relational way, but I also don't wanna set it up as if I don't have an evaluative role, because I do. So, I'm always mindful of that.

When Jack does have to navigate a difficult conversation, he reminds himself of his duty to the profession:

Sometimes when I know I'm about to walk into a conversation that's difficult, not one I wanna have, I go, "I owe this to this profession that I have served and that has served me so well." And that's the profession that I love. I am very proud to be a professional counselor, and anybody that puts a stain on that, on that profession, hurts us all. So, I can't control what every other program does, but I have some influence over what the program I'm teaching in at the time does.

Moana

The second participant, Moana, is an assistant professor who self-identified as a female with 5 years of experience working as a counselor educator. Moana obtained her PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision. At Moana's R2 institution, which is located in the Rocky Mountain ACES (RMACES) region, she teaches in a hybrid program. She holds an NCC and provisional counselor state license. She has worked at one institution and the program uses a cohort model with approximately 4-8 doctoral students accepted a year. Four individual themes resulted from a single case analysis of Moana's interview: (a) *gatekeeping*, "*the tab that's*

always open” (b) emotional impact of remediation, (c) humanistic culture and approach, and (d) lack of gatekeeper training.

Moana specifically addressed how her student-centered, supportive approach aligns with the nature of her faculty and department:

I think with the doctoral students, and this might just be sort of the culture of our program, but we as advisors and chairs, or at least I as an advisor and a chair, really try to build a meaningful connection with the students that I’m working with on the doctoral level so that I can really get to know them, understand what their strengths are, understand what their needs are in terms of support to be successful. What their career goals are, so that I can be trying to facilitate things that are gonna help get them in that direction.

She shared her belief that master’s and doctoral gatekeeping are “pretty different... because there tends to be different types of issues that come up.” She endorsed negative emotions regarding remedial gatekeeping aspect of her job as a counselor educator:

We don’t have too many issues that could evolve into major issues. We’re usually able to kind of “nip things in the bud” just by keeping an eye on them, without having to go into formal remediation too often, which is nice because that’s not something anybody... Like, I don’t enjoy doing those things, it’s probably my least favorite part of my job.

Moana shared that her gatekeeper role is continually developing and her use of faculty support and consultation:

There’s still like gatekeeping issues that are coming up that are new or feel different... like, it’s not a “one size fits all approach” to dealing with issues. And so, it’s hard to navigate all of these problems. It’s not like there’s a laundry basket full of problems, but

you know, when they come up and they do come up- because our students are human beings and that's to be expected. Um, it's still a learning experience because, I mean, I still have to go back to my colleagues, um, and just talk through like, 'What do I do with this?'

Finally, Moana was so impacted by feeling unprepared and inexperienced with remedial gatekeeping that she wrote academically about it. She discussed how her lack of training and experienced affected her role as a new faculty member and identity as a gatekeeper.

Krys

The third participant, Krys, is a full professor who self-identified as a white female with 13 years of experience working as a counselor educator. She obtained her PhD in Counseling and Supervision. At her institution, which is located in the Southern ACES (SACES) region, she currently acts as the director of the doctoral program. She also holds state counselor licensure. Krys is currently employed in multiple programs and teaches face-to-face and online. At the institution where she is the doctoral program director, they are in the middle of transitioning to an R2 classification.

Four individual themes resulted from a single case analysis of Krys's interview: (a) *gatekeeping as an investment in new faculty*, (b) *"carrying a heavy load" as mediator* (c) *systematic and relational gatekeeper*, and (d) *lack of faculty support*. Krys reflected on her challenging experiences being the director of a small "severely underfunded and under-supported" doctoral program going through multiple transitions:

...it's been like a really wild rollercoaster as far as managing the program... I feel I've have been in sort of like this middle position of how do I create a thriving program when

faculty don't want it? ...but I definitely came into a number of necessary transitions, and most of which people didn't want but still had to happen.

Krys's interview emphasized how impactful a program can be on the importance of gatekeeping and your ability and identity as a gatekeeper. She described the lack of a team approach in gatekeeping "Because there's still resistance to the existence of the doc program and investment in it."

When Krys was asked how she felt about the level of responsibility involved in her gatekeeper role, she replied:

Well, it's interesting because I think it's all dependent on where you are, like, where I've been for the last decade while it has a lot of positives, like, this role, um-- How do I feel? Um, burdened...Alone. Yeah...because I do have high expectations and that's not how we operate as a whole. So, I think burdened and alone in my current situation. I did not feel that in my previous job. So, I do think that it doesn't have to be that way.

When asked what keeps her going when her role feels overwhelming and burdensome, she responded:

For me, when I'm struggling with it, I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that I have to do it alone. And I become the 'bad guy' in it. And so for me, the thing that sustains me is the stuff I do outside of the program, because it feels like the program is putting me in a position, so I can't find satisfaction in that space. I do a lot of things outside the program, and I find a lot of joy in them, because I'm not in positions like that. So, that's where I find it, is, like, remembering the things that I do that aren't that.

Dean

The fourth participant, Dean, is a full professor who self-identified as a white male with 30 years of experience working as a counselor educator. Dean obtained his PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision. At Dean's R1 institution, which is located in the Southern ACES (SACES) region, he currently acts as the chair of the doctoral program. He also has a national counselor credential and does not practice clinical counseling. Dean has worked at a total of two institutions and currently works online due to COVID19. His doctoral program accepts six doctoral students per year. Four themes resulted from an analysis of Dean's interview: (a) *doctoral degree as a career transformation*; (b) *time-limited remediation: minimal and selective*, (c) *gatekeeping as an act of integrity*, and (d) *ethical and pragmatic gatekeeper identity*. Dean's approach as a counselor educator and gatekeeper is focused on his ethical and moral convictions. He also discussed his beliefs about doctoral programs, students, and the purpose of the degree. In addition to his emphasis on ethics, Dean referenced his moral responsibility and high expectations. When asked how he views his role as a gatekeeper of doctoral students, he responded:

My legacy and your legacy is not gonna be the books you write, and it's not gonna be the articles or the grant money that you bring into your institution. My legacy, as I've explained to students for years, are the number of kids and families whose lives are gonna be different because you work with them and because I've worked with you. And I am not willing to tarnish that legacy. They deserve better, and you deserve the best. That's why you're at [Southern University]. So, in that ethical and moral responsibility, if I don't think you can do this work, I will say to you, "I ain't gonna let you work on real folk. You pose a danger to them."

Dean also described the importance for counselor educators to engage in necessary student remediation to set a precedent for fellow students and peers:

Students will recognize it's a statement of the integrity of the program. And they will have already seen those behaviors or attitudes in all those informal chats that they have in the parking lot after class. They may wonder why it took the faculty so long to catch on. But they would've been heavily dismayed if the faculty hadn't done anything.

When asked how Dean would improve the process of gatekeeping at the doctoral level, if it all, he responded,

... rather than a tacet component of becoming faculty, I would make it an overt component. Because I'm not sure a lot of folks, even those on the doc level, really understand what it means to be a professor. And I think that they've gotta know that [gatekeeping is] part of it. And I think if it can be put that way, not as a way to be mean to students but as a way to honor the integrity and the future of your profession, then I think it loses some of its stigma of punishment. We grade students. We say that you can't just give them a grade 'cause they showed up. And nobody seems to take umbrage with that notion. Students willingly allow us to read their dissertations and give them feedback.

During his interview, Dean spoke a lot about his beliefs about obtaining a doctorate degree in counselor education and the rigor required. He reiterated:

I say to students, and they think I'm joking and I'm not: "If you're gonna do doctoral study for two or three years, do not get married, do not get divorced, do not have more children, have nobody die in your family. You need all the rest of this to be sitting still to do this. Also please get deliberate conscious buy-in from everybody who says they love you.

Because if you have kids or uninformed family members, they're gonna start saying to you about Thanksgiving of year three, "Aren't you done yet? You've gotta write one stinking paper. How come that thing's not done yet?" And if you have nobody in your family that's ever gone through a doc program, they have no idea what it's like.

He asserted his view that, "Everybody walks into doctoral study saying the same thing, 'I didn't know it would be this much work.' Well, guess what? It is." He summarized his beliefs about the doctoral degree and students with a metaphor, "Because doc study is not a sprint, it's a marathon. And you can't kinda stop in the middle and catch your breath."

Claire

The fifth participant, Claire, is an assistant professor who self-identified as a white female with six years of experience working as a counselor educator and supervisor. Claire obtained her PhD in Counselor Education and Counseling. At Claire's R2 institution, which is located in the North Central ACES (NCACES) region, she currently acts as the faculty chapter advisor for the counselor honor society. She holds state counselor licensure and the approved supervisor credential and does not currently practice. She has worked at a one institution. She currently works face-to-face and online. Her program typically accepts six to eight doctoral students per year, but this year they offered 11 spots due to the increased applications and qualified applicants. Four themes resulted from an analysis of Claire's interview: (a) *struggle to define faculty best practices*, (b) *emotional responses to remedial gatekeeping*, (b) *student-centered and diverse culture of training*, (c) *willingness to nurture individual differences*, and (d) *consultative gatekeeper approach*.

Claire explained her program's value and mission regarding diversity.

We're a diverse group of faculty, so we definitely bring in a diverse group of students. Typically, we'll have just as many international students as domestic students in our program, which really just opens up all of our students, our masters and doc, about how counseling is viewed around the world and increases our knowledge of what counseling is in different countries. ...here, I've been exposed to students from Turkey, Indonesia, India, Ghana, Uganda, South Africa, Australia... It's been really just so wonderful...And it's a mix of international students, students who have been practicing clinicians, and then students who are just graduating with their masters that are coming in. So it's a wide variety.

Claire noted how the lack of clarity regarding competency standards permeates all phases of the doctoral program:

I think it's interesting because we all have different standards around who we accept and we all are CACREP. Many of us are CACREP accredited, but that doesn't dictate how we teach them, how they learn, what we're looking for, what creates a good doctoral or counselor educator, right? It's different when you have a counselor educator who's only in a master's program versus a counselor educator who's doing master's and doc students. And how much opportunity are we able to give to our doctoral students to prepare them when they leave? We want our students to be able to teach master's students, but they can co-facilitate master's classes with us, but we don't have classes where they teach master's students by themselves. So, I struggle with that when that's how they can get a teaching internship.

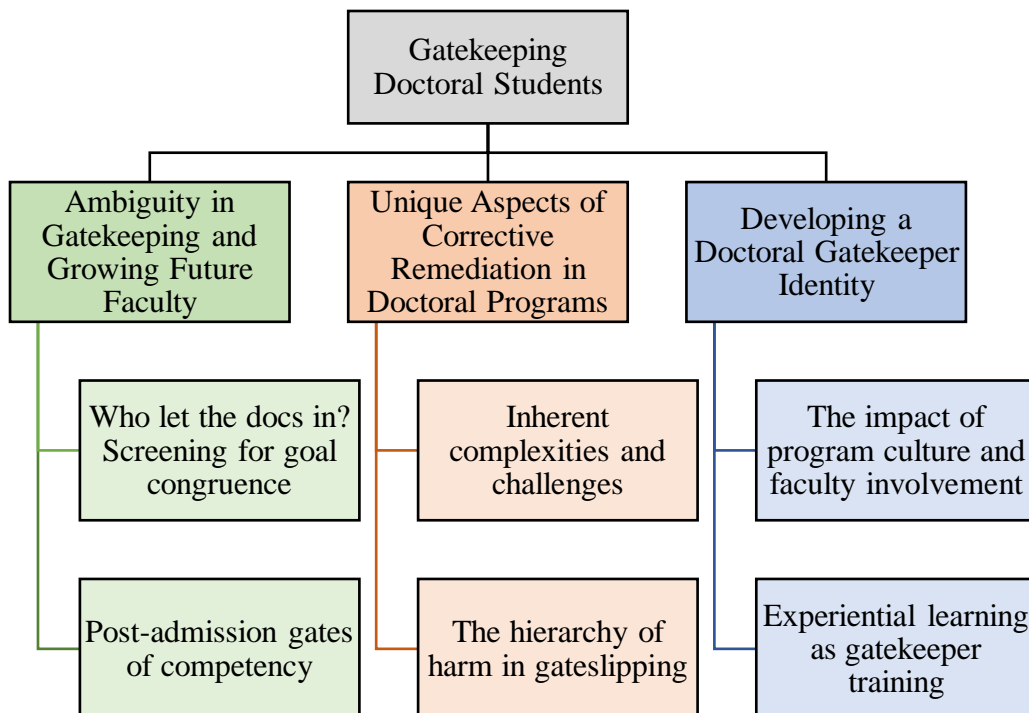
Findings: Super-Ordinate & Sub-Ordinate Group Themes

The cross-case analysis resulted in a total of three super-ordinate themes with six subthemes, as seen in Figure 1. The following superordinate theme descriptions will demonstrate in detail how they apply to each of the participants. The researcher provides evidence from each participant to support each theme, or “case within theme” (Smith et al., 2009). Each theme will be discussed in terms of how participants’ experiences converged and diverged among one another as themes were developed from both points of congruence and contrast.

The findings richly portray what it is like to be a gatekeeper of doctoral students, how the factors involved impact the gatekeepers, and how they process these experiences in different contexts. A narrative explaining how the participants’ experiences relate to one another through patterns, connections, and differences is presented. The filler words and nonverbals in participant quotes were either included or removed based on their utility to provide a rich context.

Figure 1

Thematic Map of Group Super-ordinate Themes and Subthemes



Super-ordinate Theme #1: Ambiguity in Gatekeeping and Growing Future Faculty

The first super-ordinate theme represents counselor educators' lack of clarity in training and preparing doctoral students. This super-ordinate theme reflects participants' attempts in defining and conceptualizing the doctoral training process with the overall consensus of producing future faculty members. Two prominent sub-themes emerged within the context of participants' experiences of gatekeeping and preparing doctoral students for careers: (a) *Who let the docs in? Screening for goal congruence* and (b) *Post-admission gates of competency*.

All participants expressed the view that their role is to prepare and graduate students who will become counselor education faculty. Krys specifically captured the essence of this super-ordinate theme when she stated, "I think in the right conditions it [doctoral gatekeeping] comes across as investment. And that's what I think our job is as faculty...we're growing new faculty. It's an investment into the profession." Dean expressed a similar belief and shared how faculty may have various opinions about the purpose and scope of the doctoral degree:

We had, when I arrived, nine faculty. We had nine different definitions of what a doctoral program was. And I think there was an ongoing debate among the faculty in terms of, "Is this an advanced clinical program, and/or is this a program to train supervisors, and/or is this a program to train agency directors, and/or is this a program to train faculty?" And it was the latter, last agenda that won. And [after] the faculty turnover, I think faculty now are consistent and have bought into that mission.

Moana also reflected on how she prepares doctoral students to be effective future colleagues and asks herself, "How do I create an environment where the doc students know when they apply for jobs, they're competitive?" She also pointed out the incongruent nature regarding clinical counseling and wondering about its place in post-master's counselor education: "... there

are things that come up in a doctoral program that don't directly connect to clinical experiences or don't connect clearly to counselor identity. But we're here in a counseling program...so it's like such a weird thing?" Echoing a similar experience, Claire expressed her view of preparing and graduating students who will become counselor educators. She reported, "my bias is that [they] will go into a faculty position." Claire further clarified:

My goal in walking with these students in their doctoral journey is to help create someone who's going to add knowledge to the field, whether it be through service or counseling or research or teaching. Just that... I became a counselor educator so I can give back and now I'm giving to doctoral students who then can go out into the world and help train and teach future counselors. I want to ensure that they are qualified, they're able to articulate their research interests in a clear manner, and substantiate it from knowledge, that they are able to design a class and stand in front of a class and teach it and feel comfortable...And that they're effective supervisors...

Jack had a somewhat unique perspective by stating faculty's job is to train a doctoral student "to be a counselor educator, which could include being an advanced practitioner, ...adjunct work, or ... supervision."

Participants also expressed ambivalence toward the difficulty of evaluating competencies across doctoral programs, viewing standards as vague and open to interpretation. For example, Claire pointed out how even CACREP-accredited counselor education doctoral programs have different levels of training and expectations of their doctoral graduates. She elaborated:

I don't think there's one set standard or even a "best practices" around what makes a good counselor educator because I think that's very unique. I think students would say something different than faculty who've been in the field for a long time."

Claire continued by recognizing the ambiguous nature of training doctoral students:

I always hear in my faculty meetings like, "We don't want to dictate how you train students, right?" But we have ideas around what counselor educators need to do when they leave and they're done. They need to be able to teach, research, and do service."

Krys also captured the essence of the first super-ordinate theme when she referred to the five core CACREP doctoral standards in comparison to one training area for master's students:

...the fact that we have so many areas with the teaching, research, and service, like there's so many areas and, where do you place your concern? Which one rises to the top? ...And I think that's the biggest thing... it's not like it is at the master's level where it's, "Can you serve clients competently and ethically?" It's a lot of different areas. And I think there's probably disagreement on whether things are a concern or not across different domains. Like, if somebody is just a disaster in leadership and did something inappropriate with a professional organization, is that a gatekeeping issue? I don't know. But, if I were part of that organization and brought them into it and they did that, that feels like it could be. But I think everybody calibrates that differently.

Who Let the Docs In? Screening for Goal Congruence

This subtheme speaks to participants' beliefs that the admissions interview is the most crucial gate to ensure an applicant will be a good fit in the context of the program's culture of training. The participants described the admissions process as the initial and most significant evaluative gate in doctoral programs. For example, Moana noted how COVID impacted their ability to effectively gatekeep at pre-admissions and the associated negative relational consequences:

...we didn't have that opportunity to really do that gatekeeping process in admissions the way that we normally would. Which is not just about screening out applicants to our program, but it's also about screening them in and getting them sort of ready to start. And we didn't really get a chance to prepare them ... to start in the fall. And so now we've got some issues coming up this spring because they just are all lacking that support system. Like that's the common thread is that all of these things are getting blown out of proportion because nobody has a support system in the program and they don't feel connected.

All participants discussed the importance of pre-admissions screening for an appropriate fit between an applicant's career goals and the program's mission. The participants discussed the ability to evaluate this through admission interviews. Krys explained how the structure of the interview is important:

...The questions and the process sends the vibe of 'this is professional program where you're learning to be an educator and a researcher and contributing to the field'...That approach in itself allows for gatekeeping significantly. It's just a matter of holding a line.

Krys discussed gravitating toward interview questions that determine if she would be able to "place [the doctoral applicant] with my master's students right out of the gate in a co-teaching situation? Can you be in the classroom with me or can you be side by side when we're doing supervision?" Claire echoed a similar experience of wanting to make sure they have clear professional goals. She reiterated, "It can't be, 'I want a PhD just to have a PhD', because we find that those types of students don't do well in this rigorous degree..." Similarly, Dean spoke about assessing for academic goal congruence:

Anybody that starts talking about private practice, adjunct faculty, part-time faculty – part-time faculty don't need to write. The doctoral program is designed to prepare you to add to the knowledge of your discipline. If you're not gonna do that as a career, you are exploiting the degree for personal gain without the personal responsibility.

Dean further elaborated on his beliefs about doctoral students and the purpose of obtaining a doctorate in counselor education:

And I've had some people say flat out, "I decided I don't want to be a professor." That's okay. Then you certainly don't need this program. You're not gonna survive 18 credits of research and a dissertation if this is not your future. And that comes after 30 years of experience. And I refuse to drag doctoral students through a dissertation. I wrote one.

Writing a dissertation is harder than giving birth. And the reason I say that is some people have multiple children, but I know of no one who's given more than one dissertation.

Moana shared a unique perspective by shifting from a focus on the program to instead the students' needs. She explained that is also important for the student to feel like their goals match with the program they are looking to train in:

So, like making sure our programs can help [doc students] meet their career goals.

Because that's essentially a pretty huge issue if, if they're expecting to get training that we don't [offer] ... Then we wanna make sure we know that, we're transparent about that so that we're not, we're not creating issues down the line when they're unhappy that they're not meeting expectations because they have different sets of expectations. Yeah.

So trying to figure out like career goal wise, if things are gonna be a good fit in the interview process, I think makes things a little bit easier as we go along, because then we're all starting on the same page.

All five participants indicated that doctoral gatekeeping starts during the pre-admissions process. They also all expressed a similar belief that the interview is the most crucial and effective gate at the doctoral level. For example, Jack described admission interviews as “the most important thing we [faculty] do... We gatekeep who comes into the program, because it can be difficult to get people out of the program sometimes.” Additionally, Dean compared the process at both training levels:

I also think [the interview] is critical in the same way it is on the master's level, because we have found out over the years that the therapeutic relationship accounts for more change in a client than any theory or technique. And I'm gonna posit that that assumption is equally valid for doctoral study. So if you cannot connect with some member of the faculty, ...if you hate all of them, that doesn't bode well. Who's your mentor? Who's your pseudo role model, from whom do you learn how to do this?

Ultimately, Dean provided a simple key question to ask when needing to gain clarity for doctoral admissions decisions: “Would you be willing to chair their committee?” And if nobody says yes, I ain't gonna do it. That's unfair to you as a student to get the committee here who's going, "No, I'm too busy."

Post-Admission Gates of Competency

This subtheme represents the participants' expectations and evaluations of doctoral competency after admissions. This also includes their expectations and problems of competency they experience with doctoral students, which typically presented differently in their master's students. Their view of dispositional and academic competency is briefly reviewed within the context of their lived experiences in doctoral programs. This section ends with the participants'

evaluation and training recommendations on how to help faculty better prepare doctoral students for the counselor educator role.

Regarding the most frequent competency issues observed at the doctoral level, Jack, Krys, and Dean acknowledged professional dispositions result in the most serious remedial gatekeeping whereas Claire and Moana viewed academic and skill problems as more prominent. Overall, all participants described personal dispositions as expectations of professionalism, leadership, ethical behaviors, open communication, and interacting with peers, master's students, and faculty in a respectful manner. Claire pointed out, "Our [doctoral] students have a lot of interaction with our master's students" through supervision and teaching. Jack evaluates doctoral students' ability to serve a program ambassadors and act as "a good steward of our training program as it is our professional reputation that's on the line, too." Moana's faculty designs their doctoral courses to incorporate professionalism as 20% of their course grade, "...So, if you don't get those points, then you kind of automatically don't pass the class with the grade you need to move forward in the program. And it's structured that way for a reason." All participants noted engaging in student dispositional ranking through informal evaluations and progress reviews once or twice a year.

Participants described varied experiences of dispositional issues with doctoral students. For example, Dean referred to pervasive issues of student motivation, dedication, and initiative in doctoral programs. Dean noted how students who give excuses about getting things accomplished leads to a "growing concern about their capacity to really represent the program well at the other end." Jack discussed dispositional issues as "consistent patterns" of problematic behavior. Jack noted occasionally hearing from students how they don't care about certain courses based on their career objectives. For example:

...Like they wanna teach in a regional program where there's very little research, and then they're dismissive of their stats and research courses, or they intend to be advanced practitioners, so they blow off their pedagogy class because they don't wanna teach... and I'm like, "Well you do while you're here, or don't be here...it's part of the package."

Jack believes most of the dispositional issues relates to the stress of being a doctoral student and balancing multiple responsibilities. He explained his experiences of witnessing the pressure of being in a doctoral program:

Sometimes when people get really stressed, they lose their edge a little bit, and are not very good community members... I've seen cohort groups that functioned really, really well, and I've seen some cohort groups that were just a great, big dysfunctional family. And that happens in high-stress situations...Based on this... kind of a stress response, we see people at their best and at their worst in a doctoral program.

Krys expressed a similar reaction and noted the competency concern of "inappropriateness in relationships" requiring remedial gatekeeping. She elaborated on her experiences of dispositional issues in doctoral students with a focus on cooperating with peers and master's students:

...[observing] really concerning behaviors or confrontations with peers or in the classroom and just feeling like "I can't put you in a classroom with master's students, I can't have you supervise master's students." So some of the dispositions are like, "What's happening between you and your peers because those are future colleagues. Like, if you can't function with your peers, we can't send you to another institution to have a job." And then the other part is like, "How are they with the master's students? Can they conduct appropriate supervision, understand their boundaries, follow through on their commitments to the master's students, model appropriate supervisory things? Are they

competent in the classroom? Are they reliable in the classroom? Are they congruent with like 'If I say this, I'll do this?' Do they understand the material at a doctoral level or are the master's students ahead of them in some way?"

Claire reiterated the importance of professionalism, openness to feedback, and ability to respectfully work with master's students. She gave an example of a dispositional issue she has witnessed:

How are [the doctoral students] engaging with students from a professional way that facilitates information, but also the understanding that they are learning from students? I think sometimes that's harder when they come in with this, "I am a master's level clinician, and I'm a doctoral student and you're a master's student." We've even had that come up at a site conflict where, "I'm a doctoral student and I know things because I can go out and do this counseling." They still have to do that counseling practicum. Having those doctoral students at a place where they are receiving and open to receiving that feedback from a master's level independently licensed clinician who's been counseling and practicing for two to three years. Not all of our students have that experience. So, I think that sometimes is a challenge with our doctoral students.

In terms of the academic and skill gates of competency evaluation, the participants referenced coursework, comprehensive exams, co-teaching and supervising, graduate school requirements, curriculum vitae, and the dissertation. Academically, Claire expects doctoral students to be able to think critically, read at a level to gain insight and inquiry, produce quality and synthesized writing, facilitate students' learning and growth, and present things in a cohesive, articulate manner. She explained, "As students move through our program, we are expecting them to hone their research skills and knowledge and be able to identify what they

want to study” and eventually become “experts in what they’re studying.” Moana described how her program evaluates different areas of the core CACREP doctoral standards:

[The doctoral students] have a practicum class they have to take, which is in our clinic where they get evaluated on their clinical skills...A supervision course they have to take where they do supervision with their master students and get evaluated...on those skills, and then a comprehensive exam kind of addresses more of the teaching and research areas in a formal way. Then there's co-teaching opportunities the students do where they get sort of less formal feedback and evaluation, but we're not filling out forms or things like that. We probably should, but we don't for like internship or co-teaching experiences.

Participants described various experiences of academic issues with doctoral students.

Overall, participants referred to issues as writing challenges, plagiarism, grade point average, and time management. Participants more frequently reported experiencing problems with doctoral students’ writing, specifically during comprehensive exams and the dissertation process. Moana described how she often sees doctoral students’ writing abilities not where they need to be. She discussed the importance of connecting students to resources like professional writing services or research mentorship. She noted “instead of just failing students out of the program, which serves nobody, they might have to rewrite certain questions or ... re-present their answers so we know they have the knowledge base they need to move forward into dissertation phase.”

Dean voiced his perspective on the expectation differences of master’s and doctoral students:

Master's studies is theories that you need to practice. Doc studies is theories based on philosophy. If you can't go there in your thinking, this is not the program for you. It's not

an advanced master's [degree]. What you did in your master's program got you here. It is not good enough to get you through.

Dean described a recent example of how a doctoral student's academic issue of plagiarism turned into a dispositional concern and removal from the program. He explained, "[The doctoral student's] written work was passable. There didn't appear to be a lot of originality or critical thought in it... And the student ended up ... in the doctoral comp question plagiarizing somebody's dissertation..." He noted the student was defensive and denied their claims. Dean explained how the faculty held up the two documents showing the word for word copying, and the student responded saying, "'Well, I didn't know that. Nobody told me.'" Dean continued to reflect:

"Wait a second, you're gonna be a scholar and you don't know what plagiarizing is?" ... So, what we ended up with throughout the entire process was an absolute refusal to take any kind of responsibility. 'Cause I think the faculty would've said, "Yeah, okay, let's try this again we'll change the question." But her steadfastness in claiming that we were mistaken literally ended up in her being expelled...if you're expelled on your transcript it says in big letters, "Expelled for cheating," which then calls into question any of your other coursework. She said, "Well, this isn't fair. I applied to another school, and they wouldn't take any of my doc program." I said, "That's not my problem." "Well, I wasted all this money." "Yeah, that's true." "Well, I'll sue the university." "You go right ahead and stand in line. I'm sure people are suing universities all the time."

Dean recalled another example of students inflating their clinical hours during practicum, which turned into an ethical issue. He reflected on a conversation with a student:

"Well, we're gonna be moving. I really have to get my degree." "That doesn't give you an excuse to lie." "Well, I'm not really lying." "Okay, well, how would you call it? It's a falsehood. I mean, would you do this on a billing ticket? Would you do this on a diagnostic summary? That's a criminal act." And, yeah, most of those cases, students are incredibly contrite.

To summarize, Dean wondered how counselor educators can teach doctoral students' professional self-regulation:

... I don't know how to instill...academic discipline in doctoral students. But to me, [it's] a critical competence because once you get in a faculty job, you don't even have a chair watching you. At the end of the year you go, "This is what I've done." And people go, "That ain't good enough. One state conference ain't gonna make it." So, you have to develop that discipline during your doctoral program. And it's not for the doctoral program, it's for success in your career.

Recommendations. Several participants offered recommendations on how to make evaluation, training, and preparing trainees clearer at the doctoral level. For example, Moana referred to CACREP's lack of clarity regarding their standards when asked how she would improve the gatekeeping process at the doctoral level. She provided suggestions at the accreditation and program levels in addition to acknowledging the concept of peer gatekeeping:

I think CACREP could give some more guidance in this area because they don't. Particularly the doctoral level I feel like their standards are a little more vague around things, which I get they wanna do that to give people flexibility to do what's in the best interest of their students in their programs. And then that leaves a lot of gray area for us to try to figure out and the more gray area there is the less certainty you have and the less

ground you have to stand on sometimes. And I think at our program level, like those evaluation structures we have in place could be a lot more concrete about how we're evaluating some of these things as opposed to just being open-ended and qualitative. And I know we're doing that to be very humanistic and to engage in a dialogue, as opposed to it feeling like they're taking a test or something. But I think you need that sometimes to maybe to be able to screen for different things that are coming up early on that maybe we're just not privy to, or maybe we just don't see 'cause the doctoral students in particular, there's so much that goes on because they're collaborating together on projects and they're going to conferences together and they're spending all this time outside of the program together. And that's when these issues, I think, tend to come up, not in the classroom, but when they're doing all of these other things that we're not connected to or not a part of and don't know about. Unless somebody tells us. Cause I think what happens is that it becomes the responsibility of the students to tell us about what each other is doing and that doesn't really seem fair.

Claire shared that she did not fully understand the "balancing act that faculty do" when she first became a counselor educator and how to manage the service, advising, teaching, and research. She recommended that "...there needs to be some better mentoring of doctoral students that describes every aspect. I don't know if they need to shadow someone for a day or somehow figure that piece out."

Super-ordinate Theme #2: The Unique Aspects of Corrective Remediation in Doctoral Programs

The second super-ordinate theme illustrates how participants experience and understand the process of remediating doctoral-level students. The participants described elements of

remedial gatekeeping as flexible and the process as uniquely structured. Within the context of this study, remediation is defined as part of the gatekeeping process where a participant directly intervened or implemented a strategy to help a doctoral student develop sufficient levels of professional competence. The participants also refer to remedial gatekeeping as formal or corrective. This theme illustrates participants' views of how doctoral corrective remedial gatekeeping are different from master's in terms of decision making, procedures, frequency, and difficulty. This included some participants' implicit assumptions of doctoral students compared to master's students. Additionally, the participants referred to a lack of training and preparation in performing remedial interventions. Two prominent sub-themes emerged within the context of participants' experience of remediation at the doctoral level: (a) *Inherent complexities and challenges* and (b) *The hierarchy of harm in gateslipping*.

Participants described their understanding of remedial gatekeeping and noted its function in doctoral programs. Moana defined remediation in her own words and portrayed it as a protective and supportive act:

[Remediation is] a more formal and structured process, like we have a clear issue that we've identified, and we need to make a plan about how to address it in a concrete measurable way. And a lot of times remediation happens to protect us and the student. So, like there's a clear plan to address the problem and if that's not addressed, there's a big consequence to that.

Krys explained how she decides if a gatekeeping experience turns into remediation. She noted viewing general gatekeeping conversations as opportunities for change. She clarified:

If those conversations happen and there isn't change by the time we do progress reviews, then it becomes a remediation plan. And then the plan is set up [so] if the student doesn't

do the plan, the plan fails, and then that's an exit conversation. ... But there's checkpoints along the way. So, there's opportunity to meet your marks along the way or communicate that it's difficult. So, I think setting it up so that the student has the choice of whether to make it or not make it at multiple points along the way. 'Cause I think that exit is just *crushing* [emphasis]. So, I don't feel good about that, and don't want it to happen that way.

If Claire's program has concerns about a doctoral student, additional advising or an "advisor-initiated conversation" occurs and an initial plan is created to address any deficits. She explained, "Students can also be brought in front of the whole faculty as a whole faculty review if you feel that it warrants that."

Moana's faculty decide to implement a corrective remediation plan if the doctoral student is negatively impacting others, "... either the master's students they're working with, others in their cohort, or even us a faculty..." However, if the doctoral student is only affecting themselves like not turning in assignment or getting their dissertation completed, Moana explained that formal remediation would not be necessary as the student would have natural consequences of not moving forward "until they've finished the work to be able to do so." She further emphasized this concept of self-remediation specific to doctoral programs:

It just doesn't really naturally impact anybody but that student if they don't get their dissertation done. I don't have to read it if you're not writing it. So, I mean, I'm technically your chair, I'm checking in on you, but you've got to take initiative to do things or you're gonna essentially stall out of the program 'cause the university has time limits on these things. ...there are built in natural processes and consequences if it's stuff that's only impacting that one student.

Multiple participants indicated that remedial gatekeeping occurs less often at the doctoral level. Jack specifically reported, “I probably have done 10 remedial plans with masters students for every one I've done for a doctoral student or been involved with for a doctoral student.” He further clarified:

I've only been involved in dismissing one doctoral student in my entire career, which was just a train wreck, [they] just showed up high as a kite to class first week; whereas, I've had that hard conversation [of dismissal] with I don't know how many but probably 15 first year master's students.

Moana agreed that she has “had to do a whole lot more remediation of master's students than doctoral students.” Her program takes a proactive approach with “pre-gatekeeping” conversations to decrease future competency issues. She also compared the differences in the plans of study per master's and doctoral programs:

It's not like at the master's level where they have to take... [the] same sequence of courses in a certain order. ...there's not as much of a time limit on things at the doctoral level. We have students that drop to part-time because things are too much or they take a break and come back...So we have the flexibility to be able to do that without remediation being necessary if it's just something that's impacting them.

Two participants specifically indicated engaging in less remediation at the doctoral level due to their beliefs about doctoral students. Jack stated, “We don't do nearly as much gatekeeping or remediation at the doctoral level, right? ... [because] they've already navigated a master's program.” He explained his beliefs of doctoral students and why remediation is not as needed at this level:

I think a big thing that's different with doctoral gatekeeping, it's usually by the time people have gotten to that point, they can hear feedback... I've had very few problems in my career with those conversations with doctoral students. I've had World War III a few times with master's students... It's just a different conversation with doctoral students and they can hear it, they can integrate it, they can sift through and figure out what's useful and what's not useful, and they can, and they can act on that feedback in a much better way.

Jack continued with the expectation that the doctoral interview process is “much more thorough” than the masters, leading doctoral students to be “usually stronger when they get there.” He also noted how having difficult conversations with doctoral students is easier “because we do typically sort of have different relationships with doctoral students, that's more collegial than with master students.” Jack further described his developmental versus formal remedial approach with doctoral students by “giving them the benefit of the doubt” due to the difficult nature of doctoral study. He revealed:

I'm giving this feedback from a much more developmental space than a corrective remedial place. ...I think my role is to communicate “I'm giving you this feedback because I care about you, and I think you can do better. I think you've got the potential to be better than you are right now.” It's that perfect blend of stick and carrot...I wanna be encouraging, but I also wanna say, “Hey, this particular behavior, this is something I want you to pay attention to [and] work on.”

Dean gave a different reason for why remedial gatekeeping tends to occur less at this level. He explained that when students start their doctoral program, they are assigned a temporary advisor who helps them get through qualifying exams. Next, the student's application

for candidacy is reviewed by the entire faculty both on academic competence and personal disposition. At the end of their second year, the doctoral student is evaluated on general dispositions. Dean emphasized how remediation is time-sensitive at the doctoral level:

At that point, to be honest with you, it's kinda too late. They're on their way to comps and dissertation. And your direct contact with them then becomes minimal and selective. If you're not their chair, you generally almost have nothing to do with them until somebody drops a dissertation in your lap to read.

Inherent Complexities and Challenges

This subtheme exemplifies the participants' descriptions of doctoral remedial gatekeeping as a challenging process with barriers. Within the context of this study, inherent complexities and challenges are defined as the participants' understanding of the complicated nature and potential deterrents to remediating doctoral students, which include vague professional dispositions, the undesirable emotional impact, and a lack of training in how to implement remedial interventions.

All participants described remediation as more difficult in doctoral programs. Krys highlighted her systemic worldview when she stated, "...You're probably going to ask this, but I do find that doctoral gatekeeping is much more complicated than master's gatekeeping because doc students are connected to everything in your system..." She talked about master's students' issues typically showing up early in techniques and in clinical classes where everything is taped and has an "evidence base" with dispositional and practical assessment. Krys summarized, "So it feels like master's students don't surprise me as much because you can kind of see the concern early on."

Moana expressed a similar belief that master's students' remediation issues are much easier addressed due to their objective nature. She elaborated:

... 'cause they can be addressed through some additional supervision. They're so clear cut they warrant dismissal from a program or it's an academic honesty issue where there's policy that helps guide what we do with those kinds of things...And so like academic advising usually and connecting to resources to mitigate those issues, too. So, I find the master students issues, not to minimize their issues, but they're much easier solved, or much easier navigated and managed than the doctoral students [because] when issues come up, they're pretty big issues and they're pretty complex.

Moana also shared her thoughts on how the removal of a doctoral student is often riskier and more impactful than a master's student on a program. Her views echoed Krys's regarding the systemic influence of doctoral students. She explained:

This is going to sound awful, but we have a whole lot more master's students than we do doctoral students. So, if things don't work out and we lose a master's student... I mean it's a sad thing...but we have 40 more of them. And so we're not risking like not being able to have a [doctoral] class because enrollment is not where it needs to be. But when we have doctoral students in a cohort, if things don't work out with one of them or they leave the program, sometimes it puts us in a bind because we have so few students each year that are coming into the program...So like they are maybe more of an impact overall on the program. Not that losing a student is ever not impactful... it absolutely is. But a doctoral student, there's a lot of other implications for our program when things don't work out, if you choose just to leave or have to be gatekept out of our program than it is

on the master's level, like always a sad situation, but one that's easier to navigated on the master's level.

Professional Dispositions are Abstract. Multiple participants described dealing with dispositions as “tricky.” Three participants explicitly discussed the challenge in remediating doctoral students' dispositions. They mentioned professional dispositions being difficult to define, evaluate, and measure due to their vague characteristics. Moana described her program as doing “a really awesome job” of concretely evaluating their master's students' professional dispositions. She expressed ambivalence toward their process for doctoral students with pros and cons in their ability to honor individual uniqueness:

...it's not as concrete in terms of the way that we evaluate them. It would tend to be more qualitative, more open ended...which I think in some respects is nice because it gives some flexibility to understand and accommodate things like cultural considerations and things like personalities and different ways of approaching things and professional identity and things like that. But it also sometimes leaves a bit of a gap in understanding between what we perceive to be the way that you would show us professionalism and the way the student thinks that they're showing us those things. And so there have been occasions when there's a gap between what we believe to be what they need to be doing and what they believe they need to be doing to demonstrate those particular skills.

Moana further discussed the institutional challenges in remediating a student's dispositions, emphasizing a lack of clear policies. When her program attempts to make the case that a students' dispositions are below expectations, she explained, “The University is like ‘What does that even mean?’ So you're like “Well they made this other student cry. I don't know what else to tell you.’ Universities don't really have bullying policies like the high schools do.” She

summarized these situations as “not easily solved and usually really complex issues.”

Additionally, Krys emphasized the personal experience of gatekeeping dispositional issues and described it as “a lot more painful, difficult, contentious, and it's much harder to navigate.”

Jack echoed Moana regarding the legal complexities of understanding professional dispositions. He emphasized the influence of a university’s council, which ranges from attorneys not wanting faculty to mention dispositions in remediation plans to attorneys who assert students can undoubtedly be dismissed for their dispositions. Jack discussed working with multiple university attorneys over his 27 years as a counselor educator and noted the “vast majority of university attorneys are gonna tell you, 'Either they need to flunk out, or they need to have some behavior that is inconsistent with the ethical standards of your profession.’” Jack described how it can be difficult to be “behavioral and grades-based” if it is not quantifiable but rather the doctoral student is “kind of curmudgeonly with their peers, and they're not kind to supervisees...” Jack emphasized another challenge of remediating doctoral students’ dispositions when faculty are required to reduce it down to a behavior:

I've had cases where I knew that students were towing a line until they graduated, and it wasn't gonna stick at all...Like they were just doing what they needed to do behaviorally to get through the program. There's nothing I can do about that. It's frustrating. I can light a candle for future clients, or supervisees, or students, or what have you... if there wasn't good due process policies and procedures in place, it would get abused by people... That's a real challenge in this process ...when you see a real damaging behavior with a client, it's a little easier to elevate it to a higher level of intervention than when you see somebody do some kind of boneheaded in the classroom or with an individual supervisee.

Finally, Jack described another complicated aspect of engaging in effective dispositional evaluation at the doctoral level:

Advisors will be asked to do the dispositions on a student...but I might agree to chair somebody's dissertation in my first year and not have them for class in the second year, and then I'm the one who's supposed to fill out the disposition, sure, but I have very limited contact with them?

Emotional Responses to Remedial Interventions. Three participants specifically described negative feelings associated with engaging in remedial gatekeeping in doctoral programs. Within the context of this study, remedial interventions were defined as any actions a counselor educator directed toward a doctoral student displaying problems of professional competency. The three female participants spoke in detail about their experiences remediating doctoral students as transformative and challenging events in their career. Two participants also voiced their positive experiences of successfully remediating a doctoral student. They all emphasized the negative emotional toll of the process and the impact on their wellbeing. Krys illuminated the essence of this subtheme when she spoke about her role overseeing remediations, “It *wrecks* [emphasis added] me 'cause lots of things can happen. Sometimes it goes really well, and other times it's like students ... rise up against you.” The participants described the following stories after being asked to share their most memorable or significant gatekeeping experiences working with doctoral students.

Krys recalled working with a doctoral student who was “concerning” and “not appropriate with peers.” When addressing the doctoral student, they attributed their behaviors to cultural differences. Krys explained, “When [cultural differences are] on the table, it's like, well, maybe it is? And so, I feel like I take a lot more time to just think through that.” But then there

was a time the doctoral student “lashed out” at her in class and Krys realized it was not due to cultural differences. Instead of waiting until the end of the semester, Krys described:

...We sort of expedited a conversation about remediation. And the student got extraordinarily angry and threatened to burn down my office, and it was not good. All of this stuff started happening, and we wrote a remediation plan that basically removed the student from cohort-only classes, and put the student into some of the research classes, and said, "Okay, you gotta work on some dispositional things... Here's the courses that you'll need to do to show that academic competency while you're taking care of yourself and getting some mental health support." And the student failed the stats class, and so I don't wanna say that took care of it, but it was sort of a combination of like, "Okay, if you can do that and get some help, we've got some room to talk. But if you can't do the research and you aren't gonna get help, then this is going to be over in May regardless." And that was the approach that we took. And that was really, really bad, like really bad 'cause the student was confronting me like every single time I saw them, and I was like "This isn't helping your case."

Krys felt “really nervous” during that experience since it “could either be physically threatening to me or be a potential litigation.” She further noted, “It's so hard to live through that process on the faculty side, particularly if you don't have a lot of...that's your role and you don't have collaborators in it.” Krys felt alone, isolated, hypervigilant, and unsupported during that experience. She also described it as “heavy” situation:

Like you don't want to do that to somebody. They invest their time and their energy and their money. I grew up pretty working class, so I was still super attuned to like, "Holy hell, you just spend the \$20,000 to go to school," and we're going to be like, "No, thanks.

Bye"? I took that really seriously...so I feel like I probably carry it more heavily than I should?

On the contrary, Krys also described a positive experience successfully remediating a doctoral student. She explained how the process can be “nice” when she has a difficult conversation with a student who is able to hear it. For example, she said:

I just chaired a dissertation for somebody who'd been conditionally admitted at one point and was on a remediation right from the beginning. And we have an amazing relationship because it started out really honest. And I was really supportive of their growth and process and just a couple of weeks ago they defended, and so I do think there's something really good that can come out of it. A lot of trust and investment when the conditions are right for that.

Moana recalled a significant remedial gatekeeping experience occurring early in her career that she referred to as “such a mess.” She described the doctoral student as “verbally abusive to other people in the program and bullying people.” Moana had a peer of the student come to her in tears because the other doctoral student had been “so mean and making them feel like they shouldn’t be in the program.” Moana was baffled that this doctoral student was problematic:

...like I had coffee with this person at a conference and thought they were lovely because they were just totally different around the faculty than they were with the students. And we had no idea, like they were our top ranked person for admissions and no indications of a problem until somebody was brave enough to say something to us. And then it all sort of just came out of the woodwork that all of these things had been going on for months.

Moana explained how this student was in practicum, so the faculty had a meeting with this person, and they “were essentially like, ‘Well, you all are just discriminating me,’ and like, ‘This is not [true] everybody just hates me,’” and did not take any responsibility. Moana explained her thought process:

And so we ran into this really difficult decision of like, what do we do? Because engaging in a remediation plan means that this person can stay and potentially cause more damage to others around them, which doesn’t seem appropriate. But procedures wise, our hands are a little bit tied in terms of our ability to just cut them from the program, because all universities have procedures in place about dismissing students from programs and the things that need to happen before that is in place.

Moana’s faculty conferred with the university legal counsel, dean, and a committee, and “the decision was made for us to essentially fail them in their classwork” by taking away 20% of their points in their classes for lack of professionalism. The doctoral student responded with an academic appeal and “[took] us to faculty court at the university to fight the grade.” She explained that the faculty gathered their evidence to present to the academic review committee in order for the university decide if they were right in failing the student or if they needed to reinstate them. The doctoral student showed up with their personal lawyer, and:

...luckily they found in our favor, and we were a little afraid that the student would turn around [and] actually sue the school, which did not happen, thank goodness but it was a worry. And *every* [emphasis added] year when we’re doing admissions, like just amongst the faculty, it comes up. Like every time we’re really excited about somebody we’re like, “But are we sure? ‘Cause we were really excited about that student, and we see how that turned out? So like, do we know that this is gonna be a good situation?” ‘Cause it was

really traumatic for all of us to have to go through that. The student was just awful. I think they ended up enrolling in a different program, in a different state as a new student and just saying that they'd never gone to a PhD program before. So they didn't submit any transcripts from our school. They just said that they were starting fresh... and then we can't say anything. We were just sort of, "Well, all right I guess that's that."

She described how that impactful experience dominated a lot of time and energy for those involved for essentially an entire academic year. She recalled feeling afraid, worried about getting personally sued, and overwhelmed as a "brand new counselor educator." She summarized it as "the worst gatekeeping situation that I've had to navigate..."

While Krys and Moana's situations involved dispositional concerns with a doctoral student, Claire's involved a dismissal for an academic competency concern. Claire recalled her most memorable remedial gatekeeping experience occurred during her fourth year as a counselor educator. She explained how faculty had concerns about this student, so she conducted an advisor-initiated plan based, which included providing resources like additional tutoring and a writing coach. After the student completed comps the first time, Claire noted:

[The student] wasn't able to talk about their research clearly from a space of being an expert and there was plagiarism in the writing. One of the big things is you must answer all parts of your question, and they did not do that on several of our questions. This person became very upset to the point that I spent probably an hour with this person after we let them know that they did not pass...we reviewed what they could do differently next time around... their writing got a little better, but when they took [comps] again, they still had the same problems...There were gaps in their knowledge, and they were dismissed from the program.

Claire explained how difficult the decision was to make, especially from a cultural perspective. She disclosed:

I am the only white person in my program, and this was an African American, and I wanted to make sure that it didn't become a race issue. So, I did a lot of consultation. Their committee had two African American women on it and a gentleman from South Africa, so I wanted to make sure from their lens that I wasn't racially stereotyping, and they're like, "No, we see the same things." So, we, as a committee, met with them again and shared that they did not pass, and that they was being let go of the program; and that was really [*emphasized word*] hard. Really, really hard. I'd never had to do that [before]. I learned a lot about myself, but I learned a lot about, "Okay, if I don't want to be in this position again, what are some things that I can do to help a student differently?" I felt like [we] had worked together a lot on things but it still was not enough.

Claire expanded on her internal reactions, "It was stressful, emotional... I don't like to see people fail. I always go back and process what could be done differently. Though I think sometimes that student is still in the back of my mind..." When Claire was asked to clarify what she learned about herself as a gatekeeper during that process, she answered:

Sometimes you can do all you can to help the student and provide resources and [it] may not be enough because that student is just not ready, and I have to accept that. It wasn't their decision not to do well, but I just felt like there were times they wouldn't necessarily hear me or would take things in a different way than were intended. I learned to make sure that I ask people to share or like, "Okay, so what is it you heard me say?" ... it made me be a better gatekeeper in the way that I can look for similar things.

Claire explained that when they originally interviewed this student, she was two or three years in as an assistant professor and did not feel like she could say, “I don't think we should admit him.” Claire wished she would have spoken up and learned her voice does need to be shared and heard. She revealed:

I guess my fear was being, I didn't want to be called racist. I didn't want to get into a position where I was alone in thinking about that student, and I might have been, but I don't know because I didn't say anything. But I think the biggest takeaway is that if I need to I can best support a student, but I can also make the decision if it's not going to work, and that they have the support of faculty in collaboration to make those tough choices together.

Lack of Training in Remedial Gatekeeping. All participants expressed a lack of training in learning how to remediate doctoral students. Moana pointed out “... never in my training did we talk about [the] remediation process or academic appeals or the administrative side of things or the legal side of things.” She “had no idea” how to write a remediation plan or how to follow-up and measure if the student was meeting the plan’s expectations. Moana felt “very unprepared” with no training or experience in remediation and gatekeeping evaluative tools.

Similarly, Krys felt her PhD program did a “terrible” job in preparing her for the gatekeeper role. She clarified:

But I think...there's a lot of theoretical preparation. But nothing that you could really sink your teeth into and understand the personal impact of it. Like, what does it feel like to do this? How do I have this conversation? You can give me a remediation plan or

gatekeeping or dispositions, but what is it like to have that conversation and impact somebody in that way? There's no way to prepare for that.

Claire pointed out a different challenge in developing a remediation plan. She thought one of the resources counselor educators find complicated to recommend is personal counseling due to the legal and ethical implications. She wondered:

How does it get paid for? If we refer it, how do we get information about it?"... As an advisor, I can recommend it, "Have you considered getting some assistance? It sounds like you're struggling...I have it on my syllabus this year...We talk about it in orientation, "If you are stressed, here are some resources for you." As far as mandating that, you don't necessarily put those in plans.

The Hierarchy of Harm in Gateslipping

This subtheme illustrates participants' views on the level of harm and impact of gateslipping at the doctoral level. Within the context of this study, gateslipping was defined as doctoral students who graduate with problems of professional competency without remediation and enter the professional field. The participants viewed the significance of gateslipping on a continuum of less harmful to more harmful in comparison to master's gateslipping. Those who believed there was less risk when doctoral students gateslip also believed corrective remediation was not as necessary in doctoral programs. Participants also provided evidence and experiences of gateslipping in the context of their work in doctoral programs.

Dean believes gateslipping is easier and occurs more often at the doctoral level. He explained:

...by the time it gets up to that point, it's one student and one faculty member. If you don't bring it up and the faculty member don't bring it up, nobody will. On a master's

level, you've got other students. You've usually got a clinical supervisor in the field. So, there's much more room for scrutiny. I mean, all the incidences of faculty being overly intimate with students are on the doctoral level. Does the faculty member know better? Probably. Does the student know better? Probably. Did it stop them? Nope. I had a colleague who married one of their doc students, they went directly from the graduation to the wedding.

Two participants specifically described doctoral gateslipping as less harmful than master's gateslipping. Jack referred to the metaphor "the marketplace will take care of it" having some standing at the doctoral level. He explained:

If you're gonna go into counselor education, there is another review process out there...there are annual reviews, there are tenure processes... again for me it probably comes back more to the fact that the populations that they could potentially hurt are less vulnerable to start with, and that matters to me...Bad teachers, you know, they're just irritating, they're just annoying, they're not very helpful, but they- and they do some damage, I think, but not at the same level.

Jack further elucidated his position of less harm occurring based on level of vulnerability and resiliency:

Most counselor educators are gonna be working with less vulnerable populations. And there's gonna be more oversight...Supervision certainly does, um, can do harm. I think you can traumatize a supervisee by doing bad supervision, and I also know supervisees are more resilient than clients, kind of generally. Clients are coming in in these really vulnerable spaces and places in their lives... So, there's probably a willingness, at least on my part, I don't know how much this would generalize, to let some things go...they're

not harming people... whereas gatekeeping at the master's level, I'm always like, "Ugh, people are gonna come see you in these vulnerable places...if you're doing in session what you're doing in class, you're hurting people and that's not okay."

Jack summarized his view, "So, I feel a little more protective of clients I guess than I do of students and supervisees..." He continued by explaining

If somebody wants to do a research project with you and you're terrible... they'll just drop out of the project... it's not the same thing as a client being harmed." The research part in particular, if you don't do a good job, you just don't publish...it hurts you if you're not doing good work. I probably have been willing to give someone feedback at the doctoral level ... and watch them not implement it very well. Not anything that was like catastrophically bad, like they were just doing something like incredible racist in the classroom or something like that, nothing that bad.

Claire echoed Jack's beliefs about doctoral students having less of a harmful impact than master's students. She reiterated, "Doctoral students can certainly become impaired while they're working, but more often than that they've been through a counseling practice and the counseling courses and have done some of that practicum and internship work, whereas these master's students haven't. She continued by explaining, "...We have had doctoral students who... the competency is around more how to be an effective supervisor. We are not so concerned about their counseling skills as we are on the master's students."

Two other participants acknowledged doctoral gateslipping as both significant and potentially harmful. Kryss referenced the various expected competencies and roles of doctoral students whose goal is to be a counselor educator: "They have to be able to counsel because you can't do supervision if you can't counsel...And supervision and teaching, like those are all high-

stakes relationships...That's the stuff that sets off more significant alarms to me. Moana discussed the double standards and confusing differences between both levels:

I guess going out into the world as counselor educators, there's something that feels different than the students I'm sending out in the world to be counselors. Because they're not day in and day out attending to the wellness and safety and autonomy of clients. They're out there doing it [to] students, which is important, but like the expectations for whatever reason become different? And I think sometimes in academia it's more allowable to be kind of a jerk, in some settings...I wish it weren't. I don't know why anyone would start to be that way. But like, it's just a different set of rules in higher education than being in the community as a clinician. It shouldn't be different rules. But it's just...[the] code of conduct is different.

Evidence of Doctoral Gateslipping or Harm. Despite Jack's beliefs about their being a less harmful impact of problematic doctoral students, he acknowledged multiple instances of gateslipping occurring at this level:

In our field, there are a lot of people who are counselor educators that sometimes you're just left scratching your head going, "How did they get through their doctoral program? Like, they're not healthy, and I wouldn't want to see them as a counselor, I wouldn't want them training future counselors..." It's usually ego-driven, like just these *huge* [emphasis added] egos in the profession. It's really disconcerting. So, I think we work in a field where the effective work comes from a place of humility, but you see these big egos in counselor education...I got off CESNET years ago, but I still hear the stories about some of the huge egos on CESNET, like the stuff that they're billowing out, and I'm like,

"Wow, if consumers could read this stuff, they would never go to counseling," ...this is who's preparing the counselor.

He generally explained how gateslipping occurs at the doctoral level:

Others who have gotten on through...because they were academically really talented... really, really bright folks, but they just sort of psychologically [and] developmentally weren't ready to step into these roles of teacher and supervisor... But they were bright and they were very capable. And ... when they graduate I think, "They can publish a really good paper on a client population that they could never serve," and that bothers me quite frankly. But the behavioral problems never elevate to the level ... there might be some feedback gatekeeping kinds of things, but usually doesn't elevate to the level of remediation or certainly not a dismissal. ... And maybe they'll grow into it, and at least in some cases, I think they probably have as I've watched them over the years after they graduated. But in other cases, I'll see them 10, 12, 15 years later and it's like, "Yeah, they're the same, they're what I thought they were. They're publishing...but I still wouldn't refer somebody to them for counseling" ... There are some folks who fit in that, "Those who can, do; and those who can't, teach" box for sure.

Jack also gave an example of a colleague he worked with for many years who was "impaired." He also referenced the academic faculty "who are removed from the clinical world" and haven't seen a client in 20 years. He indicated, "...We have this beautiful new trauma-informed lens, and we just really recognize the damage we can do to people if we're not sensitive and compassionate counselors. So that's frustrating to me."

While Claire disclosed she has not seen "anything harmful" on the counseling skills scale they use doctoral practicum, she stated, "...but when I have a doctoral student whose skills are

‘near expectations’ and not meeting them, I’m like, ‘What skill [did] they miss in their master’s training?’ So that can be calls for, ‘We want you to be a counselor educator, meaning you should be able to meet and exceed expectations as a counselor.’”

Super-ordinate Theme #3: Developing a Doctoral Gatekeeper Identity

The last super-ordinate theme depicts how participants continuously develop their identity as gatekeepers of doctoral students. Within the context of this study, the development of a doctoral gatekeeper identity was defined as participants’ attitudes and beliefs about gatekeeping, their characteristics and sense of self as counselor educator, and their philosophical approach toward gatekeeping doctoral students. Significant factors that contributed to the understanding of participants’ experiences and how they continue to develop their gatekeeper identity emerged as two intersecting sub-themes: (a) *The impact of program culture and faculty involvement* and (b) *Experiential learning as gatekeeper training*.

All five participants discussed their gatekeeping style and perspectives toward their doctoral gatekeeper role. While they each had a slightly different gatekeeper orientation or approach, an underlying commonality and focus on investing in the students and profession was observed across participants. Moana clarified her role doctoral gatekeeper and was the only participant to differentially define gatekeeping and remediation:

...To me they are two pretty different things. In my mind, I’m engaging in gatekeeping all the time. Because doc gatekeeping equals evaluation. I’m always working with them, meeting with them, wanting to hear how things are going, wanting to hear about their progress. Or as a faculty, [we are] evaluating them, looking at progress, looking at potential issues that are coming up, and some of those warrant remediation and some of them don’t. But we’re always noticing, we’re always observing, and we’re always trying

to evaluate those types of things to be proactive. So, gatekeeping wise, we're kind of doing that all the time. It's not really a "whether or not to engage in it" kind of thing. It's just an ongoing process. It's "the tab that's always open in the browser," if you will.

Therefore, Moana does not view gatekeeping as a decision to make but rather an active and constant process of evaluation. Similarly, Dean viewed gatekeeping not as a choice to make but a persistent obligation. Dean maintained a pragmatic and moral approach as a gatekeeper. He referenced his ethical responsibility and the gatekeeping process as an act of integrity within the profession of counselor education. Dean referenced the detrimental impact of gateslipping as a motivation to uphold his duties. When asked how he decides to engage in gatekeeping or remediation at the doctoral level, Dean responded:

I'm not sure it's a choice. It came with the job description. Our primary ethical concern is for the welfare of our clients, and I extend that to the welfare of future counselors.

Holding that mandate to be true, one cannot not gatekeep. Even if all your gatekeeping efforts prove unnecessary, you can demonstrate that you have looked at the future of the industry and profession beyond what's on their transcript. Now, if I was training chemists, it might not be a big deal. They don't blow up the lab, they pass. But what we do is too critical to the human spirit to leave it to chance. And it's too critical to the human spirit, I believe, for faculty to be cowardly and not want to say, "This one ain't making it."

Dean further revealed an active and straightforward approach when evaluating and communicating with doctoral students:

I don't want to waste your time. If we have an assignment due the first two weeks and you don't show up, I'm gonna haul you in and say, "What's going on?" Because I ain't gonna do this for another 12 weeks this term...

In contrast, Jack's gatekeeping philosophy featured a less active and more relationally minded attitude. He stated, "I don't start with gatekeeping, I start with development... the vast majority of things that doctoral students are wrestling with [are] developmental, and so it's my job as an educator to help them develop, right?" Jack demonstrated a laissez-faire viewpoint when deciding to engage in remediation with a doctoral student:

... choosing when to [remediate] and when not to, is when you really see behaviors that are concerning... there's a little, "Let's watch that." Like that's a common phrase among faculty, "Let's watch this and see if it gets better or if it gets worse." If it gets any worse, we need to have some conversations with this student.

It was evident throughout Krys's interview that she pays close attention to how everything around her is interconnected and described herself as having high expectations of doctoral students. She shared:

I'm a systems person. So, I see the interaction of them [doctoral students] with the master's level and then with us [counselor educators] and then with the counseling center. Like, there's so many connection points that when something goes wrong with a doc student, it tugs on like five different things. So, I think I'm super attuned to the systemic connections as well as... I think our job is to make sure they're ready for the job market and my personal philosophy is I want them to be able to sit as a colleague with one of my friends.

Her comments highlighted doctoral students influence within counselor education programs at the master's and doctoral level. Kry's also appeared to take a proactive stance as a gatekeeper, which echoed Dean and Moana's comments. Kry's reported her tendency to engage in preemptive gatekeeping to honor students' experiences and investments they have made in their education. Kry's takes her gatekeeping responsibilities seriously and acknowledged how the financial consequences could impact students:

It's so interesting because everybody's on their own dial with that [gatekeeping]...if I'm seeing concerns early, I'd rather address them early...It doesn't have to be like a "you're at risk" kind of thing but "I'm seeing early signs. Can we talk about those?" So, I'm an early intervention person, for sure...you can trust me to say something early and not blindside you after you spent \$40,000. That's kind of what I think is important, is for my students to know this isn't going to go to the end of the term and then explode. I think that creates some an uncertainty, but then also a betrayal when it happens and neither one of those ruptures are particularly healthy for the system.

Claire also reflected on the importance of her role safeguarding the profession and the unique nature of doctoral gatekeeping:

... So it's kind of a serious thing. They're going to go out and train people who are going to work with people who have all kinds of challenges. So, I want to make sure that they're competent... And that they'll be proud to say, "Yes, I got this degree from [University] and I feel prepared and I'm ready."

The Impact of Program Culture and Faculty Involvement

This sub-theme depicts how the interaction between a participant's program culture of training and their level of faculty involvement influences the formation of their identity as a

counselor educator and gatekeeper. Within the context of the participants' experiences, program culture is defined as the inherent values, ideas, behaviors, and narrative promoted by their fellow faculty and training environment. Faculty involvement is defined as participants' views of their colleagues' level of support, collective decision-making, and consultative behaviors.

The participants' direct experiences with their program environment appeared to affect their gatekeeper approach. While all participants generally described their program as student-focused, the manifestation of how the program culture of training implicitly impacted their gatekeeper approach was nuanced among participants. Each of the participants referred to either the programs they trained in as doctoral student or worked in as faculty directly or indirectly impacting their gatekeeping approach. Moana, Claire, and Jack's gatekeeper approach aligned with the culture of their program while Dean and Krys's approach deviated from their training culture. Overall, a student and profession-focused culture of training appeared to permeate most of the stories with slight variations among participants.

Moana spoke about her willingness to support and nurture doctoral students' individual differences. She described her current program as "pretty humanistic program across the board." She gave an example comparing their counselor education faculty to outside committee members and how their program navigates this process:

... you have to have some people who are not your counseling faculty on [a doctoral student's] committee. So sometimes there's a bit of a different perception or approach to evaluating those things. ...as counseling faculty, we have this culture of like, "Let's try to help them out. Let's try to see if we can help them be successful without compromising the rigor of the exercise." That's always kind of our approach to things. And the outside folks would say like, "Let's nail them to the wall they didn't do it right, so that's a no for

me.” [We] get comments from outside committee members sometimes of like, "Oh, you're so much nicer to your students than we are to ours in my program..." And you can tell we keep asking the same outside committee members to be on counseling doctoral committees over and over and over again, because they're kind of integrated into that approach and they understand how we do things. So when they come in and someone is struggling, like I just had this happen with one of my students who was in dissertation phase where they were just really struggling with the drafts of their dissertation going into their defense... the quality of the work was there, the study was done and everything looked right, it was just the writing issue like they just rushed it and it just wasn't there. So the committee, because it was all people that have worked with counseling students before, kind of understood that when we met together like, "Okay, they did the work, we're going to give them an extensive list of edits, you can approve this and we trust that you won't sign off on it until these writing edits are done, but we're gonna go ahead and pass the defense.”

Moana described her tendency to be “pretty protective” of her advisees as their advisor and chair. She described how she will “click into counselor advocate mode” when things come up that may impact her advisees or noted that if “someone’s taking advantage of them then to me it feels like I’m switching into advocate mode. And engaging with whatever process needs to be in place to protect that person.”

Claire highlighted similar humanistic values and described the atmosphere of her program as “very person-centered, or student-centered.” She emphasized how her program provides numerous chances for doctoral students to co-write, present, and teach with faculty members. She went on to discuss the importance of an advisor in supporting doctoral students in

tailoring their educational experience to fit their career goals. Claire stated, “We actually try and meet the students' needs as far as what additional experience they're wanting to gain while they're here with us.” She explained how her program has focused on shifting the stigma and climate around gatekeeping from a form of punishment to instead an act of support:

When I came here, it used to be like if people were called into those faculty review meetings it felt like it was punitive. So, we've worked really hard to frame them as "This is an opportunity for all of us to support you. We want to know what's best and what's going on so we can do that better." It's still difficult to sit through those meetings because it's uncomfortable for the student. It's not always comfortable for faculty to say, "What's going on?" And how do we get our faculty to do it in a caring manner and such that it's done in a safe, collaborative, compassionate way? Because sometimes it's like, "Well, this is what I see and this is what's going on and this is not okay," versus "I've noticed" or "I've observed and I'm curious what's going on." So, we're shifting that way, we're doing better but I think that's a tough thing.

Multiple times throughout her interview, Claire emphasized the importance her program places on diversity, which was distinct as no other participants discussed this value: “People comment diversity is one of our values...We have diverse interests but we're also diverse in ethnicity and race in our program. So, I think that makes us quite unique.”

Unlike the other participants, Krys described her struggle in balancing the program milieu since her faculty are resistant of the doctoral program. Krys indicated her identity as doctoral director has strengthened because of the fractured climate. She explained feeling like she must set even higher expectations for doctoral students than typical since her colleagues levels of investment widely vary:

I have a pretty high expectations in the sense that I think about my students as graduating and applying to programs where my friends work. And that's not necessarily what they're gonna do but that's sort of my metric, is I wanna have people who are ready to go work with one of my friends in another institution. And that I would feel confident saying to one of my best friends like, "This would be an amazing colleague." And so that's sort of my bar and it's probably pretty high. I think the faculty resistance to the doc program means that sometimes our collective expectations are a little bit lower...

Relationship with Doctoral Students. All participants discussed how they navigate relationship dynamics within their program environment. Four participants discussed how they view their unique relationship with doctoral students. The way participants perceived themselves in relation to doctoral students varied. The differences in their experiences illuminate the underlying subtheme, which speaks to the participants' understanding of how the culture of the program and faculty influence their gatekeeper identity development. First, Jack discussed how he sees his role as a gatekeeper impacting his interactions with students:

...My relationship with a doctoral student in their third year is different from my relationship with a doctoral student in their first year. If I'm chairing a dissertation, and they're getting into their third year, I know them a little bit, they know me a little bit, we've built a relationship, and I know what their quirks are, but I also know they're... gonna be okay, right? And so, I can be more, not even collegial, I can be just more of a colleague...be a friend, be a support person. Whereas initially, I need a little bit of distance from that, because what if they do have some impairments, then we're...a little too chummy, and it's gonna be harder to have those conversations. But I want everybody to know I think they belong. They belong there, they deserve to be there... because

everybody's got their own version of imposter syndrome at the doctoral level, and at the master's level, but that shows up powerfully for people.

On the other end of the relational spectrum, Dean's relationship with doctoral students was less affected by the department culture. He claimed:

I know that there are members of our faculty who are definitely seen as more nurturing than I am, who have a differing relationship with doc students than I do, to whom doctoral students may go to with concern [about peers]. Most of my doc students and all the [master's] students spend most of their time afraid of me. And that's okay...

While Jack views his relationship with doctoral students different from master's students, Dean's approach toward students at both levels is similar. Dean's interactions with students are more akin to the counselor-client relationship and boundaries. Dean further explains his position and relationship with students:

If I had to choose in my interactions with students between being friendly and being respected and feared, I would take the second...I am not your buddy. You are paying for my time. Go forth. I bless you. Enjoy your life. I'm glad that you appreciate your time with us. Next. And we have to accept as faculty, students are transient. It is the integrity of the program and these issues which is of more concern. Students come and go. We love them. We care for them. It's kinda like raising puppies. But then we're gonna bless you and boot you out the door. And welcome the next batch in.

Moana expressed ambivalence about how her program's humanistic culture impacts her confidence and perception of her ability to do her job:

...it can be really strange [with] the doctoral students because some of them have way more clinical experience than I do coming into the PhD program ... Part of it is the culture

of our program to see them as colleagues and have them call us by our first name, and those kinds of things which I like. But then when issues come up, I don't always feel super empowered to address them because we've leveled the playing field so much. And in some situations I feel like I'm not always on a leveled playing field anyway. So when we've managed to take away the little bit of power that I felt like I had in the first place... I need a little bit of power in the relationship to be able to be a gatekeeper, and I don't always feel like I have the power to do that.

Krys also talked about how her program's resistance to the doctoral program has in turn negatively impacted her relationship with students as the program director and only remediator:

I've just had some really difficult interactions, because I am like "the heavy." I'm the one who has to do that part [the remediation] and we're pretty loosey-goosey with stuff in general. So, when you have to be like the role holder at all, you're the bad person. And so, I have definitely felt like there are many roles that I hold as like the rule systems person that are negative. And I also think that there are some students, like I've had some amazing students that I've chaired dissertations on because they're like, "Krys has got a system, there's expectations, it's all clearly communicated." And so there's a cluster of students who gravitate because of that, and they know that I'm clear and I'm nice. But I've had to be, like the bad guy, too sometimes.

Level of Faculty Involvement. An intersection between gatekeeper identity development and faculty involvement was also illustrated in the interviews. Participants often mentioned how they obtained support from colleagues, engaged in consultation for guidance about issues, and made collective decisions. Each participant mentioned their experiences with their department faculty to some level when discussing their experiences. For example, Jack, Moana, and Claire

spoke about seeking out consultation as support during times of individual and group gatekeeping. Claire referred back to her most challenging doctoral gatekeeping experience:

I think through that really tough experience to know that if it got that bad, that we have to dismiss somebody, that I'm not alone in that, that this is a consultative gatekeeping position. I gatekeep in my own class but I can still go to a faculty member and say, "Okay, I'm concerned about this person, how can I best help her..."

Jack also highlighted the importance of seeking consultation to get feedback and support. He said, "Before I would have a serious conversation with a student about concerns, I would talk to a colleague... sometimes you get some clarity, like, 'Huh, this is really my stuff bubbling up,' or 'no this is a pattern for the student.'" Dean, Moana, and Jack also talked about faculty's pivotal role in collective decision-making at the doctoral level. Dean described this experience when he stated, "Well, part of our process is that no decision is made individually... A decision, while perhaps delivered individually, is a community decision." Jack discussed the significance of group decision making when giving students challenging feedback:

...A lot of times it's really nice when you can say [to the student], ... "I'm the one giving you this information, but it's not just coming from me, it's coming from multiple faculty, and faculty are gonna be watching." ... We'll often say in faculty meeting[s], "Make sure this person knows this is not coming from you, this is coming from the full faculty."

Particularly in cases where something like age or gender or race, ethnicity, or something could call into question the person's perception... I think that's always wise to sort of say it's coming from a group of people, not from an individual.

Moana captured the core essence of this sub-theme regarding the intersection of gatekeeper identity, program culture, and faculty involvement in decision making. She emphasized her trust

in and appreciation for her fellow faculty in the context of making doctoral admissions decisions. She also referred back to her most challenging gatekeeping experience:

We trust each other as colleagues which I think makes a huge difference because with that trust being there and having gone through this together...having established a good working relationship and trust, if somebody brings up a concern and it seems like a pretty serious concern, then we all hear it and try to make the best decision we can as a group...So I think because we're all on the same page structure wise, we're all on [the] same page evaluation wise, and we have a good working and trusting collegial relationship, It actually, it's usually a pretty simple process to make decisions about admission.

The most striking difference was noted for Krys, as she was the only participant to speak about a lack of faculty support and trust in decision making the context of doctoral gatekeeping. However, like the other participants, she recognized the importance of faculty support and is negatively impacted in her gatekeeper role without it. Krys described challenges in faculty cohesion and her program's lack of "faculty buy-in" and the difficulties in not having a team approach for gatekeeping. She gave examples of times where as "the mediator and messenger" she has had to have difficult conversations with students who were shocked by the feedback. She further explained how her faculty are "definitely a 'minimize until it's an explosion' culture" but stands alone in her believe that coordinated intentional communication is really important. Krys noted an absence of constructive and critical dialogue among her colleagues. She further identified how the faculty culture truly permeates a program and impacts gatekeeper role, since she has had more productive conversations in previous jobs. She shared:

In this current environment, if people don't want to talk any further they just stop...If people don't agree or don't find it as significant...they just stop [talking]. At my old institution, we disagreed sometimes and really sort of followed the thread until we came to a consensus... We didn't have to have everybody on board; we had to have a majority. Here we have to have *everybody* [emphasis added] or we won't do anything. And so I think there's also just sort of that mindset of like, "What does agreement mean?" And that's really important of like, "What is your culture of agreement here?" It's like unless everybody agrees, we're not doing it, we're just gonna stop [talking]. But at my old institution, it was like, "If a majority of people have a concern, the other folks aren't gonna stand in the way because they trust that there's enough people concerned that we should do something."

Experiential Learning as Gatekeeper Training

Each participant identified a lack of educational and instructional training in gatekeeping both while obtaining their doctorate degrees and currently as faculty members. This sub-theme is defined as the different ways participants learned how to perform the doctoral gatekeeper role by engaging in related, hands-on experiences. Gatekeeper self-efficacy identity development impacted by experiential learning, years of experience, and the power of time.

All five participants echoed similar experiences regarding their absence of educational training in gatekeeping at the doctoral level. Each person also identified the lack of gatekeeping training as a problem in counselor education. For example, when Jack was asked what type of preparation he received as a gatekeeper of doctoral students, he replied, "Absolutely none, zero, and I think that's a problem in our field." He further clarified that he did not have any formal gatekeeping training in his program when he was a doctoral student 28 years ago. Jack explained

the predominant mindset of counseling training programs 30 years ago was, “The marketplace will take care of it – if they're not good, they just won't last in the field.” He referred to this concept multiple times throughout his interview and clarified his feelings about this mentality in terms of master’s students:

I've never been comfortable with that idea, because how much damage can the person do before the marketplace takes care of it? And I'm not even always convinced the marketplace takes care of that. I've had two master’s students that were dismissed from the program I was teaching in that went on to get master’s degrees at other institutions and get licensed, and there's no way in hell, pardon my language, they should be working with clients. Maybe they went through some epiphanies and transformations and they're good at what they do, but I mean, they were *horrible* [emphasis added] but that was kind of the prevailing logic 30 years ago, “Well, it's too legally sticky to dismiss students.” So, I think we've gotten more aware of that.

Jack, Claire, and Moana ultimately referred to the limited preparation they did have analogous to their supervisor-in-training experiences with master’s students in their doctoral programs. Claire was not trained in doctoral gatekeeping but learned “very minimal” about gatekeeping master’s-level practicum students through her supervision experiences as a doctoral student. She recalled:

We probably did read some articles around gatekeeping roles, but again, like you've noticed in the research [it's] around master's [gatekeeping]. And it wasn't necessarily, "Here's an example of a remediation plan and this is what you can do." It was like, "Oh, if you need to do it...then we're going to do it" ...nothing structured.

Moana reiterated that learning about gatekeeping was equivalent to supervision training as a doctoral student and focused on the master's level:

I got a lot more training in gatekeeping and remediation for master's students than I did for doctoral students. And I would hazard to guess to say that's probably typical. [And] that you would only know about those things if you had to go through them on the receiving end as a doctoral student. But as for master's students, I felt like I got more experience and more training because I had to do it for our master's students as a supervisor.

While the participants did not receive formal training related to doctoral gatekeeping, they all described various personal learning opportunities, instances as doctoral students themselves, and even unrelated professional experiences that influenced their current gatekeeper role. Consistent with Claire and Moana, Krys indicated receiving basic "theoretical" gatekeeping preparation in her doctoral program. She shared how her current position as doctoral program director and sole remediator has greatly impacted the development of her gatekeeper identity and professional self-efficacy. Krys stated, "...I've been the lead on all of [the remediations] in the doc program in the years that I've been here." She clarified, "It doesn't matter what the situation is, even if I never had any conversation or indication or I haven't had the student yet in class or anything, it's still me [that engages in remediation]. As a result, Krys has a vast amount of experience gatekeeping doctoral students. She also mentioned her previous occupation as a paralegal currently influencing her role as an evaluator, gatekeeper and remediator. She gave an example, "I sort of collect that data as I go...I keep receipts and keep track of everything."

Like Kryz, Dean also referenced two prior occupations as uniquely impactful in laying the groundwork for his counselor educator identity and ability to assertively perform his gatekeeper role:

One was being a public-school teacher. And if you're a public-school teacher where I was taught to teach [and] where I taught, unfortunately there are kids who are not gonna pass. And you do them no favors with social passes by sliding them into the next grade and making them somebody else's headache...And secondly, as an interim career, I was a restaurant manager. And in that, everything was competency based. If you're not doing a good job, I'm firing you...You don't show up on time...you're out of here. I've got no qualms about it.

In contrast, Moana pointed out how her clinical training as a counselor and knowledge has not completely translated to her gatekeeper position, "I did not learn anything about [gatekeeping] documentation...like a lot of days I've leaned on my understanding of clinical documentation, but that's super different than documentation that's necessary in higher education." Yet, she noted that over time through hands-on experiences she learned "what kinds of things to look for, and what kinds of things are indicators of maybe bigger issues that we would be worried about." Moana further explained how her program's straightforward admissions process and on-the-job mentoring experiences as a new faculty member contributed to her doctoral gatekeeper preparation:

...There's quite a lot of structure that exists in the way that we do [admissions]. So that helped me to learn how to do it pretty easy and pretty quickly...because you come in your first year and you need to do this stuff. So, that was pretty easy to get mentored

through and get comfortable with, because we already have a pretty structured process.

It's not at all ambiguous in terms of the things we look at or how we look at them.

Still, Moana emphasized that the learning associated with being a doctoral gatekeeper is an ongoing process, "I mean, I still have to go back to my colleagues and just talk through like, 'what do I do with this?'"

In line with the other participants, Jack did not receive training in his doctoral program prior to his position as a counselor educator. He recognized his earlier experiences as a doctoral student and first job significantly shaped his gatekeeper identity. He illustrated how observing two vastly different training environments impacted his beliefs about working with doctoral students as a counselor educator:

I trained in a program that had kinda rigid boundaries between faculty and students...they were pretty strict. And then my first faculty position was in a place where there were almost no boundaries, like to a really unhealthy level, like parties where people were drinking way too much, and there were some faculty who had sexual relationships with students...So I saw these two kinds of extremes, and that's really where my education kicked in, [and] I went, "Okay, that's not right, and that's not right, so where's the middle ground here?" And I started trying to work towards that – where I was approachable and relational, but also had boundaries and had a role [that] did have some of the evaluative pieces...

Gatekeeper Self-efficacy. While the participants did not have formal educational preparation for their gatekeeping roles at the doctoral level, they described learning facets of the role through other related experiences. These experiential learning moments coupled with years of experienced also enhanced their ability to trust themselves and their abilities as a doctoral

gatekeeper. Influences of time, program culture, level of faculty involvement, privilege, and personality appeared to transform the participants development as counselor educators in various ways. The participants ranged in the amount of time they have worked as a counselor educator and gatekeeper from five to 30 years. Levels of reported confidence as a doctoral gatekeeper varied among the five counselor educators.

Moana, with five years of experience as a faculty member, shared her experiences related to privilege discrepancies and role ambivalence when viewing herself as a counselor educator relative to her doctoral students. She noted the challenges related to being a new counselor educator:

... Particularly at the beginning of my career when I wasn't so far removed from being a doc student myself, it felt a little strange to be evaluating people that were only a year or two behind me in terms of career. It still sometimes feels that way...especially when [my] students are chronologically older than me or holds more majority culture identities that I don't hold. Sometimes I don't always feel as empowered to address things and I have to really sort of psych myself up to have these conversations with some of the students...I don't love that, but it's the truth that sometimes I don't feel very confident being a gatekeeper.

Claire acknowledged a positive shift in her self-confidence and ability to gatekeep at the doctoral level over the last six years.

...when I started [I felt] totally unprepared and inadequate. [I] was not sure what I was doing... what were all these resources at my institution that were available to students?
... I had no concept of international students and how to work with them and what it was like, and [I] have definitely grown in becoming more competent, more confident in

learning from my students and working with them to meet them with where they are and find out how I can best support them on this journey and what additional resources they need. I would say that probably took me at least about four years to feel more confident and competent in that area. I think it took me some time to understand what to look for, that our clinical hats are helpful in that realm to observe people and try and gauge how their personality or attributes would benefit the program and how they could grow into a counselor education role.

Claire further elaborated on the progression and awareness of her professional identity in light of her most challenging and impactful remedial experience with a doctoral student:

I think if I'd had this conversation prior to that [unsuccessful remediation] experience, but even earlier in my profession, I don't know how clear I would have been able to answer some of your questions. I think that my identity as a counselor educator has been strengthened with more time and getting ready to submit stuff for promotion and tenure and work on that this summer, I think just feeling like, "Yes, I am at a time where it's time to move forward in my career and promotion and tenure."

Krys, who has 13 years of experience, described a strong sense of self-efficacy regarding her doctoral gatekeeper abilities. Despite her positive identity development, she continues to feel conflicted by her challenging faculty dynamics. Krys revealed:

I personally feel like I'm really competent. I feel like I'm kind, I'm competent, I'm fair. I'm really seeking out a pathway for the student. And it's just sort of juxtaposed that also like not doing that in a team. And so I feel confident, but I feel like it should not be an individual job. And so that's where I am. Like, I feel good in my role, but I shouldn't be all alone in the role.

Jack spoke to how his gatekeeper identity and confidence has developed over his 27 years of experience as a counselor educator. He acknowledged that his personal development led to professional growth:

...early in my career, I was still stuck in this...I had my stuff around wanting to be liked. And as I got more seasoned in the role, it was much more of like "I've gotta protect the public from this person...there's a higher good here than whether this person likes me or not." So, I think that was more [of a] personal growth than professional growth.

Dean, who has 30 years of experience, expressed self-assurance regarding his gatekeeper identity. He referenced both his personal upbringing and involvement in the profession as contributing factors. He was also the only participant to voice a confident attitude regarding the legal system:

I have been called in court by students who felt unjustly dismissed from programs...We have more power than you think once we get off campus. You want to sue me? You go right ahead. See how that works out for you.

When asked why he does not fear legal repercussions, Dean discussed both his personal upbringing and professional experiences, which also speak to his ethical gatekeeping philosophy:

I grew up in a household where doing what was morally right was expected. I started working in youth work when I was 15...That's over 50 years of doing this. I've got a voice. I've got conviction. I got a great PhD and 40-page CV. I've done this too many times...And I am sufficiently self-aware that this is not personal. And people will threaten you with litigation. The other thing too is that if you are right, your institution will protect you because you reflect on them.

Dean's statements appeared strikingly different from Moana's in terms of the amount of "voice" they each feel they have in their role as a doctoral gatekeeper.

Recommendations for Future Faculty. Four participants ended their interviews offering advice to future counselor educators in addition to suggestions for gatekeeping improvements at the doctoral level. These recommendations included thinking about questions to ask during job interviews, getting training in documentation and program evaluation, and seeking out internal mentorship. For instance, Krys suggested that current doctoral students interested in strengthening their gatekeeper identity should first reflect on their own internal reactions and experiences in addition to seeking out a mentor:

...pay attention to your interactions with master's students. I think that's a good thing to start understanding – your own internal calibration of what feels off or what feels concerning. Like, really trust yourself...And, if you have a close advisor, I really do encourage the conversation of like, "I wanna learn how to be a good gatekeeper. Here are the things that I noticed this term in this class I've been teaching, where does that fall on a spectrum?" I think it's okay bounce those ideas around with your advisor or your chair and just sort of get a feel for having that conversation based on the things that you noticed that just kind of trigger something in you like, "This feels kind feels off."

Additionally, Moana, Krys, and Claire all suggested asking specific questions about doctoral gatekeeping and remediation during faculty position interviews. Moana explicitly encouraged asking about a program's approach to doctoral gatekeeping and remediation, how they address student issues and the related policies and procedures. She elaborated:

Because that tells you a lot about how they are with the students, how the students are with each other, how often this stuff comes up...and I think it tells you a lot about how

well [the faculty] work with each other in terms of supporting the students. So, if they don't have any structures in place, that would be a worry. And if they're like, "Oh, yeah, we kick students out of the program all the time," that would also be a worry...good things to know when you're thinking about the environment that you're gonna engage in as a faculty member [for] how they handle these things. 'Cause they're gonna come up. There's no scenario where they don't come up, at some point. So, it's good to know what you're getting into and what's expected of you in terms of the way that you do those kinds of things.

Krys echoed similar advice about interviewing and even referenced the current study's interview questions as suitable examples

... find out like, "How do you all decide on gatekeeping? Like, is this consensus? Who handles this process? Where's the support if one person has a concern but other people are like, 'No, it's good.' What does that look like for you?" ... And, when you have a chance of something like this, to hear stories of other people, I think it's good to listen, too. I wish I had heard more stories before I started having to manage them.

Furthermore, Claire emphasized the significance of understanding institutional policies and engaging in consultation. She asserted, "Understand the policies that are put in place by your college or your program...don't be afraid to ask questions. But yes, collaborate just like we say in counseling, right? Consult, consult, consult. Collaborate, consult, and keep researching." She expanded further by recommending mentorship and highlighted the systematic nature of higher education:

I think I would really like to see when a faculty member is onboarded to their program that there is some training around their policies, because I think gatekeeping is impacted

by the culture of the program, which then is impacted by the culture of the university and college. I think that would have helped me tremendously... And, if there are concerns, who do you go to ask? ... That can be done just by internal mentoring a little better.

Moana identified an overall need for improved doctoral instruction in program evaluation for gatekeeping and followed up with advice for future counselor educators and CACREP standards:

We have to train people better. We just do...I think the answer is more on the educator side of things and the accreditation side of things. And looking at how do we better prepare people to be able to do that? If it's better training and evaluation...Because evaluation is a big, big part of it. We skirt so much around things like program evaluation, but part of program evaluation is student evaluation. So, if we don't know how students are meeting standards, then we don't know when there are problems with students meeting standards either. I mean, it seems counterintuitive, but it's so important for doctoral students to get training in evaluating students and program evaluation for counseling programs. And things like documentation...I think we don't hit on as much and I know they're not in the accreditation standards cause they sort of just glaze over, "Oh, teach about gatekeeping and remediation." So, I mean, evaluation is gonna save you every time. Evaluation and documentation will save you, *every time* [emphasis added]. They'll save the students, too. So that to me is the advice – get as much training [in] or train your students in evaluation as much as you can specific to gatekeeping.

Finally, Dean ended his interview by encouraging the researcher to take the lead in developing a purposeful training for doctoral gatekeeping:

I have an idea. Become the national leader. It's open for you. You have correctly identified – it's terrific literature. Fill that gap in. You're somebody who would probably do it both with integrity and compassion, and that would reflect well on our profession.”

Summary

The purpose of Chapter Four was to present the findings of this qualitative research study. The researcher utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the experiences of five counselor educators who have engaged in gatekeeping and remediating doctoral-level students. First, the individual interviews were analyzed as single cases, which resulted in four identified themes for each participant. Next, a cross case analysis of the participants' individual themes resulted in the identification of themes across the group.

A total of three super-ordinate themes and six sub-ordinate themes were identified. Findings revealed three super-ordinate themes: (a) *Ambiguity in Gatekeeping and Growing Future Faculty*, (b) *The Unique Aspects of Corrective Remediation in Doctoral Programs*, and (c) *Developing a Doctoral Gatekeeper Identity*. These three themes maintained contextual overlap and connection to six salient sub-themes: (a) Who let the docs in? Screening for goal congruence, (b) Post-admission gates of competency, (c) Inherent complexities and challenges, (d) The hierarchy of harm in gateslipping, (e) The impact of program culture and faculty involvement, and (f) Experiential learning as gatekeeper training. In Chapter Five, the researcher will discuss the current findings in relation to extant literature, address limitations of the study, and identify implications for counselor education including suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Chapter One provided a brief overview of gatekeeping in counselor education and established the purpose of the study, which was to obtain a deeper understanding and awareness of counselor educators' experiences of engaging in doctoral gatekeeping. Chapter Two outlined the key elements of gatekeeping in counselor education master's programs and reviewed relevant doctoral program literature. In Chapter Three, the research methodology and procedures utilized to conduct the study were reviewed. The researcher utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the central research question: "How do counselor educators experience the process of gatekeeping doctoral-level students?" Chapter Four introduced the five counselor educators that were interviewed and participated in the study. The interviews were first analyzed as individual case studies, which led to four themes emerging per participant. The individual themes were then analyzed across cases collectively to illustrate three super-ordinate themes for the group. The current chapter reflects a summary of the findings, which are discussed in relation to the research questions and current body of knowledge. Limitations of the study, suggestions for future researchers, and implications for the field of counselor education are provided.

Purpose and Significance of Study

The doctorate degree in counselor education and supervision is becoming more sought-after over time (Snow & Field, 2020). Both the number of doctoral programs and student enrollment have surged over the past few years (Preston et al., 2020). There are currently 85 CACREP-accredited counselor education programs, which is a 35% increase over the past four years (CACREP, 2017). These programs have approximately 3,000 enrolled doctoral-trainees, and counselor educators graduate nearly 500 doctoral students yearly (CACREP, 2019). Faculty within counselor education doctoral programs prepare doctoral students to become leaders of the

profession (Adkinson-Bradley, 2013). These students learn to fulfill roles within supervision, teaching, research, counseling, and advocacy (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Doctoral students who become counselor educators will serve as teachers, advisors, supervisors, mentors, researchers, and leaders (Goodrich et al., 2011). Hence, counselor education doctoral students represent the future of the counseling field. This demonstrates the importance and significance of current counselor educators adequately training and graduating competent doctoral students as they continue to shape the future of the profession.

Prior to this study, no qualitative literature was found regarding how counselor educators experience gatekeeping doctoral-level students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of gatekeeping at the doctoral-level for counselor educators in a CACREP-accredited Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral program. As a result of data collection and analysis, three overarching super-ordinate themes were discovered that portray the ways in which the participants make sense of and perform their gatekeeper role with doctoral students. Critical aspects of the interviewees' stories and experiences illustrated below.

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study are discussed within the context of the three research questions and objectives that guided the study. The researcher used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to make sense of the participants making sense of their personal and interpersonal experiences of gatekeeping doctoral students. The following three super-ordinate themes and six sub-ordinate themes were identified through counselor educators' accounts and perceptions of doctoral gatekeeping:

1. Ambiguity in Gatekeeping and Growing Future Faculty
 - a. Who Let the Docs In? Screening for Goal Congruence

- b. Post-admission Gates of Competency
- 2. The Unique Aspects of Corrective Remediation in Doctoral Programs
 - a. Inherent Complexities and Challenges
 - b. The Hierarchy of Harm in Gateslipping
- 3. Developing a Doctoral Gatekeeper Identity
 - a. The Impact of Program Culture and Faculty Involvement
 - b. Experiential Learning as Gatekeeper Training

The first theme, *ambiguity in gatekeeping and growing future faculty*, highlighted participants' lack of clarity in evaluating and preparing doctoral students to become future counselor educators. They strived to conceptualize this ambiguous process through their understanding of pre-admissions screening and their expectations of dispositional and academic competencies at the doctoral level. The second theme, the *unique aspects of corrective remediation in doctoral programs*, emphasized participants' understanding of remedial gatekeeping as a juxtaposition of flexibility and structure. Participants overwhelmingly viewed doctoral remediation more difficult, less frequent, and not as necessary as remediating master's students. The third theme, *developing a doctoral gatekeeper identity*, illustrated the interaction of participants' experiential learning, program culture of training, and faculty relationships as instrumental in their philosophical approach to gatekeeping. The counselor educators' experiences were presented in a way that both illuminates how participant experiences converge while simultaneously recognizing where individual experiences diverge.

The following narrative discusses the findings, what they mean, and why they are important in the context of the research questions and prior literature. The super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes work together to answer the three research questions. There is an overlap in

how the themes help answer the three research questions, but one theme is discussed per question to avoid redundancy. The themes work together to further the understanding of counselor educators' experiences and perceptions of gatekeeping doctoral-level students.

A challenge in comparing the current findings relationship to previous research is that many studies do not clarify if the participants' experiences of gatekeeping were based on master's or doctoral students but are typically assumed to be master's-level students. Due to the lack of existing research on this topic and the parallels to master's gatekeeping, most supporting research is based on counselor educators' experiences of gatekeeping or remediating master's level students. The emerging themes illustrate how the participants make sense of their gatekeeper role and gatekeeping experiences in doctoral programs. Across these themes, consistencies and variances were found regarding how participants perceived doctoral gatekeeping. A discussion and interpretation of the findings in relation to the research questions and previous research is offered in the subsequent sections. Specifically, the findings are discussed first with respect to the three research questions and then more broadly based in light of the extant literature.

Research Question #1: The Process of Gatekeeping Doctoral Students

How do counselor educators experience the process of gatekeeping doctoral-level students? The purpose of the first research question was to capture participants' understanding and perception of the gatekeeping process within doctoral programs. This overarching research question was answered through the emergence of the first super-ordinate theme *Ambiguity in Gatekeeping and Growing Future Faculty* and subthemes of *Who let the docs in? Screening for goal congruence and Post-admission gates of competency*. The five participants conceptualized and made meaning of doctoral gatekeeping by describing the ambiguous training process and

preparing doctoral students to become counselor educators. They strived to make sense of this ambiguous process through their understanding of pre-admissions screening and their post-admissions expectations of dispositional and academic competencies at the doctoral level. A few participants also compared the challenge of preparing doctoral students to be competent in five areas (teaching, supervision, counseling, research, and leadership) and master's students in one (counseling). Most participants particularly emphasized their job is to prepare doctoral students to teach, supervise, and research with much less emphasis on counseling skills. While participants did not focus on the clinical aspect of training doctoral students, doctoral-level CACREP standards articulate that advanced clinical development is still an emphasis at this level (CACREP, 2015).

Lack of specific direction in training doctoral students was widely represented by participants. Similarly, Goodrich et al. (2011) indicated that CACREP-accredited doctoral programs typically prepare future counselor educators in diverse ways as the processes and procedures counselor educators utilize to academically and clinically training doctoral students vary widely. Additionally, participants predominately discussed doctoral training standards as vague and open to interpretation. This was consistent with Snow and Field's (2020) findings that existing descriptions of quality training mostly rely on expert counselor educators' attitudes and assumptions. The participants and available literature point out the need to evaluate and develop best practices in training counselor educators that transform into more practical outcomes, such as student retention, dissertation pass rates, job acceptance, and both post-degree productivity and gateslipping (Snow & Field, 2020).

All participants identified that doctoral gatekeeping starts during the pre-admissions process and the importance of the doctoral interview in screening for goal congruence and fit,

which was also evidenced in related studies on screening and recruitment procedures in doctoral programs (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014; Woo et al., 2016). While Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen's (2010) theory of gatekeeping was developed with counselor educators who taught in master's programs only, the current study's first and second super-ordinate themes echo the theory's four phases: preadmission screening, postadmission screening, remediation plan, and remediation outcome. A student's career goals aligning with the mission of the program was widely reflected in participants' interviews. Mission alignment was also a finding in a recent study exploring the components of high-quality doctoral programs in counselor education (Preston et al., 2020).

Multiple participants described how stressful a doctoral program can be on students. Some even discussed how they take the stressful nature of a doctoral program into consideration when deciding to intervene with a student. One participant in particular described it as a "stress response" instead of a dispositional issue. Roach and Young (2007) also suggested that student's problematic behaviors or presentation are often associated with the stress of the academic expectations of graduate school. As taken by some of the participants in this study, a developmental or proactive gatekeeper approach may be beneficial to reduce overall program stress.

Research Question #2: Perceptions of Doctoral Gatekeeper Identity

How do counselor educators perceive their identity as gatekeepers in doctoral programs? The purpose of this research question was to examine how participants made sense of their role as gatekeepers of doctoral-level trainees. This question was answered through the emergence of the third super-ordinate theme *Developing a Doctoral Gatekeeper Identity* and subthemes of *The impact of program culture and faculty involvement* and *Experiential learning*

as gatekeeper training. These five participants made sense of their role as doctoral gatekeepers through interactions with their program's culture of training, faculty members, and experiential learning opportunities. Most participants also understood and made meaning of their identity within the context of their relationships with doctoral students, level of faculty involvement, transformative events, and development of self-efficacy. The interaction of participants' experiential learning, program culture of training, and faculty relationships appeared instrumental in their philosophical approach to gatekeeping. The counselor educators also offered advice to doctoral students and new faculty members for learning to become a doctoral gatekeeper.

Corley et al. (2020) explored doctoral students experiences of gatekeeping and discovered one theme to be "developing a gatekeeper identity" with a focus on gatekeeping master's students, which is parallel to this study's third super-ordinate theme "developing a doctoral gatekeeper identity," with the focus of gatekeeping doctoral students. Both studies also had themes related to the program environment influencing identity. Therefore, these two studies complement each other well. Additionally, the development of a counselor educator identity and the navigation of relationships were two themes identified in a recent study by Preston et al. (2020) examining the components of a high-quality doctoral program, which are consistent with participants' quotes in the third super-ordinate theme.

The participants demonstrated how faculty and training programs should be aware of the culture they are creating, as gatekeeping is a substantial part of a program's culture and philosophy, as also noted by Kimball et al. (2019) from the master's gatekeeping perspective. Multiple participants specifically noted the importance of transparently portraying gatekeeping as a support and investment in the student versus a punishment. This finding is consistent with

Foster and McAdams' (2009) framework for creating a transparent culture for feedback and fostering student investment in gatekeeping. The researcher wonders if the program's culture of training impacts the development of the participants' gatekeeper approach or if their inherent approach guided them to their program environment. It would also be interesting to determine if counselor educator identity and gatekeeper identity in doctoral programs are one in the same.

Schuermann et al. (2018) examined potential differences in views of gatekeeping based on faculty member rank. The researchers mentioned how faculty can be on different pages and how that impacts the gatekeeping process. In alignment with these previous findings, participants in this study described different perceptions of gatekeeper approach and self-efficacy by academic rank, with assistant professors reporting more concerns and less confidence than the full professors. It appeared that the participants with the most years of experience were more confident in their gatekeeper approach and sense of self in their programs. Other factors such as being a doctoral program director or currently practicing as a counselor may also have impacted the participants' internal and external experience of doctoral gatekeeping.

All participants identified a lack of educational and instructional training in gatekeeping while obtaining their doctorate degrees. The participants instead learned how to perform the doctoral gatekeeper role by engaging in related, hands-on experiences. Despite the lack of formal training in gatekeeping at the master's or doctoral level (Corley et al., 2020; DeDiego & Burgin, 2016; Freeman et al., 2020; Rapp et al., 2018), gatekeeping continues to be an essential component of the duties of counselor educators

Research Question #3: Comparing Master's and Doctoral Gatekeeping

To what extent can counselor educators' accounts of doctoral gatekeeping be explained by their views of gatekeeping master's students? The purpose of this research

question was to clarify participants' experiences of gatekeeping doctoral students in comparison to their understanding of gatekeeping master's students. This final question was answered through the discovery of the second super-ordinate theme *The Unique Aspects of Corrective Remediation in Doctoral Programs* and subthemes of *Inherent complexities and challenges* and *The hierarchy of harm in gateslipping*. Most participants made sense of their doctoral gatekeeping experiences through their familiarity with gatekeeping in master's programs. This was most evident when they spoke about formal or corrective remediation situations but also occurred while discussing general evaluative gatekeeping. The participants made meaning of their doctoral remedial gatekeeping experiences within the context of their understanding of master's gatekeeping and remediation. It was common for participants to answer interview questions by reflecting on their doctoral gatekeeping experiences intertwined with stories of master's gatekeeping. Therefore, it appears the participants' experiences of master's gatekeeping explained and informed most of their views of doctoral gatekeeping to a large extent. Yet, participants' overall reasons and decision making for doctoral remedial gatekeeping was distinctive from master's remediation.

The five participants compared their understanding of gatekeeping in both master's and doctoral programs. All participants acknowledged gatekeeping challenges at both the master's and doctoral level but placed an emphasis on the unique barriers in doctoral programs. Additionally, the participants all referred to the elements of gatekeeping that are complicated and may deter faculty from performing formal remediation. These factors included the abstract nature of professional dispositions, the negative emotional impact of directing remedial interventions toward doctoral students, and the general lack of training in remedial gatekeeping at both levels. Participants understood remedial gatekeeping as both of flexible and structured.

Participants overwhelmingly viewed doctoral remediation more difficult, less frequent, and not as necessary as remediating master's students. This researcher wonders if there is a way, or if there should be, for the participants' understanding of doctoral gatekeeping to not be based or formed from their master's gatekeeping. Should they be viewed as the same or separate processes?

The participants' knowledge of master's gatekeeping also aided the formation of their experiences by comparing the impact of doctoral gateslipping, the significance of related harm, and the evidence of these experiences in doctoral programs. The most important consideration when evaluating for PPC is determining the risk it presents to the well-being of clients, peers, and the public (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). Based on participant observations and assertions, it appears doctoral peer functioning is parallel to colleague functioning. For example, a participant discussed how if a doctoral student struggles with a peer it is likely they will struggle with faculty relationships.

Most participants described doctoral gatekeeping as more difficult and occurring less often than master's gatekeeping. For most participants, examples of when they did remediate doctoral students were few and far between. The flexible nature of gatekeeping at the doctoral level was highlighted by the idea of self-remediation. Participants described the doctoral program as much more individualistic with the impacts of student behaviors more likely to impact the student themselves than other people. An interesting and somewhat common finding was the level of inconsistency in responses. For example, most participants identified decreased need to remediate doctoral students yet those same participants were able to easily identify doctoral gateslipping.

Participants' descriptions of vulnerable and painful experiences of remedial gatekeeping were impacted by participants' naturally empathic and supportive nature were consistent with multiple related master's gatekeeping studies (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2014; DeCino, 2020; Glance et al., 2012). An interesting finding was that the three female participants spoke about their most memorable remediation in terms of the emotional impact, while the two male participants did not. Future studies may want to explore the gender and power dynamics of gatekeepers. Additionally, the two participants with the greatest number of years as a counselor educator were less worried about legal actions from a student being gatekept. While the two assistant professor participants reported the most fear of legal repercussions of doctoral gatekeeping experiences, which is a finding supported in other studies (Brear and Dorrian, 2010; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Homrich et al., 2014).

Limitations of the Current Study

There were several limitations to this study despite the researcher's intention to perform a rigorous inquiry. First, researchers have noted the difficulty in defining gatekeeping and related terms such as professional dispositions and problems of competency (Brown 2013, Homrich & Henderson, 2018; Letourneau, 2016; Rust et al., 2013). In fact, there is no technical definition for gatekeeping at the doctoral level. This definitional issue presents a limitation in comparing and contrasting participants' experiences since it is subjective and potentially difficult to capture with language. This restriction contributes to an overall limitation in defining inclusion criteria for recruitment based on differing definitions of gatekeeping.

Additionally, qualitative research is not intended to be generalized (Smith et al., 2009). Data analysis is focused on meaning and not causality (Larkin et al., 2019). Consequently, it is unknown if the findings apply to other counselor educators working in doctoral programs.

Therefore, it is important for readers to carefully consider the limitations of the current study when discussing the findings.

One general drawback was enhancing trustworthiness through methodological procedures. For example, follow-up interviews and member checks were not conducted, which are often a useful mechanism to enhance trustworthiness (Hays & Singh, 2012). No additional information was obtained such as collecting information from de-identified remediation plans, which could have developed some level of triangulation. Another data source might have provided a more thorough understanding of participants' experiences of doctoral gatekeeping. A limitation inherent in the design of traditional Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is the one-dimensional perspective on the meaning of events and processes. While this information is valuable, it can also have limitations. Due to the relational and systemic nature of gatekeeping, making sense of both parties' experiences (the gatekeeper and the gatekept) could be invaluable (Larkin et al., 2019). Also, the use of a single approach (IPA) eliminated methodological triangulation.

The current study only interviewed faculty who worked in CACREP-accredited counselor education programs. As accreditation standards outline curriculum and educational mandates, these participants may have been largely influenced by program components that are required by the current doctoral CACREP standards. Counselor educators who work in non-CACREP-accredited programs may have different experiences and views of doctoral gatekeeping in counselor education. Also, beyond the fact that nomination sampling only resulted in one participant, other participants were asked to contact the researcher if they wanted to participate in the study. It is unknown how these counselor educators differed systematically

from those that were nominated or recruited and chose not to participate, so unintended bias in selection may be relevant with purposeful sampling.

Regarding data collection, additional demographic and institutional information regarding the participants' identity (race and age) and program (number of faculty) could have been obtained to speak more to the participants' lived experiences. Cultural considerations also provide a potential drawback to the study as counselor educators' intersectional identities like ethnicity, religion, and ability may influence their gatekeeping experiences. Therefore, acknowledging the range of their identities may provide a more encompassing representation of their lived experiences. Despite these shortcomings, other recommendations for future researchers and implications for counselor education are offered in the subsequent sections.

Implications for Counselor Education Faculty and Programs

According to Larkin et al. (2019), "For experiential qualitative researchers, it is becoming increasingly important to understand the impact of our work. Qualitative work can have an effect upon the world at many levels" (p.183). Through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, the voices of participants can raise awareness of this relatively undocumented experience. In the field of counselor education, this highlights the advocacy role within the five CACREP areas. Counselor educators' voice in the counselor education literature regarding doctoral gatekeeping has specifically been missing.

The purpose of this study was to investigate and obtain a deeper understanding of how counselor educators experience gatekeeping doctoral-level students. This study examined a previously unexplored area of gatekeeping in counselor education. While the transferability of this research is limited due to using IPA, the findings offer helpful implications for counselor educators, doctoral students, counselor education programs, and stakeholders such as CACREP.

Each theme represents unique aspects of gatekeeping at the doctoral level that are both similar to and different from gatekeeping in master's programs.

An increased understanding and conceptualization of gatekeeping doctoral students, potential influences and challenges as a doctoral gatekeeper, and ways to improve gatekeeping practices were identified. The current work contributes to the body of knowledge on gatekeeping with an emphasis on doctoral-level training. These findings are relevant to counselor educators, supervisors, doctoral students, new faculty members, and professional organizations like CACREP, ACA., and ACES. These findings can influence and enhance counselor educator training with practical applications. The following recommendations are based on the collected data and from the voices of the five participants.

Recommendations

Participants identified specific recommendations related to improving the process and increased the clarity around gatekeeping at the doctoral level. All participants discussed the lack of doctoral gatekeeping training in addition to a call to CACREP. CACREP should offer clearer and more objective guidelines regarding doctoral preparation best practices and gatekeeping at both program levels. In general, developing a "best practice" for counselor educators with a specific section on gatekeeping would be beneficial (see Ziomek-Daigle, 2018). Counselor educator competencies are needed as the role is multidimensional.

All participants in this study noted that gatekeeping was not a topic widely covered in their curriculum. At a program level, counselor education doctoral programs should include training or educational material within core coursework or competencies, including learning about documentation in the instructional theory course, leadership class, or professional orientation class. Also, the qualitative research course should include more emphasis on

program evaluation based on the participants experiences. In terms of application, Freeman et al. (2020) created a developmental experiential model to infuse gatekeeping training into counselor education doctoral classes. The model contains six experiential gatekeeping modules intended for teaching at three developmental levels. It appears it could be adapted to include doctoral gatekeeping in the instructional model. This could be used to increase competence in doctoral gatekeeping for both current doctoral students and counselor educators.

Developing a dispositional evaluation framework based on the five CACREP areas specific for doctoral students instead of utilizing the master's level assessments could also be useful. For example, one criterion might be, "Is open-minded when working with master's students." This is especially important given that most participants discussed less of a clinical competency focus at the doctoral level, so the evaluation should match the focus. Also, a skill or competency focused evaluation on doctoral student's teaching, research, leadership, and professional service is also needed.

Multiple participants offered advice for recent graduates or future faculty. Three participants suggested asking specific questions about doctoral gatekeeping and remediation during faculty position interviews. Coaston (2019) also offered a list of questions that may help in ascertaining an appropriate fit. The participants recommended asking specific questions about how the program approaches gatekeeping and remediation with their doctoral students when interviewing for faculty positions. Other recommendations for future counselor educators included seeking out mentorship and receiving training in documentation and program evaluation. This researcher recommends a task force be created to advocate for or help design clearer guidelines for training doctoral students with minimum competency in all five core areas. Recommendations for subsequent studies and future research are offered in the next section.

Directions for Future Counselor Education Research

Limited research exists regarding gatekeeping at the doctoral level, specifically in relation to counselor educator's lived experiences and understanding of the process. Several recommendations and directions for future research were based upon the findings, limitations, and implications of the present work. While this study was a first step in describing counselor educators' experiences and perceptions of gatekeeping doctoral students, there is a need for additional research into this important issue. In addition to the following suggestions, the researcher also invites scholars to further explore the emerging super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes of the current study.

A few general recommendations for further research would be to utilize a different methodology, such as a grounded theory, Delphi study, or mixed-methods approach. The replication of this study with a larger or more diverse sample could increase the generalizability of findings. Additionally, doctoral counselor education competency standards need to be explored and further developed to promote quality training of future faculty. For instance, the development of certain standards and practices that assess doctoral disposition and skills needed to become a counselor educator should be a critical element of future research. Echoing the purpose and findings of recent literature published in a special issue of *The Professional Counselor*, more research on the preparation and promotion of high-quality outcomes in doctoral education is needed as the dearth of literature is striking (DeCino et al., 2020; Freeman et al., 2020; Litherland & Schulthes, 2020; Preston et al., 2020; Snow & Field, 2020).

The present study examined faculty perceptions and experiences of gatekeeping doctoral students in counselor education. It would be important for future studies to survey current doctoral students to ascertain their perspectives of gatekeeping in their doctoral programs. As

potential future counselor educators, doctoral students may have important views on this issue either as peers (like in Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019) or as students who have been gatekept themselves. Additionally, insights from adjunct instructors and clinical site supervisors who have experienced gatekeeping doctoral students may provide unique perspectives on gatekeeping. Future research also might study doctoral gatekeeping among different types of counselor education specialty programs such as rehabilitation counseling or school counseling.

Because gatekeeping is a particularly relational and social phenomenon, a conflict between the different perspectives of the parties involved may be anticipated. Larkin et al. (2019) suggested that qualitative scholars utilize a multiperspectival design when both viewpoints should be understood for research to inform practice. Thus, a future study with participants in pairs of counselor educator (gatekeeper) and doctoral student (gatekept) would be exceptionally informative and interesting. Larkin et al. (2019) explained how people's experiences of events and processes are intersubjective: "Meaning is 'in between' us but is rarely studied that way in phenomenological inquiry...and can sometimes be understood in a more complex manner when viewed from the multiple perspectives involved in the system which constitutes them" (p. 194). Consequently, rigor and trustworthiness are enhanced with the triangulation of viewpoints. Therefore, scholars are invited to use a multiple perspective IPA design to address research questions about gatekeeping in doctoral programs, which would add tremendous value to the field.

Conclusion

Chapter Five provided a summary of the current study's findings. The results were discussed in relation to the related gatekeeping literature in counselor education. The limitations of the study and implications for counselor educators, doctoral students, and counselor education

programs were presented. Recommendations for future research and areas for improvement in counselor education and supervision training were illustrated.

Prior to the current study, no qualitative literature was found regarding how counselor educators experience and understand the process of gatekeeping doctoral-level students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore five counselor educators' lived experiences of gatekeeping at the doctoral-level in CACREP-accredited programs. The researcher used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to identify individual and cross-case themes to truthfully represent how the participants made sense and meaning out of their doctoral gatekeeping experiences. Data analysis led to the discovery of three super-ordinate and six subordinate themes, which reflect and further the current body of literature surrounding counselor educators' process and view of gatekeeping and remediation, specifically in doctoral programs.

The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of gatekeeping in doctoral programs within the context of the participants' experiences. The themes and participants' specific recommendations led to several implications for the field. The researcher hopes this first-hand knowledge will lead to a better understanding of the inherent complexity in doctoral gatekeeping and increased appreciation, support, and resources for counselor educators executing this imperative and ethical duty. It is apparent from the extant literature and the findings of this study that counselor educators working in doctoral programs could be better supported in their gatekeeping efforts by institutions, scholars, professional organizations, accrediting bodies, and the counseling profession as a whole. As a result, the researcher recommends advocacy toward: (a) open dialogue regarding doctoral gatekeeping issues and practices, (b) educational preparation in doctoral remedial gatekeeping in training programs, and (c) scholarship that addresses and advanced knowledge of gatekeeping in doctoral programs.

In conclusion, the findings highlight the importance of increased awareness of counselor education gatekeeping processes at not only the master's level but specifically the doctoral level. This deeper understanding of the complexities of gatekeeping has implications for doctoral students, counselor educators, and program coordinators and directors. Based on the findings of this study, clarifying remedial gatekeeping policies and procedures between master's and doctoral programs at the local and accreditation level to fit the needs of doctoral programs may help prevent gateslipping in future generations of counselors and counselor educators.

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APPENDIX A. IRB APPROVAL



01/25/2021

Dr. Jodi Leigh Tangen
School of Education

Re: IRB Determination of Exempt Human Subjects Research:
Protocol #IRB0003428, "Who Let the Docs Out? An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Counselor Educators' Experiences Gatekeeping Doctoral Students"

NDSU Co-investigator(s) and research team:

- Jodi Leigh Tangen
- Chloe Marie Krinke

Approval Date: 01/25/2021
Expiration Date: 01/24/2024

Study site(s): The researcher will conduct interviews via online video conferencing such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, or FaceTime. A phone interview will occur if a participant does not have access to video platform or technology issues occur. Participants will choose their preferred private setting with secure internet. A comfortably familiar, safe, a reasonably quiet and free from interruptions space will be recommended to the participant. The co-investigator will be located alone in a private and confidential office during interviews.

Funding Agency:

The above referenced human subjects research project has been determined exempt (category 2) in accordance with federal regulations (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Part 46, *Protection of Human Subjects*).

Please also note the following:

- The study must be conducted as described in the approved protocol.
- Changes to this protocol must be approved prior to initiating, unless the changes are necessary to eliminate an immediate hazard to subjects.
- Promptly report adverse events, unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others, or protocol deviations related to this project.

Thank you for your cooperation with NDSU IRB procedures. Best wishes for a successful study.

NDSU has an approved FederalWide Assurance with the Department of Health and Human Services: FWA00002439.

APPENDIX B. IRB PROTOCOL CHANGE APPROVAL



02/19/2021

Dr. Jodi Leigh Tangen
School of Education

IRB Approval of Amendment to Protocol #IRB0003428 , “Who Let the Docs Out? An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Counselor Educators' Experiences Gatekeeping Doctoral Students”

Co-investigator(s) and research team:

- Jodi Leigh Tangen
- Chloe Marie Krinke

The protocol amendment request and all included documentation for the above-referenced project have been reviewed and approved via the procedures of the North Dakota State University Institutional Review Board. Current protocol approval expires - 01/24/2024.

Thank you for cooperating with NDSU IRB procedures, and best wishes for a successful study.

NDSU has an approved FederalWide Assurance with the Department of Health and Human Services: FWA00002439.

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE

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NDSU is an EO/AA university.

APPENDIX C. REQUEST TO NOMINATE EMAIL

Hello *Counselor Educator's Name*,

I am wondering if you would be willing to nominate prospective participants for my dissertation study. You are being asked to serve as a nominator because you are currently a faculty member and counselor educator at North Dakota State University. Please note that should you choose to act as a nominator, I will not identify you in any way nor will I have the capability to identify who you chose to nominate.

The study I am conducting is titled “*Who Let the Docs Out? An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Counselor Educators’ Experiences Gatekeeping Doctoral Students*” (IRB #0003428) and is directed by my advisor Dr. Jodi Tangen. The purpose of the study is to explore counselor educators’ experiences and perceptions of gatekeeping doctoral-level students. Participants will engage in a 60–90-minute individual interview with me via video.

As mentioned, I am seeking your assistance to identify prospective counselor educator participants. To be eligible to participate, individuals must: (a) be at least 18 years of age, (b) identify as a faculty member in a doctoral CACREP-accredited counseling program, (c) have completed at least one year as a counselor educator working with doctoral students, and (d) have had experiences gatekeeping or remediating doctoral-level students.

It is the final criterion – **identifying counselor educators who may have directly engaged in gatekeeping or remedial practices directed toward a doctoral student** – where I most need your assistance. To help you identify prospective participants, let me define and attempt to describe the process of doctoral gatekeeping for clarity:

- **Gatekeeping** has been defined as “the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate” (ACA, p. 20). Gatekeeping generally refers to the actions or interventions faculty engage in to ensure students are prepared to practice/graduate and intervene when problematic issues arise (Homrich & Henderson, 2018).
- Specifically, **doctoral gatekeeping** describes the evaluation of doctoral students’ suitability to effectively practice as clinicians, supervisors, teachers, researchers, and advocates within the fields of counseling and counselor education (CACREP, 2015).
- **Remediation** refers to the process of directly implementing strategies to help students develop or regain sufficient levels of professional competence (Henderson & Dufrene, 2012). Examples of remedial interventions include: (a) personal counseling, (b) written professional development plan (c) increased supervision, (d) course repetition, or (e) program dismissal (Homrich & Henderson, 2018).

Based on the eligibility criteria and descriptions of doctoral gatekeeping, I ask that you nominate up to 3 potential participants by contacting them, informing them of the study, and providing them with my contact information should they choose to participate. I attached a general script about the study that you may use when you contact them.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I really appreciate it!

Sincerely,

Chloe Krinke, LPC/LPCC, NCC

Doctoral Candidate | NDSU Counselor Education & Supervision

APPENDIX D. NOMINATION EMAIL TEMPLATE

Hello *Counselor Educator*,

I am contacting you because I would like to nominate you to participate in a study titled “*Who Let the Docs Out? An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Counselor Educators’ Experiences Gatekeeping Doctoral Students*” (IRB #0003428). The purpose of the study is to explore counselor educators’ experiences and perceptions of gatekeeping doctoral-level students. The primary researcher of the study is Chloe Krinke, and she is currently a doctoral candidate in the counselor education and supervision program at North Dakota State University in Fargo, ND. Her faculty advisor is Dr. Jodi Tangen.

I identified you as a prospective participant because I believe you may have experiences of gatekeeping doctoral students, and thus, may be able to contribute to dissertation research in this area. To be eligible to participate, you must **(a)** be at least 18 years of age, **(b)** identify as a faculty member in a doctoral CACREP-accredited counseling program, **(c)** have completed at least one year as a counselor educator working with doctoral students, and **(d)** have had experiences gatekeeping or remediating doctoral-level students.

The following definitions and examples are provided to provide clarity regarding the process of doctoral gatekeeping:

- **Gatekeeping** has been defined as “the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate” (ACA, p. 20). Gatekeeping generally refers to the actions or interventions faculty engage in to ensure students are prepared to practice/graduate and intervene when problematic issues arise (Homrich & Henderson, 2018).
- Specifically, **doctoral gatekeeping** describes the evaluation of doctoral students’ suitability to effectively practice as clinicians, supervisors, teachers, researchers, and advocates within the fields of counseling and counselor education (CACREP, 2015).
- **Remediation** refers to the process of directly implementing strategies to help students develop or regain sufficient levels of professional competence (Henderson & Dufrene, 2012). Examples of remedial interventions include: (a) personal counseling, (b) written professional development plan (c) increased supervision, (d) course repetition, or (e) program dismissal (Homrich & Henderson, 2018).

Again, I believe that you would be an excellent participant for this study. The study requires a single 60-90-minute video or phone interview. If you would like more information about the study (such as viewing the interview questions) or would be willing to participate, please e-mail the primary researcher, Chloe Krinke, at chloe.m.krinke@ndsu.edu.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration!

Your Name

APPENDIX E. INITIAL CONTACT EMAIL RESPONSE

Hello *Counselor Educator*,

Thank you for contacting me with your interest in participating in my study titled “*Who Let the Docs Out? An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Counselor Educators’ Experiences Gatekeeping Doctoral Students.*” It is exciting to speak with counselor educators who have been nominated by their peers as faculty members who may have experienced gatekeeping students in a doctoral program.

To provide you with some background information, my name is Chloe Krinke and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at North Dakota State University in Fargo, ND. As part of my dissertation, directed by Dr. Jodi Tangen, I am conducting a study exploring counselor educators’ first-hand experiences and perceptions of gatekeeping doctoral level students. To recruit participants, I asked counselor education faculty members to identify and contact individuals who they believed have experienced the process of gatekeeping PhD students.

To be eligible to participate in this study, individuals must: **(a)** be at least 18 years of age, **(b)** identify as a faculty member in a doctoral CACREP-accredited counseling program, **(c)** have completed at least one year as a counselor educator working with doctoral students, and **(d)** have had experiences of engaging in gatekeeping or remediating doctoral-level students.

If you meet the eligibility criteria, you will be asked to participate in a 60-90-minute video interview and asked questions regarding your experiences of gatekeeping doctoral-level students with a focus on your perceptions and internal reactions. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed (written out) for data analysis and interpretation. You would choose the most convenient location (work office, library, home, etc.) for your interview with a private space and a strong internet connection encouraged to promote your confidentiality. You would also be asked if you agree to be contacted for any follow up or additional clarifications if needed.

Before you consent to participate in the study, it is important that you are apprised of all of the risks and benefits of the research project, as well as procedures for maintaining confidentiality. I have attached the research consent form for you to read and keep as part of your records. You will also receive a copy of the interview questions after providing verbal consent and scheduling an interview time.

If you have any questions or are interested in setting up an interview time, please contact me, Chloe Krinke, at 701-523-6331 or chloe.m.krinke@ndsu. You may also contact my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Jodi Tangen at 701-231-7676 or jodi.tangen@ndsu.edu.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. I really appreciate it!

Sincerely,
Chloe Krinke, MEd, LPC/LPCC, NCC
Enc: Informed Consent

APPENDIX F. LISTSERV RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello CESNET Members!

My name is Chloe Krinke, and I am a doctoral candidate in Counselor Education & Supervision at North Dakota State University (NDSU). I am conducting a dissertation study titled *Who Let the Docs Out? An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Counselor Educators' Experiences Gatekeeping Doctoral Students*. Research in counselor education has primarily focused on gatekeeping master's-level students. The purpose of this study is to better understand how counselor educators experience the process of gatekeeping doctoral students. This research may promote awareness of gatekeeping practices in doctoral programs.

To participate in this study, you must be age 18 or older and:

- a) identify as a counselor educator in a doctoral CACREP-accredited program
- b) have completed at least one year as a faculty member working with doctoral students
- c) have experience gatekeeping or remediating doctoral-level students

The following definitions are provided for clarity regarding the process of doctoral gatekeeping:

- **Gatekeeping** has been defined as “the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate” (ACA, p. 20). Gatekeeping generally refers to the actions or interventions faculty engage in to ensure students are prepared to practice/graduate and intervene when problematic issues arise (Homrich & Henderson, 2018).
- More specifically, **doctoral gatekeeping** describes the evaluation of doctoral students’ suitability to effectively practice as clinicians, supervisors, teachers, researchers, and advocates within the fields of counseling and counselor education (CACREP, 2015).

Participation requires a single 60-to-90-minute interview via video. You will be asked questions about your experiences of gatekeeping doctoral students with a focus on your perceptions and internal reactions during the process. The interview will be audio recorded and data will be stored on a password-protected device until the end of the study. A pseudonym will be used and other potentially identifying information will be removed and kept private.

There is no compensation for your participation, but you may find it interesting and thought provoking to discuss your experiences. You also have permission to withdraw from the study at any time. This study has been approved by the IRB and NDSU (#0003428). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, an unresolved question, or a concern about this research, you may contact the NDSU IRB office at 701.231.8995, toll-free at 855-800-6717, or via email at ndsuirb@ndsuh.edu.

If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions, please contact me at 701-523-6331 or chloe.m.krinke@ndsuh.edu. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Jodi Tangen at (701) 231-7676 or jodi.tangen@ndsuh.edu.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration!
Chloe Krinke, MEd, LPC/LPCC, NCC

APPENDIX G. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

NDSU NORTH DAKOTA
STATE UNIVERSITY
School of Education
Dept. 2625, PO Box 6050
Fargo, ND 58108
701-231-7202

Title of Research Study: Who Let the Docs Out? An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Counselor Educators' Experiences Gatekeeping Doctoral Students (IRB #0003428)

This study is being conducted by:

Chloe Krinke, MEd, LPC/LPCC, NCC	chloe.m.krinke@ndsu.edu	701-523-6331
<i>Faculty Advisor:</i> Jodi Tangen, PhD, ACS, NCC	jodi.tangen@ndsu.edu	701-231-7676

Purpose and Background Information

This consent form is designed to inform you about the study you are being asked to participate in and what will happen if you choose to take part. Research in counselor education has primarily focused on the process of gatekeeping and remediation practices for students in master's programs. Knowledge of gatekeeping in doctoral programs is limited. The purpose of the study is to use interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore how counselor educators experience the process of gatekeeping doctoral-level students. More specifically, the goals are to: (1) better understand counselor educators' perceptions of gatekeeping doctoral students, and (2) cultivate implications to inform gatekeeping research for the field of counselor education and supervision.

Participants

You are invited to participate in this study because you are a counselor educator who has potentially engaged in gatekeeping practices directed toward doctoral students. There will be approximately 3-6 participants interviewed for this research project. To be included in this study, you must: **(a)** be at least 18 years of age, **(b)** identify as a faculty member in a doctoral CACREP-accredited counseling program, **(c)** have completed at least one year as a counselor educator working with doctoral students, and **(d)** have experiences engaging in gatekeeping or remediating doctoral-level students.

Procedures

Participation requires a 60–90-minute online video interview (via Zoom, FaceTime, or Microsoft Teams). You will be asked questions about your experiences of gatekeeping doctoral students with a focus on your perceptions and internal reactions during the process. You will receive the list of interview questions before the meeting. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed (written out) for data analysis and interpretation.

You are welcome to choose the most convenient location (work office, library study room, home, etc.) for your interview. Private spaces free from interruptions with a strong internet connection are encouraged to promote your confidentiality. You will be asked for your permission to be contacted for possible follow up or clarifications if needed. The researcher will

periodically take field notes during the interviews and an informal debriefing will occur at the end of the interview.

Potential Risks

Risks to participants are minimal in this study. Nevertheless, some participants may experience a small amount of discomfort answering questions about personal experiences. In addition, total privacy cannot be guaranteed; however, various precautions to protect your identity will be made. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research, but the researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to you.

Confidentiality

When the interview is transcribed, your chosen pseudonym will be used and other potentially identifying information will be removed and kept private. A transcription service may be utilized to transcribe the audio-recording. The transcriptionist will sign and date a confidentiality agreement with a non-disclosure statement prior to transcribing information. For analysis purposes, all study-related documents will be stored in a safe, secure location and all electronic data stored on the primary researcher's password-protected computer.

Benefits

You are not expected to gain any specific benefit from participating. **However**, you may find it interesting and feel satisfied to have the opportunity to comment on your experiences and insight related to gatekeeping in doctoral programs. The information learned in this study will increase the knowledge available regarding counselor educators' views of doctoral-level gatekeeping.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is your choice. If you decide to participate in the study, you may change your mind, decline to answer specific questions, and stop participating at any time without penalty. Instead of being in this research study, you can choose not to participate. If you withdraw before the research is over, your information will be removed at your request and additional information will not be collected about you.

Before you decide whether you'd like to participate in this study, please ask any questions that come to mind. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the primary researcher Chloe Krinke at 701-523-6331 or chloe.m.krinke@ndsu.edu, or Dr. Jodi Tangen (faculty advisor) at 701-231-7676 or jodi.tangen@ndsu.edu.

Participant's Rights, Concerns, and Complaints

You have rights as a research participant. All research with human participants is reviewed by a committee called the *Institutional Review Board (IRB)*, which works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions about your rights, an unresolved question, or a concern or complaint about this research you may contact the IRB office at 701.231.8995, toll-free at 855-800-6717 or via email (ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu).

You are freely making a decision whether to be in this research study. Your consent to participate in this study indicates:

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.

By participating in this interview, you are providing consent for responses to be used in this study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep at the time of the interview.

APPENDIX H. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Primary Research Question: How do counselor educators experience the process of gatekeeping doctoral-level students?

Relevant Terms

Gatekeeping: “The initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate (ACA, p. 20). The actions or interventions faculty engage in to ensure students are prepared to practice/graduate and intervene when problematic issues arise (Homrich & Henderson, 2018).

Doctoral gatekeeping: The evaluation of doctoral students’ suitability to effectively practice as clinicians, supervisors, teachers, researchers, and advocates within the fields of counseling and counselor education (CACREP, 2015).

Remediation: The process of directly implementing strategies to help students develop or regain sufficient levels of professional competence (Henderson & Dufrene, 2012).

Demographic Questions:

- Do you have a preferred pseudonym or name as a participant for confidentiality purposes?
- What was your post-master’s degree in (e.g., *Counselor Education and Supervision or Counseling Psychology*) and did you receive a PhD or EdD?
- What is your current academic position/rank (e.g., *assistant, associate, full, tenure*) and any related credentials (e.g., *NCC*) or licensure (e.g., *LPC*)?
- How long have you been a counselor educator?
 - How many years as a faculty member in a master’s and/or doctoral granting program? How many institutions have you worked at?
- Are you currently working in a face-to-face, online, or hybrid program?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. **Can you describe the doctoral program where you currently work?**
 - a. How would you describe your program’s and/or your expectations of professional competency for doctoral students?
 - b. What policies and procedures are you aware of regarding the evaluation, remediation, and gatekeeping of doctoral students specifically?
2. **What types of competency problems do you typically experience at the doctoral level requiring gatekeeping or remediation?**
 - a. How are your experiences of these issues different and/or similar to master’s level issues, if at all?
3. **Can you walk me through one or more of your most memorable/significant gatekeeping experiences working with doctoral students?**
 - a. What particular thoughts, feelings, or other internal reactions did you experience during or after?
 - b. (Probe for a successful and unsuccessful experience of gatekeeping)

4. **How do you decide whether or not to engage in remedial gatekeeping with a doctoral student?**
 - a. What influences your decision?
 - b. If applicable, describe a time when you felt gatekeeping should have occurred but didn't.

5. **Overall, how do you view your role as a gatekeeper of doctoral students?**
 - a. How do you feel about this responsibility?
 - b. Describe how your gatekeeper role impacts your relationships with doctoral students, if at all?

6. **What gatekeeping training or preparation did you receive prior to your position as a doctoral faculty member?**
 - a. How do you feel your program prepared you for your role as gatekeeper at the doctoral level?
 - b. To what degree do you feel confident in your abilities to gatekeep PhD students? Has this changed over time?

7. **How effectively do you feel gatekeeping occurs at the doctoral level in general?**
 - a. How well do you feel you and your program gatekeep doctoral students?
 - b. What challenges/barriers exist to doctoral gatekeeping?

8. **How would you improve the gatekeeping process at the doctoral level, if at all?**
 - a. Any advice to future counselor educators in terms of gatekeeping at this level?

9. **Is there anything else you would like to comment on/share related to your gatekeeping experience that we did not cover?**

Possible Probes: Can you share more about that? Can you walk me through that experience? Can you tell me more about what you were feeling/thinking in that experience?

References

- American Counseling Association. (2014). *2014 code of ethics*.
<https://www.counseling.org/resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2015). *CACREP 2016 standards*. <https://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/2016-cacrep-standards/>
- Homrich, A. M., & Henderson, K. L. (Eds.) (2018). *Gatekeeping in the mental health professions*. American Counseling Association.
- Henderson, K. L., & Dufrene, R. L. (2012). Student behaviors associated with remediation: A content analysis. *Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation*, 3, 48–60.
 doi:10.1177/2150137812437364

APPENDIX I. FIELD NOTES TEMPLATE

Interviewer: Chloe Krinke

Pseudonym: _____

Interview Date: _____

Duration: _____

Interview Summary

Facts and Details

- *Demographics, arrival, setting, interruptions, technology complications, etc.*

Observation

- *Appearance, presentation, speech, body language, facial expressions, etc.*

Reflections

1. Initial and overall impressions of interview?
2. What were the main issues or themes that stuck out for you in this contact?
3. What discrepancies, if any, did you note in the interviewee's responses?
4. Anything else that stuck out as salient, interesting, or important in this contact?
5. How does this compare to other data collections?
6. Additional or emerging questions for future data collections?

Reflexivity

- Intrapersonal reactions, feelings, thoughts, assumptions, bias, preconceptions

**APPENDIX J. CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TRANSCRIPTION
SERVICES**

NDSU NORTH DAKOTA
STATE UNIVERSITY

Title of Research Study: Who Let the Docs Out? An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Counselor Educators' Experiences Gatekeeping Doctoral Students (IRB Protocol #0003428)

Researcher: Chloe Krinke, MEd, LPC, NCC	chloe.m.krinke@ndsu.edu	701-523-6331
Faculty Advisor: Jodi Tangen, PhD, ACS, NC	jodi.tangen@ndsu.edu	701-231-7676

1. I, _____ “the transcriptionist”, agree to maintain full confidentiality of all research data received from the principal investigator related to this research study.
2. I will hold in strictest confidence the identity of any individual that may be revealed during the transcription of interviews or in any associated documents.
3. I am not to inform anyone else about any of the content of the audio recordings. None of the research data will be forwarded to any third party under any circumstances.
4. I will not make copies of any audio-recordings, video-recordings, computerized title of transcribed interviews or other research data, unless specifically requested to do so by the principal investigator.
5. I will store all study-related data in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession. All video and audio recordings will be stored in an encrypted format.
6. All data provided or created for purposes of this agreement, including any back-up records on my computer or back-up devices, will be returned to the researcher or permanently deleted. When I have received confirmation that the transcription work I performed has been satisfactorily completed, any of the research data that remains with me will be properly destroyed.
7. I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement that occurs if I disclose identifiable information contained in the records to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed): _____

Transcriber's signature: _____ **Date:** _____