

Master's-Level Counseling Students' Perceptions of Journaling
as a Tool for Developing Reflective Thinking and Self-Awareness

by

Lindsay Woodbridge

A thesis submitted in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

Counseling

at

The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

December 2014

Acknowledgements

A thesis is an extreme exercise in “trusting the process” that requires the support of many. I’m very grateful to each of the following:

My committee members: Dr. Brenda Rust O’Beirne, Dr. Cindy Anderton, and Dr. Scott Peters. They guided me through the entire process, providing advice, support, and round after round of feedback. Without them, this project never would have gotten off the ground, let alone to the point of completion.

The faculty of the UW-Oshkosh Professional Counseling program for backing this project and allowing me access to their students. I’m indebted to Dr. Alan Saginak for getting the ball rolling; Dr. Charles Lindsey for help with participant recruitment; and especially Dr. Kelli Saginak for volunteering to get involved directly, answering lots of questions about her course and assignment, and recruiting participants.

The four students who participated in the research. They volunteered to help out a fellow student despite having a lot going on in their own lives, were insightful and candid in their interviews, and agreed to release their personal writing to a stranger. Each has such a memorable voice; they are the heart of this project.

My friend and fellow graduate assistant Lorice Ratat, who played a huge role in data analysis. She read Mezirow, coded many pages of transcripts and journal entries, and (cheerfully!) had lots of conversations with me about qualitative research, thesis writing, and journaling.

The staff of the UW-Whitewater School of Graduate Studies and Continuing Studies, especially Sally Lange. In addition to providing help and answers, they also awarded me Graduate Research Grants that funded this work.

Aaron Jonasen, a 2012 graduate of the UW-Whitewater Counselor Education program and the last student in the department to write a thesis, for providing guidance, sharing documents, and answering many questions.

The faculty, staff, and students of the UW-Whitewater Counselor Education program for their curiosity, support, and kindness.

Dr. Emily Hall and the UW-Madison Writing Fellows Program for supporting my first exploration of this topic ten years ago. Dr. Rob Nixon and Dr. Rachel Azima, mentors for my undergraduate thesis, for helping me see that I can take on a project of this scale.

My friend Jessica Benish for her sustained interest in this project during a very busy year of her life and for her mutual love of “old lady power walks” as self care. We had many conversations about this project while pushing her son’s stroller around Madison’s Tenney Park Lagoon.

Diane Woodbridge, George Woodbridge, and Michael Johnson, for everything.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Review of the Literature	4
A Theoretical Framework of Reflection: The Work of Schön, Kolb, and Mezirow	4
Characteristics of Constructivism: The Role of the Self and the Importance of Dialogue.....	9
The Role of Reflection in Counselors' Professional and Personal Development	12
Journaling as a Tool for Developing Reflective Practice	17
Journaling for Course Credit: Ethical and Practical Considerations	18
Existing Research on Journaling in Counselor and Psychotherapist Education.....	27
Methods	32
Method of Inquiry.....	32
Participants	33
Participant Recruitment	34
Data Collection.....	35
Data Analysis.....	36
Trustworthiness of the Data.....	39
Results.....	42
Participants' Phenomenological Experiences of Journaling in an Academic Setting	42
Level of Reflection in Participants' Journals.....	61
Discussion.....	67
Participants' Perceptions of Journaling	67
Evidence of Reflective Thinking in Participants' Writing	69
Benefits of Descriptive and Introspective (Non-Reflective) Journal Content.....	70

The Relationship Between Experience and Reflection.....	71
Instructor Feedback: Benefits and Varying Preferences.....	72
Desire for Freedom of Expression.....	74
Practical, Personal, and Ethical Challenges.....	75
Limitations and Directions for Further Research	78
References.....	82
Appendix A: Online Survey Questions.....	88
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions.....	90

List of Tables

Table 1: Categories and Themes in the Phenomenological Data.....	43
Table 2: Summary of Analysis of Levels of Reflective Thinking	62

Master's-Level Counseling Students' Perceptions of Journaling
as a Tool for Developing Reflective Thinking and Self-Awareness

by

Lindsay Woodbridge

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, 2014

Under the Supervision of Dr. Brenda Rust O'Beirne

Counselor educators are invested in helping students develop reflective thinking skills and increasing self-awareness, and often assign journals as a means of doing so. While much has been written about the potential benefits of journaling for counseling students, less is known about whether students themselves view this purportedly learner-centered practice as beneficial. Thus, the purpose of this study was to generate a phenomenological description of how master's-level counseling students perceive journaling assignments, including whether they believe journaling results in the outcomes their instructors expect. This study explored the phenomenological experiences and writings of four counseling students in a CACREP-accredited program at a mid-sized public Midwestern university who kept a journal during an addictions counseling course in the summer of 2013. Results indicate that participants felt the journal contributed to their learning by helping them develop greater self-awareness and practice the reflective thinking skills they will need in their counseling careers. Analysis of participants' journal entries indicated that participants consistently demonstrated reflective thinking in their writing. These findings are useful to counselor educators who may be considering implementing or modifying journal or other reflective thinking assignments in their courses.

Introduction

Among those who train counselors, social workers, teachers, and nurses, the terms “reflection” and “reflective practice” arise frequently (Norrie, Hammond, D’Avery, Collington, & Fook, 2012). A primary goal of training professionals in these fields is to foster students’ abilities to be reflective (Burgess, Rhodes, & Wilson, 2013). Stated benefits of reflection include the opportunity to learn from experience (Kolb, 1984), increased self-awareness (Moon, 2006), and the ability to improvise in professional scenarios (Binder, 1999). Despite the discussion and the promise associated with reflective practice, serious questions remain as to how to define reflection, how to study it, and whether it can be taught.

Among all of these questions, a fundamental truth emerges: reflection is difficult to define (Scanlan & Chernomas, 1997). Dewey (1933), widely acknowledged to be one of the first modern thinkers to apply the concept of reflection to education, defined it as the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends” (p. 9). In more recent definitions, common features include that it is an internal process (Kember et al., 1999; Moon, 1999) used for the critical assessment (Mezirow, 1991; Thorpe, 2004) of issues that do not have clear solutions (Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Schön, 1983). Case conceptualization is one example of this process: counselors receive a large volume of client data – data that is often ambiguous and sometimes conflicting – and must use it to generate hypotheses and a treatment plan (Falvey, 2001). Reflective thinking is essential to this process.

Reflection integrates both thoughts and feelings (Boud, Keough, & Walker, 1985). Past experience is the most widely acknowledged subject matter for reflection (Kolb, 1984; Schmidt & Adkins, 2012), and some consider assumptions, intentions, and motives to be suitable material as well (Mezirow, 1991; Samuels & Betts, 2007). For example, a counselor can reflect by looking

back on a past case and developing new understandings. A counselor can also reflect by analyzing a strong reaction she had during a client session and identifying the assumptions that fueled that reaction.

Reflection is a goal-oriented activity (Moon, 1999; Schön, 1983); goals include meaning-making (Mezirow, 1991; Schmidt & Adkins, 2012); developing new understandings, insights, or perspectives (Boud, Keough, & Walker, 1985; Thorpe, 2004); and guiding future attitudes or behaviors (Fook & Askeland, 2007; Samuels & Betts, 2007). In addition, reflection is a cyclical process (Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Kolb, 1985), meaning that individuals can reflect more than once on the same experience, intention, etc. For example, a counselor-in-training might watch a taped session to reflect on how the session went, and later review this tape with a supervisor and reflect on it again. The counselor-in-training emerges from both periods of reflection with new insights that she can put to use in future client work.

Despite the abundance of definitions, reflection as a process is not well understood (Hargreaves, 2003; Ixer, 1999). Bennett-Levy (2003) argued that the reason for this lack of understanding is that reflection, by its nature being an internal process, is difficult to study. Some researchers attempt to use interpersonal process recall to retrieve subjects' internal reflections after the fact (see, for example, Burgess, Rhodes, & Wilson, 2013). However, reflection largely remains, as Bennett-Levy (2003) put it, "a behavioral scientist's nightmare" because it is "out of reach of the experimenter's best attempts to bring it under experimental control" (p. 16).

In spite of a lack of empirical research offering a detailed explanation of the process of reflection, reflective practice remains highly regarded in many fields, including counseling (Schmidt & Adkins, 2012). After interviewing 100 counselors at various stages of their careers, Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992b) concluded that reflection is the central process by which counselors grow as professionals. As such, counselor educators endeavor to include reflection in

their curricula. This study investigated one example of a reflective writing assignment completed by master's-level counseling students in a CACREP-accredited program in the upper Midwest.

Review of the Literature

A Theoretical Framework of Reflection: The Work of Schön, Kolb, and Mezirow

In the literature on reflection, the names Donald Schön, David Kolb, and Jack Mezirow loom large. Each man developed or expanded a theory of adult learning that features reflection in a central role. Each theory has a slightly different focus: Schön's work (1983, 1987) centered on professional development and the necessity of professionals to reflect on their work to produce positive change. Mezirow (1991) focused on the features of adult learning, particularly the deepest form of adult learning, which he describes as transformation. Kolb's work (1984) emphasized the centrality of experience – and reflection on that experience – for meaningful learning. These three threads run through all of the literature related to reflection in counselor education (among other fields), and thus provide the theoretical framework for an investigation of reflection in counselor education.

In his books *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1987), Schön advocated moving away from a conception of professionals as simple administrators of a bound set of knowledge upon known problems. Instead, Schön argued professionals should be seen as thoughtful actors who distinguish themselves through their ability to reflect on complicated scenarios to determine a way to move toward a solution. In Schön's view, when a professional is faced with a novel challenge, her critical first step is to wade into the problematic information to generate an accurate understanding of what the problem is. Schön described this initial task as "mak[ing] sense of an uncertain situation that initially makes no sense," and defined it as *problem-setting* (1983, p. 40). As described previously, one example of problem-setting in the counseling field is case conceptualization. Using information gathered from an intake interview, including the client's verbal responses to questions about current functioning and past history, observations of body language, and other non-verbal cues, the

counselor establishes a framework for understanding the client's issues and begins to generate ideas for the treatment plan. In Schön's terms, the professional who engages in this process is a reflective practitioner.

Schön distinguished two types of reflection in which professionals engage. One, reflection-on-action, occurs when a professional looks back on past events and generates new understandings (1983). In the counseling field, this type of critical thinking occurs when a counselor writes a progress note after a session. In Schön's view, the other – more advanced and more helpful– form of reflection is reflection-in-action, in which the professional thinks about what she is doing even in the midst of doing it (1983). For example, a counselor may ask her client a seemingly benign question and receive an unexpectedly affect-laden response. If the counselor is adept at reflecting-in-action, she can reflect upon the question itself and the reasons it may have drawn such a response. She can then use this information to alter the mental framework she is using to conceptualize the client's case. To Schön, this experience of encountering a result or phenomenon that differs from what was expected is an important catalyst for reflection-in-action, and as such is critical to a counselor's practice. The practitioner must allow herself to feel "surprise, puzzlement, or confusion" (1983, p. 68), reflect on this feeling and what caused it, and act upon the surprising scenario by setting up an experiment that allows her to explore the situation further and test new hypotheses (1983). Throughout the counseling process, both reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action are essential to the counselor's work.

In *The Reflective Practitioner*, and to an even greater extent in his follow-up work *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Schön contended that training programs for professionals must be redesigned so students learn how to reflect-in-action just as they learn other skills related to the profession (1983, 1987). Future professionals must be trained to create time and space to engage in reflection (1983). In this form of training, educators function as coaches who teach and

model reflection through reciprocal dialogue with students (1987). This system of the educator as a coach and a model of reflection aligns with the supervision process in counselor education. In a supervisory relationship, the supervisor and supervisee work together to identify critical moments in a counseling session, reflecting-on-action and forming strategies for moving into reflection-in-action the next time the supervisee is faced with a similar situation. The supervisor can also share past experiences in which she has reflected-in-action during a client session (Stoltenberg, 1981).

In Schön's view, past experience played an important role in professionals' processes of reflection. Schön wrote that reflective professionals such as himself "bring our past experience to bear on the unique case" (1983, p. 140). In his model of learning, Kolb (1984) assigned an even more central role to experience. To him, every act of learning was "grounded in experience" (p. 27). In fact, for Kolb, experience played two roles in the learning process. First, experience provides learners with concrete examples of the sometimes abstract concepts they may come across in their studies. For example, a novice counselor's first encounter with counter-transference during a session provides a rich, real-world, subjective experience that illuminates a term she may have seen defined in a book or described by a professor. In addition, experience serves as a learner's testing grounds, in which she can check the validity of the things she has learned (Kolb, 1984). For instance, after meeting with a supervisor to process her experience of counter-transference, the novice counselor returns to her next session to test newly learned techniques for keeping herself grounded and focused on the client.

To illustrate how experience drives the learning process, Kolb (1984) conceptualized a four-stage model of learning. The steps, which form a cyclical process, are "concrete experience," "observations and reflections," "formation of abstract concepts and generalizations," and "testing implications of concepts in new situations" (p. 21). This model illustrates the two different roles that experience plays in learning: lived experience is the fodder for reflection, and also provides

the grounds for testing the outcomes of reflection. The model also demonstrates how reflection is crucial for making meaning of past experiences and setting the stage for the development of new ideas and approaches. In addition, the cyclical nature of Kolb's model makes it clear that reflection is not a one-time event; a learner may reflect on an experience more than once and derive new learning each time.

Like Kolb, Mezirow (1991) closely paired reflection with experience, writing that “we resort to reflection only when we require guidance in negotiating a step in a series of actions or run into difficulty in understanding a new experience” (p. 107). Mezirow's depiction also calls to mind Schön's emphasis on surprise as the catalyst for reflection-in-action. However, Mezirow couched reflection in a theory of adult learning that is rooted in constructivism and has as its central goal the transformative process of making and remaking meaning. In Mezirow's terms, reflection is the process by which adults truly learn.

Unlike learners who are children, Mezirow (1991) argued, adult learners must gain completely new perspectives in addition to gaining more knowledge. Armed with their new outlooks, adults experience “a more complete understanding of changing events and a higher degree of control over their lives” (p. 3). Because of this focus on the acquisition of a new perspective rather than additional knowledge, Mezirow branded his theory of learning as transformative. Reflection is central to the project of meaning-making that defines transformative learning. Mezirow argued that, over time, adults develop systems of meaning – often in the form of preconceived ideas or assumptions – that “diminish our awareness of how things really are” (p. 5). Transformative learning occurs when adults critically reflect on their thoughts and assumptions, test them, and replace them with new, more useful insights and meanings. In fact, for Mezirow, adult development was defined by the individual's ability to become a better learner through reflection (1991).

Mezirow (1991) identified three forms of reflection. The first, content reflection, is what takes place when a learner critically assesses a perception, thought, feeling, or action. For example, a client acknowledges that she feels uncomfortable in the presence of her openly gay coworker. She reflects that this discomfort does not fit with her general perception of herself as an open-minded person. In Mezirow's second type of reflection, process reflection, the learner reflects on *how* she carried out the process of perceiving, thinking, feeling, or acting, and assesses her effectiveness. For instance, the client looks back on past interactions with her coworker and identifies specific topics of conversation that triggered her feelings of discomfort. She revisits how these triggers caused her to relate to her coworker differently.

Finally, in premise reflection, the learner critically examines the assumptions and beliefs that informed the way she approached the perception, thought, feeling, or action. For example, the client realizes her feelings of discomfort are rooted in the religion she practiced as a child, one that condemns homosexuality. After making this connection, the client begins to strategize ways to move away from the teachings of her childhood religion and instead view her coworker in a way that better reflects her current value system. Mezirow contends that premise reflection is the deepest and most meaningful form of reflection, and it is the means by which we transform the way we look at and relate to the world.

Mezirow (1991) delineated three common forms of non-reflective action. The first is habitual action, which requires no conscious thought, such as brushing one's teeth. Another is thoughtful action, in which past learning is invoked but not critically assessed, such as solving a math problem using a formula printed in a textbook. The last is introspection, a close relative of reflection that involves thinking about oneself without the development of any new insights. For example, a client considering a new career notices that he is happier and feels more productive when he is engaged in solitary tasks rather than group projects or meetings.

Taken together, the work of Schön, Kolb, and Mezirow paints an image of reflection as an ongoing process grounded in experience that is critical to personal and professional development. Their position was that reflection is necessary for learning – particularly for adults who have amassed life experiences and may have become rigid in their thinking. Their work has been taken up by educators in counseling and other fields and used to justify the inclusion of reflective thinking exercises in these curricula (Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Mann, Gordon, & MacLeod, 2009). While the theory behind reflective thinking assignments is well established, less is known about the most effective ways to put it into practice in the classroom.

Characteristics of Constructivism: The Role of the Self and the Importance of Dialogue

To accept the centrality of the self and the importance of dialogue in learning is to embrace the postmodern theory of meaning-making known as constructivism (Perkins, 1999). Constructivists believe learners uncover knowledge by integrating their experiences and observations of the world with their own thoughts and beliefs (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Mezirow, 1991). In fact, any meaning that exists is assigned by the learner through her active participation in the process (Mezirow, 1991). Observers of constructivist classrooms see students interacting with the instructor and with one another, debating concepts, incorporating experiences from their own lives, and reaching their own conclusions. This environment is markedly different from a more traditional classroom in which the teacher presents information and the students passively receive it. In a constructivist learning environment, students uncover meaning by looking both inward and outward, and through solitary thought as well as dialogue with others (Mezirow, 1991; Stevens & Cooper, 2009).

In learning that incorporates reflection, the individual learner possesses the power to create meaning, and reflection is a central means for doing so. In her theory of the role of reflection in social work, Ruch (2002) wrote of the self as a “vital source of knowledge” (p. 211).

Von Wright (1992) argued that the reflective learner opens up access to an entire “new domain of knowledge, that relating to the self” (p. 61). For example, a counseling student keeping a reflective journal for an ethics class uses her new knowledge of ethical standards to reflect on her past counseling experiences. In doing so, she better internalizes the concepts she is learning in class and also gains a new viewpoint on her counselors’ approaches and effectiveness during these past encounters. Somewhat paradoxically, reflecting on one’s thoughts, feelings, or actions, whether alone or with others, allows the individual to create some distance from her subjective experience (Walker, 1985). When this distance is in place, the learner can evaluate her thoughts, feelings, or actions more objectively, which in turn provides opportunities for additional learning (Walker, 1985).

Learning through reflection necessitates the acceptance of the *whole* self: emotions and intellect, successes and setbacks, rational and the irrational responses (Fook & Askeland, 2007; Ruch, 2002, Walker, 1985). In assigning reflective portfolios to his adult students, Walker (1985) made a point of encouraging students to be ruthlessly honest in their reflections and explore feelings of discomfort and awkwardness. Similarly, Ruch (2002) advocated a model of reflective thinking in which anxiety is acceptable and even embraced as a part of the learning process. For many learners, embracing awkwardness, discomfort, ambiguity, and anxiety through reflection is an unsettling experience. If they choose or are required to share their reflections with others, they might feel they are risking disapproval, criticism, or even exploitation (Fook & Askeland, 2007). After all, disclosure of uncomfortable feelings, setbacks, and irrational responses runs contrary to the environment of assessment in which most students complete their reflective thinking assignments.

When learners take the risk to self-disclose in their reflections, they allow themselves access to a number of personal benefits including increased self-awareness and a deeper

understanding of themselves as learners (Moon, 1999; Ruch, 2002; Walker, 1985). The objectivity that reflection provides plays an important role in self-awareness: by revisiting one's thoughts, feelings, and actions, and later one's reflections, an individual is able to see herself in a different light (Holly, 1989). Looking back on his experiences assigning journals to his students, Walker (1985) observed that students who complete a reflective portfolio tended to gain a better understanding of how they learn. After the learner knows more about herself, how she sees the world, and how she learns, she can use that knowledge to improve, empower, and emancipate herself as she sees fit (Moon, 1999). Furthermore, self-knowledge and self-awareness are ethical necessities for the practice of counseling and related fields (Hubbs & Brand, 2005). The self-awareness that a counseling student develops as a result of reflection contributes directly to her effectiveness in working with clients (Hubbs & Brand, 2005).

While self-awareness is a very important goal, individuals must engage in dialogue to get the most benefit from reflection (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). The objectivity afforded by reflection allows an individual to have a dialogue with herself. She can revisit past thoughts, feelings, and perceptions to contrast them with the present (Walker, 1985). In addition, some educators recommend creating opportunities for students to share their reflections with each other (Bennett-Levy et al, 2001; Walker, 1985). Walker (1985) identified several benefits to students sharing their reflections: they can compare their approaches to the assignment, learn what others are doing, and determine whether they want to make any changes to their reflective process. In addition, receiving others' feedback can inspire additional reflective thought.

Bennett-Levy et al. (2001) studied two cohorts of Australian clinical psychology students who completed self-practice and self-reflection in a cognitive therapy course. The self-practice and the reflections were an ungraded yet required element of the course. The researchers analyzed data from participants' journals as well as transcriptions of group and individual interviews. In

their analysis, the researchers uncovered an additional benefit of reflecting: exposure to others' reflections helped students place their personal experience within a broader context (Bennett-Levy et al., 2001). For example, a student who wrote about an unsuccessful experience with a self-practice technique could learn how others had benefitted from it. By sharing, the authors argued, reflectors can learn from one another, enrich their own experiences, and receive feedback and ideas that in turn spur additional reflection. However, it remains to be seen whether studies of other populations result in similarly favorable conclusions regarding reflection and constructivism.

The Role of Reflection in Counselors' Professional and Personal Development

Counselors are professionals who complete specialized training, and as such they fall into the group Schön discussed in *The Reflective Practitioner*. Indeed, counselors can derive many benefits from incorporating reflection into their work. These benefits include greater awareness of self as it relates to one's interactions with clients (Hubbs & Brand, 2005; O'Loughlin, 2003), the capacity to improvise in a counseling session (Binder, 1999), the ability to transform professional experience into wisdom (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001), and the power to ward off burnout, stagnation, and professional impairment (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992b; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). In fact, counselor educators such as Shovholt and Rønnestad (1992a) and Bennett-Levy (2006) argued that for counselors, the ability to reflect is not simply a benefit, but a necessity. Bennett-Levy (2006) described reflection as "central to the process of therapy" (p. 68), and thus, self-reflection "is arguably the central skill that trainers should be developing in trainees for ongoing professional development" (p. 61).

Through reflection, counselors increase their self-awareness and self-knowledge, understandings that Hubbs and Brand (2005) asserted are necessary in the counseling field (and likely other fields as well, such as education, social work, and nursing). Individuals in these

professions must have a solid understanding of their personal values and beliefs, and furthermore must know how those values and beliefs fit within the context of their professional cultures (Mann, Gordon, & MacLeod, 2009). O'Loughlin (2003) added that counselors who are aware of their personal issues may be "more available for those we seek to help" (p. 26). In 2006, Howard, Inman, and Altman published a qualitative study analyzing incidents that nine counselors-in-training had identified as critical to their professional growth. The authors reviewed journals that trainees had kept during their clinical practicum, identifying critical incidents and classifying them into categories. The nine participants were completing practicum in a variety of settings, including schools and mental health clinics, and had been assigned the journal by their instructor.

Using discovery-oriented research, the researchers identified five categories and subcategories among the critical incidents participants described in their journals. They found that an entire category of such incidents was related to moments of increased self-awareness and self-insight. For example, a student may become aware of a powerful internal reaction to a client, such as fear. Through reflection, either alone or with others (such as a supervisor), the student can process this feeling; explore it in the context of her personal history, values, and beliefs; and use the information to better serve clients going forward (Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006). Thus, self-awareness serves as the starting point for being able to monitor and regulate oneself (Mann, Gordon, & MacLeod, 2009).

With a focus on counselor development over time, Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992a, 1992b) carried out several studies of counselors at various stages of their careers. In one study, they conducted semi-structured interviews of 100 counselors and counselors-in-training ranging in experience from zero years to 40 years. Using a qualitative grounded theory research design, the authors extracted a list of themes from the interview data and used these themes to develop a grounded theory of counselor development. They found that individuation is the general direction

of development for counselors. Rather than “playing the role” of the counselor, the experienced counselor instead integrates her personal and professional identities.

Several years after their initial research on counselor development, Rønnestad and Skovholt (2001) re-interviewed 12 of the senior counselors from their initial study. The mean age of participants at the time of the second study was 74 years, and the mean number of years of postgraduate experience was 37.6. The researchers conducted another round of semi-structured interviews and analyzed the data. The second study revealed that the senior therapists identified four “primary learning arenas”: childhood experiences, experiences in adulthood, the wisdom that comes from years of professional experience, and relationships with mentors (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001). Drawing upon these findings, Rønnestad and Skovholt (2001) concluded that professional development is an ongoing process throughout a counselor’s education and career, and that counselors must be reflective to continue developing throughout their professional lives.

In both their initial and follow-up studies, Skovholt and Rønnestad found that ongoing personal reflection is the primary means by which practitioners continue to develop throughout their careers (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992b; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001). As theorized in Kolb’s model, this reflection is spurred by personal and professional experience and is nurtured by several factors including an attitude of exploration, openness to feedback, and an environment that supports practitioners taking time to reflect (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2011). The researchers conceptualized reflection as making the difference between a counselor having “20 years of experience or one year of experience 20 times” (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001). Through reflection, a counselor is able to use her experience, observations, and feedback from others to transform her practice (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2011).

The corollary to these findings is that counselors who do not value exploration, continually seek out feedback, or take time to reflect on their experience are at risk for

pseudodevelopment, stagnation, and professional impairment (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992a, 1992b, 2011; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992a) identified the years two to five after completion of a graduate program as critical for determining whether the counselor will move toward continuing development or toward pseudodevelopment and stagnation. No longer required by instructors to read or reflect as they were in graduate school, counselors must develop individualized approaches to continuing their learning. The fodder for reflection can be as unique as the individual; counselors can seek out experience through supervision, a peer group, workshops, staying current on empirical research, or examining psychological themes in literature or film (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992a). The most important thing is that counselors take ownership of their ongoing development and continually seek out opportunities to grow (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992b).

Binder (1999) argued that the ability to reflect – in this case, reflect-in-action – can also increase a counselor's ability to improvise. This improvisation makes her more effective when new information presented during a session reveals flaws in her previous conceptualization of the case. With this assertion, Binder built upon Schön's (1983) concept of reflection-in-action. Binder (1999) contrasted expert counselors, whose working models of client issues and interactions are well-defined and subject to frequent updates and revisions, with novice counselors, whose working models are fragmented and superficial. Burgess, Rhodes, and Wilson (2013) set out to test this claim by using an interpersonal process recall study design to investigate clinical psychologist trainees' abilities to reflect during client sessions. Their research involved 10 trainees reviewing 27 past counseling sessions. To collect their data, the researchers sat beside the trainees to view tapes of trainees' sessions with clients and asked each trainee to stop the tape at a point where the trainee experienced distress during the session. The researchers

then used open questions to generate a description of the trainees' internal thought patterns during those moments.

The researchers analyzed the data to produce a grounded theory of trainees' abilities to reflect in action. They found that when trainees did engage in in-session reflections, these reflections were elementary. For example, sixty percent of participants recalled that they had engaged in self-talk in an effort to get the session back on track. Four of the 10 participants reported that they had called to mind the words of a supervisor or other experienced therapists (Burgess, Rhodes, & Wilson, 2013). In contrast, when an expert counselor receives data that challenges her existing working model, she engages in reflection-in-action to modify the existing model and proceed through the session in a way that is more helpful to the client (Binder, 1999). In fact, Binder placed such emphasis on counselors' ability to improvise through reflection-in-action that he called it "the highest form of therapist competence" and "the essence of therapist expertise" (p. 714).

In their critique of the pedagogy of counselor education, Nelson and Neufeldt (1998) expanded on Bennett-Levy and Skovholt and Rønnestad's call for counselor educators to nurture students' abilities to think reflectively. In Nelson and Neufeldt's view, the role of the counselor educator is to foster students' development toward expertise (1998). This process involves instruction in theories and techniques, and also in how to generate one's own expertise through reflection (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). They viewed reflection as a tool counseling students will need throughout their careers, and thus is on the same level as knowledge in areas such as ethical principles and counseling theories. Nelson and Neufeldt (1998) believed that counselor educators help their students develop as reflectors by "providing the space to reflect, the permission and encouragement to reflect, the knowledge of how to inform one's reflective process, and a safe relational environment in which to consider one's personal and interpersonal experience" (p. 82).

Skovholt, Rønnestad, and others have established that reflective thinking is essential to counselors' practice throughout their careers, while Nelson, Neufeldt, and Bennett-Levy have called upon counselor educators to take up the task of teaching students to be reflective. However, questions remain as to how counselor educators can best incorporate reflective thinking into their training programs.

Journaling as a Tool for Developing Reflective Practice

Recognizing the importance of developing reflective practice among counseling students, Griffith and Frieden (2000) put forth a list of possible teaching techniques. These options included Socratic questioning, journaling, reflecting teams, and interpersonal process recall, in which a student revisits a past experience such as a client session and shares the internal feelings and attitudes she was experiencing throughout. Clearly counselor educators can incorporate more than one method into their teaching, and yet still must make choices regarding which teaching method(s) they will use to foster reflection.

Norrie et al. (2012) reviewed the literature to get a broader understanding of how reflection is taught across numerous professions in the social sciences and health care. In their findings, the researchers noted that the reflective portfolio, or journal, has emerged as the method most frequently used for fostering reflective practice across these fields. Researchers and scholars of education have identified a number of benefits of journaling: as a place to record observations of surroundings and experiences, a support for the constructivist imperative to empower students to be active players in their own learning, and an avenue for self-expression and creativity (O'Connell & Dymont, 2011). Arguably the most important benefit of journaling, however, is its potential to foster reflective thinking.

Perhaps the most important defining criteria for journals used in an educational setting is that the writer's goal is to learn rather than simply to describe her day or experience catharsis

(Moon, 2006). Stevens and Cooper (2009) provided a list of six attributes that define a journal as used in an academic or professional development setting. The journal is written (in the sense that it is recorded, thus including journals composed of images, audio recordings, or video recordings), informal in tone and flexible. To an extent, it is private. It is dated and is also archival, meaning the writer or others can return to the journal at later points in time. However, Moon (2006) reminded readers that a reflective journal does not have a fixed definition, and in fact can vary depending on the type of educational opportunity, structure of the journaling assignment, and characteristics of the learner. While it is clear that there is any number of ways to structure a journaling assignment, it is less clear how these choices impact students' receptivity to such assignments.

Journaling for Course Credit: Ethical and Practical Considerations

For the many benefits reflective journaling brings to practitioner training programs, there are also a number of potential downsides. These concerns span ethical issues such as confidentiality as well as practical issues. Several writers have noted that many of these concerns have their roots in the fundamental difference between the culture of reflection and the culture of formal education (Fook & Askeland, 2007; Parikh, Janson, & Singleton, 2012; Stevens & Cooper, 2009). This tension could be as simple as differences in opinion between student and instructor on the proper format, length, and frequency of journal entries.

Delving into ethical concerns, Fook and Askeland (2007) pointed to the competitive nature of the educational system and how it is at odds with exploration of ambiguity, anxiety, and puzzlement that takes place in authentic reflection. Parikh, Janson, and Singleton (2012) framed this cultural difference in terms of assessment: while reflection is at its most useful when reflectors are exploring uncertain or confusing thoughts or feelings, the conventions of the graduate school classroom dictate that students' work must be assessed by some yardstick of

completion and/or quality. Hargreaves (2003) contrasted reflection, which she described as “morally open,” with reflective practice, which is “bound within the ethical code of the profession” (p. 200). As Stevens and Cooper (2009) summarized, journals are very different from other types of academic work such as presentations, research papers, and exams.

Self-disclosure and confidentiality.

One potentially problematic aspect of assigned reflective journaling is its emphasis on self-disclosure. Like the counseling process, reflective thinking can stir things up for students in a way that might be perceived as damaging in the short-term (Griffith & Freiden, 2000). Ghaye (2007) warned that reflective writing is “not always an inherently ‘safe’ activity” (p. 156) and thus presents a potential for harm. The American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics states that counselor education programs must keep students informed regarding “training components that encourage self-growth or self-disclosure as part of the training process” (ACA, 2014, F.8.a). Counselor educators frequently give assignments, such as journals, that require some level of self-disclosure (Morrisette & Gadbois, 2006).

Pollard (2008) countered these concerns by stating that reflective writing is focused on specific behaviors rather than the writer as a person; for this reason, self-disclosure is acceptable. In addition, it is possible that by not self-disclosing, students deprive themselves of the type of constructivist learning that takes place through conversation, both with themselves (by revisiting their own writing) and with others (Pollard, 2008). Bennett-Levy et al. (2001), who studied counseling psychology students assigned a self-practice and self-reflection exercise, reported that some students addressed the issue of self-disclosure by choosing to limit their disclosures to issues related to the *process* of their self-practice rather than its content.

An issue that is separate from but related to self-disclosure is confidentiality. Although some instructors such as Walker (1985) do not require students to turn in their reflective journals,

stating that costs outweigh the benefits, many instructors do require students to turn in their reflective writing for review and assessment. Sutton, Townend, and Wright (2007) questioned how instructors would respond to student journals that contain indications of physical abuse, sexual abuse, or unethical treatment of clients. To minimize issues related to confidentiality, a consensus has emerged that counselor educators need to address confidentiality when they introduce the journaling assignment (Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Parikh, Janson, & Singleton, 2012; Stevens & Cooper, 2009). For example, instructors can delineate the limits of confidentiality, whether students will be expected to share their journals with their peers, and whether the instructor will share content from individuals' journals with the class.

Format and number of journal entries.

Other less controversial aspects of journaling assignments, such as structure, length, and number of entries, can also pose challenges. Students are busy people, and those who are required to keep a journal for class often do so in addition to other assignments. In their review of the literature on the use of reflective journaling assignments in various practitioner training programs, O'Connell and Dymont (2011) reported that students are more likely to view journals as busy work rather than a valuable use of their time when instructors are not clear on their reasons for assigning the journal or how students should structure their entries.

Wanting to better understand students' perceptions of their journaling assignments, Greiman and Covington (2007) studied 41 student teachers in agricultural education program in Minnesota who were kept a weekly journal as part of their student teaching experience. Following this experience, the student teachers completed a questionnaire that included both scaled and open-ended questions. The researchers analyzed the data using both quantitative and qualitative methods seeking to determine the participants' preferred form of reflection (verbal, written, etc.) as well as their perceptions of the benefits, outcomes, and barriers to journaling.

Responding to an open survey question, participants indicated five categories of barriers: lack of time, competing priorities, not knowing what to write, preferring verbal or other forms of reflection over writing, and concerns related to confidentiality. Of these, struggling to find time to journal was the most frequently cited barrier, garnering 56% of the total responses (Greiman & Covington, 2007).

It could be argued that competing priorities, which was the second most commonly cited barrier, is simply a variation on the previous barrier. For example, while Greiman and Covington (2007) coded the following participant's comment in the "other priorities" category, it could feasibly be applied to the "finding time to journal" category as well: "I tried to make sure I did my journals when I got home every day but I was so tired by then I usually went home and fell asleep" (p. 130). Added together, these two categories account for over three-fourths of participants' responses to the barrier prompt and represent a significant obstacle to this group's reflective practice.

McGarr and Moody (2010) discovered that one group of students' perceptions of journaling and the quality of the reflections improved after instructors significantly reduced the number of required entries. The researchers studied student teachers enrolled in a one-year graduate school program in the Republic of Ireland. Students kept a journal throughout the program, including during a five-week student teaching placement in which they taught up to 23 lessons per week. 59 of the 90 students in the program completed a questionnaire, and 15 of those also participated in one of two focus groups. The researchers used SPSS to analyze some questionnaire data and used a coding process to determine themes that emerged from the open-ended questionnaire prompts and the focus groups. The results indicated that when students were asked to write about the two most significant issues from their teaching each week rather than generate a 200-word entry for each of the up to 23 lessons they taught weekly, students' satisfaction, as

well as their perceptions of the quality of their writing, improved. Thus, in determining the frequency of required journal entries, instructors should consider that less can often be more. When students can focus their journal writing on the topics they feel are more important, they are more likely to be satisfied with the assignment and perceive it as valuable to their learning (McGarr & Moody, 2010).

The degree of structure of a journal assignment, meaning the extent to which instructors provide students with specific prompts to address or a format to follow, is an additional practical consideration. In their study of student teachers in an agricultural education program, Greiman and Covington (2007) attempted to compare participants' perceptions of structured versus unstructured journal assignments. 23 participants completed structured journal assignments (i.e. they responded to a specific prompt each week) while the other 21 participants received no prompt. Findings showed that students in both groups had mixed responses as to whether the assignment should have more structure or less. Furthermore, the researchers found that there was no significant difference in the level of reflectivity between the students who received structured journal prompts and those who did not. In fact, the participants who received the less structured assignment were more likely than their peers to report improvements in their ability to write reflectively (Greiman & Covington, 2007).

Feedback and grading.

Instructor feedback and assessment are particularly important considerations. Regarding instructor feedback, the main topics of discussion are whether instructors should give feedback at all, and if they do, whether that feedback should be formative, summative, or both. Stevens and Cooper (2009) advocated for instructors to provide feedback in addition to grades, and further, advised that feedback be formative so that it supports "the basic objectives in assigning reflective

writing in the first place” (p. 112); namely, gleaned additional learning from experience and reinforcing reflective practice.

Much of the research supports this point of view. Schmidt and Adkins (2012) used a phenomenological research design to better understand how students and faculty members in a CACREP-accredited counselor education program conceptualized reflective practice and how they felt it should be taught. Participants included six second-year master’s-level students who kept a journal during their internship experience. The researchers collected data through two unstructured individual interviews for each participant, observations of group supervision classes, and several artifacts such as program-produced documents and objects participants chose to represent the concept of reflection. After data collection, the researchers coded the data to develop a phenomenological description of students’ and faculty members’ experiences of journaling in counselor education classes. Schmidt and Adkins (2012) found that students valued receiving individualized feedback, including follow-up questions, from their instructors. The students felt that their instructors’ engagement with their reflective writing, including both support and challenge, helped them improve their reflectivity.

Sutton, Townend, and Wright’s (2007) study of 19 students in a cognitive behavioral psychotherapy post-graduate training program revealed a very different experience for the students, and yet resulted in a similar call for the necessity of instructor feedback to support students’ development as reflective thinkers. These students kept a written journal throughout their training program. The researchers conducted focus groups to collect data. They coded the data and assembled a phenomenological description of the students’ experience. Unlike the students in Schmidt and Adkins’ study, the students in Sutton et al.’s (2007) study expressed that they felt unsupported by faculty members as they journaled and were “left to deal with any thoughts or feelings autonomously” (p. 396). Like Schmidt and Adkins (2012), Sutton et al.

(2007) concluded faculty members should provide students with written, structured, and formative feedback and support.

There is one study suggesting that instructor feedback can have a negative rather than positive impact on students' experiences with reflective writing. In this study of eight teachers who were enrolled in a six-month professional development program in Tanzania, Otienoh (2010) found that many of the study participants were disheartened and frustrated by their instructors' feedback. For example, one participant recalled, "The first day I reflected, I was told it was not reflection. So I was discouraged completely" (p. 148). Although instructors felt their comments in the margins of students' journal entries were helping to improve students' reflective abilities, the students themselves perceived the comments as irksome and as indicators that their instructors felt they did not have adequate reflection skills. Because of the negative impact on their attitudes toward the journal and perception of their ability to reflect, participants reported that the quality of their reflections actually decreased as a result of their instructors' feedback (Otienoh, 2010). While the results of this study are interesting in that they present an important counterpoint to much of the extant literature, it is important to keep in consideration some flaws in the study's design. Perhaps the most glaring issue is that the researcher was an instructor at the education institute being studied (Otienoh, 2010). Thus, she had a prior professional relationship with the subjects' instructors and perhaps even prior instructional relationships with the participants themselves. In addition, potential cultural differences may limit the generalizability of this study's findings to a Western audience.

The culture of formal education insists that instructors provide assessments of students' work. And yet, as stated previously, the concept of assessment is at odds with the informal, developmental, and often speculative nature of reflective writing. For this reason, the literature reveals disagreements about grading journals (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). Writing from a social

work perspective, Ixer (1999) argued that because educators know so little about reflection as it relates to professional competence, they lack the appropriate means to assess students' reflective work. Hargreaves (2003) suggested that mandatory assessment of journal entries forces students to write "a narrative that they and their assessors each recognize as a legitimate reflection of an idealized professional scenario" (p. 201) rather than writing honestly. One example of an acceptable narrative is the redemptive narrative, in which a writer shares an inappropriate attitude or belief and then demonstrates how he has changed his ways and is now redeemed. In contrast, an illegitimate narrative would be the expression of this inappropriate attitude or belief without the redemptive conclusion (Hargreaves, 2003).

Hargreaves' position is supported by Hobbs (2007), who conducted a study of 12 participants who kept journals during a short-term TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) certification program. Hobbs, who embedded herself among her participants, found that participants had resorted to writing what they thought their instructors wanted to read, a tactic Hobbs labeled strategic journaling. The author concluded the students "believe[d] that writing ideas that their superiors agree[d] with or view[ed] as intelligent or meaningful [would] have a positive impact on their grade or position" (p. 415). Thus, rather than fostering reflection, the journaling assignment negatively impacted both the participants' capacity for reflection and their attitude toward reflective practice.

However, others have resisted the skepticism of Ixer, Hargreaves, and Hobbs, even as they acknowledged assessment remains a difficult task. Stevens and Cooper (2009) offered a list of journal criteria that instructors might assess, including the students' type of thinking, depth of reflection, and whether the writing demonstrates curiosity and openness. Other, less subjective potential criteria for assessment include formatting, number of entries, and whether the entries are related to the objectives of the course. Whichever assessment criteria instructors choose, a

consensus has emerged that it is very important for instructors to share these criteria with students as early in the course as possible, and preferably document them in the course syllabus (Hubbs & Brand, 2005; O'Connell & Dymont, 2011; Parikh, Janson, & Singleton, 2012; Sutton, Townend & Wright, 2007). While offering assessment criteria cannot guarantee that students will not resort to “strategic” journal entries, it can potentially help dispel some students’ anxiety about having their reflections assessed while also reinforcing an educational culture that values reflective thinking.

Capacity for reflective thinking.

When instructors assess students’ journal entries, research indicates that they are likely to discover students have a wide range of reflective abilities, with relatively few students able to reach the deepest levels of reflection (Mann, Gordon, & MacLeod, 2009; O'Connell & Dymont, 2011; Otienoh, 2010; Samuels & Betts, 2007). To put it in another way, although students are journaling, not all are doing so reflectively. In her study of 52 nursing students who kept a journal for a nursing management class, Thorpe (2004) conducted analyses to determine whether each student was a non-reflector, a reflector, or a critical reflector (comparable to Mezirow’s concept of premise reflection). Thorpe found that just six of the students (12%) could be labeled as critical reflectors, while eight to 20 (15%-38%) were non-reflectors, and the remainder fell in between. Thorpe’s (2004) study suggests that although instructors assign journals with expected outcome of reflective thinking, a significant percentage of students fail to meet that expectation.

Recognizing this gap in students’ reflective abilities, Samuels and Betts (2007) designed and tested an intervention aimed at helping nine student teachers move from description toward reflection in their required journal entries. The intervention was a series of questions that guided students through a self-assessment of their own journal entries. Before and after the intervention, the researchers used a five-level scale to determine each student’s level of reflectivity. Of the

eight students who completed the study, six (75%) demonstrated improvements in the depth of their reflections over time. However, none of the participants reached the highest level of reflection on the scale (Samuels & Betts, 2007). Though small, this study demonstrates that while students may begin with varying – and often underwhelming – abilities to write reflectively, well-structured interventions have the potential to help students develop their reflective practice.

Existing Research on Journaling in Counselor and Psychotherapist Education

There is a limited amount of existing research on the usefulness of reflective writing in post-graduate counseling and clinical psychology programs. A search of the literature revealed four studies on this topic, all qualitative in design and reliant upon participant self-report. In each study, reflective journaling was implemented in a slightly different way. For example, students in one study created video journals (Parikh, Janson, & Singleton, 2007), while the others completed more traditional written journals. In two studies, students reflected on their internship experiences (Parikh, Janson, & Singleton, 2007; Schmidt & Adkins, 2012).

In the previously discussed Australian study, students used self-practice of cognitive therapy techniques as the fodder for their reflections (Bennett-Levy et al., 2001). Building upon a suggestion in the literature that students of cognitive therapy benefit from self-practice of relevant techniques, the researchers studied two cohorts of clinical psychology students who completed self-practice and self-reflection in a cognitive therapy course. Members of the first cohort were allowed to determine the topics and format of their writing, while the second cohort completed a more structured reflective writing assignment. The analysis revealed two processes in play: reflecting on experience and viewing the therapeutic techniques from the client's point of view. As a result of these processes, students came to know the subject matter at a deeper level, which in turn improved their understandings of cognitive therapy, their skills as therapists, and their conceptions of themselves as therapists.

Further findings included a considerable amount of resistance at the beginning of the course largely due to the personal nature of the exercise and the acknowledgement that sharing added significantly to the experience while also presenting ethical challenges (Bennett-Levy et al., 2001). Overall, the researchers concluded that “well-facilitated courses that encourage SP/SR [self-practice and self-reflection] will add personal and professional value to the trainees’ experience” (Bennett-Levy et al., 2001, p. 217). One potential limitation of the study is that five of the six authors were members in the first cohort. Although the researchers took steps such as member validation and other forms of triangulation, there is a possibility that the researchers’ bias as course participants impacted the conclusions they drew from the data.

In their study of 19 cognitive behavioral psychotherapy students, Sutton, Townend, and Wright (2007) sought to better understand students’ perceptions of the use of reflective journals in their training program in the United Kingdom. Participants identified several benefits of journaling, including the opportunity for emotional catharsis, a means for reaching deeper levels of empathy, and an opportunity to engage in self-reflection and track growth over time. Students reported significant variations in the format, style, length, and frequency of their journal entries. These variations were perhaps related to a perceived lack of information on the purpose, requirements, and means of assessing the journal, with increased confusion after a change in program faculty. Related to the external audience (faculty members), students reported censoring themselves and also feeling a lack of support when they did choose to share their thoughts and feelings.

From this data, the researchers concluded that in spite of significant ethical issues related to self-disclosure and assessment, and the open question of how much support faculty members should provide, reflective journaling “has the potential to be a valuable tool in development of reflection within cognitive behavioral psychotherapy training” (Sutton, Townend, & Wright,

2007, p. 400). To address some of the ethical considerations, the researchers offered lists of recommendations that included advice for structuring journaling assignments, assessing journals, and supporting students.

Similar to the Bennett-Levy et al. (2001) study, the identities of the researchers provide a potential limitation for these findings. One author was a graduate of the program that was the object of the study. Another author was the leader of the program under study, and thus was responsible for implementing the journal assignment and may have assessed students' work as well. Again, despite taking actions such as using a research journal, explicitly listing influences and potential biases, and bringing in a third author from a different university, it is possible that the personal ties of two of the three authors could have impacted the study's findings.

As stated previously, journals can take forms other than writing. Noting the potential limitations some students might experience with written journaling, Parikh, Janson, and Singleton (2012) sought to capture the phenomenological experiences of seven master's-level counseling students who created two video journals during the first semester of their school counseling internship. Students were not graded on the content of their video journals (S. Parikh Foxx, personal communication, July 21, 2014). Each participant sat for one individual interview.

Analysis of the data revealed that students conceptualized video reflections as a developmental process. At first, they were apprehensive and viewed the assignment as challenging. For many students, however, this apprehension faded by the time they completed their second video journal. Compared to written journals, participants felt that the video journals allowed them to be more authentic because they could communicate at two levels (verbal and non-verbal) and also knew the assessment of their work would not include a critique of their writing skills. In another point of comparison, participants felt that creating and reviewing video journals led them to consider the connections between their reflections and their work as school

counselors in a way that written journals could not. By the end of their experience, participants expressed a preference for video journals over written journals. The researchers concluded that “reflective video journaling shows promise as a method that supports counselor development, particularly around reflective practices” (Parikh, Janson, & Singleton, 2012, p. 45).

Once again, existing and possible future relationships between the researchers and participants indicate a potentially significant limitation for this study. The first and second authors, who analyzed the qualitative data, were also the participants’ internship supervisors. Thus, they were responsible for assessing participants’ video journals. The authors did not disclose when the interviews and data analysis took place relative to the participants’ internship experience, so the authors could have continued to have an evaluative role in the participants’ program during and after the study. For these reasons, it is possible that participants engaged in significant self-censorship in their interview responses.

In their study of six master’s-level counseling students who kept a journal during their internship experience, Schmidt and Atkins (2012) found that participants viewed reflection as playing a significant role in fostering growth in this environment. Participants indicated that reflection has some universal qualities – for example, it starts by looking back, its main purpose is to make sense of past experiences, and it can impact future behavior – and yet it remains very individualized. Participants viewed reflection as a skill they can improve over time, with several elements necessary for fostering improvement, including new experiences and an environment that facilitates reflection by providing both challenge and support. Individualized feedback from faculty members comprised an important means of this support and challenge, and it contributed greatly to whether participants perceived the journaling assignment to be beneficial for their learning. Although the study’s authors took courses with some of the same faculty members as the research participants, this study is not marked by the same limitations related to the

researchers' identities as the previous studies. However, like other studies discussed here, the relatively small number of participants poses a potential limitation for its findings.

Despite the existence of several studies examining counseling or clinical psychology students' experiences of journaling in training programs, there remains room for further exploration. In particular, there is a need for studies in which investigators lack both institutional ties to the programs being studied as well as existing or future relationships (evaluative or otherwise) with the study participants. In addition, while the Bennett-Levy et al. (2001) study took into consideration both the contents of participant interviews and the contents of their journals, none of the other studies included students' journal entries in their analysis. Thus, while the present study is also a phenomenological exploration of the experiences of a limited number of participants, differences in the design and methods indicate that it has the potential to offer important new insights on master's-level counseling students' perceptions of whether journaling is an effective tool for promoting reflective thinking.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of master's-level counseling students' experiences keeping a reflective journal as part of their required coursework. Specifically, did students perceive the journal to be a forum for practicing and demonstrating reflective thinking? Did they believe that keeping a journal for class had any impact on their level of self-awareness? In short, how well (or poorly) did students' lived experience keeping a journal align with their professor's expectations for the assignment? Furthermore, how might an understanding of these perceptions impact the way counselor educators structure journals and other reflective practice assignments in their courses?

Method of Inquiry

Because the goal of the study was to better understand students' perceptions of journaling, the researchers chose a qualitative approach. Reflection is notoriously difficult to study (Bennett-Levy, 2006), and a qualitative research design allows a point of entry into this personal and subjective process (Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006). Specifically, this study used a phenomenological design to capture participants' experiences and perceptions of journaling (Parikh, Janson, & Singleton, 2012; Schmidt & Adkins, 2012). The intended outcome of this approach was to develop a rich description of students' experiences keeping a journal as part of their course requirements.

To support this phenomenological approach, researchers collected data in a number of forms. Each participant completed an online survey and sat for one individual interview. The researchers also reviewed students' journal entries and their instructor's feedback on this writing. The primary author and a department staff member analyzed data collected through interviews and participants' journals. They coded interview data to arrive at a number of categories and themes capturing participants' phenomenological experience. They analyzed participants'

journals to determine to what degree the participants demonstrated reflecting thinking in their writing. By analyzing students' thoughts and feelings on keeping a journal alongside the learning outcomes demonstrated in those journals, the researchers sought to develop a rich, multi-faceted description of the experience of journaling from students' perspectives.

Participants

Participants were recruited from a pool of 28 master's-level counseling students who completed an addictions counseling course in the summer of 2013. These students were enrolled in a CACREP-accredited professional counseling program at a mid-sized public university in the upper Midwest. Neither author was affiliated with the students' university or its professional counseling program. Within the professional counseling program, participants pursued an emphasis of student affairs and college counseling, clinical mental health counseling, or school counseling.

Four students participated in the research. Three were female and one was male. Two participants were completing requirements for the clinical mental health emphasis, one for student affairs and college counseling, and one for school counseling. Three participants identified as Caucasian/White, and the fourth identified as Hmong. All four participants were between 26 and 30 years old. At the time they took the addictions counseling course, one participant was completing the first semester of internship. Two others began their internships the following term, and the fourth began practicum the following term.

Students in all three emphases were required to complete the addictions counseling course, and for most, it was one of the final content courses they took in their master's program. The course took place during an eight-week summer term and was facilitated in a hybrid (online and on-campus) format. As part of the course, students chose a behavior and attempted to change it during the term. Related to the behavior change experience, students attended at least four open

recovery meetings, submitted two online discussion posts describing their behavior change experience and after-care plan, and kept a weekly journal. The instructor evaluated students' journals using a rubric, and the journal comprised 25 percent of students' overall grade in the course. The rubric included criteria related to the number of entries (8), writing quality (grammar and mechanics), and how well students covered required topics. These topics encompassed struggles and successes; thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; experiences in the family system; and experiences attending recovery meetings. Seventy-eight percent of students in the class (21 of 27) received an A on the assignment. Two students (7.4%) earned an A-, and one (3.7%) each earned a B+, B-, C+, and C. Regarding confidentiality, the course syllabus included a statement that students were expected to keep confidential all student and client information discussed in class. Neither the course syllabus nor the assignment rubric included content on confidentiality or other ethical issues specifically related to the journal.

Participant Recruitment

Prior to beginning research, the researchers sought and obtained institutional review board approval from both the researchers' home university and the participants' university. Following this approval, participant recruitment began. Sampling was purposefully homogeneous in that the researchers sought out individuals with similar credentials: each person in the sample pool was a master's student in a professional counseling program who completed the addictions counseling course in the summer of 2013 (Creswell, 2008). Within this pool, researchers attempted to gather a variety of perspectives by selecting participants randomly. Using a random number sequence and the class roster, the primary author generated a list of 10 students to invite to participate in the research. The students received the invitation from their course professor.

After a limited number of the randomly selected students agreed to participate, the researchers extended the invitation to all students who had taken the course. Follow-up

recruitment efforts included additional emails from students' addictions counseling professor and internship professor, as well as an in-person recruiting visit by the primary author. Out of the 27 class members, four students agreed to participate in the research.

Data Collection

All participants gave their written consent prior to their participation. Before their individual interviews, participants completed an online survey to provide demographic data and basic information on their current and past experiences with journaling. Participants indicated whether they currently kept a personal diary or journal and whether they had kept one in the past. They also indicated the number of master's-level counseling courses for which they had been required to keep a journal, and whether they had ever chosen to keep a journal for a graduate course without it being assigned. The purpose of the online survey was for the researchers to get a broad sense of each participant's experience with journaling, both personally and academically, prior to the interview. A full list of survey questions is available in Appendix A.

Each participant sat for one 30-45 minute semi-structured interview. The primary author conducted the interviews. Interviews took place four to six months following the completion of the addictions counseling course. The course was identified for study more than a month after students had completed it; what followed was a period of obtaining institutional research board approval, recruiting participants, and securing participants' consent. Each interview took place in the counseling lab of the students' university. The goal of the interviews was to gather students' perceptions of their journaling experiences in the addictions counseling course, including what it was like to keep a journal; in what ways, if any, they believed the journal contributed to their learning; and their thoughts on how their journals were evaluated. The interview was also designed to elicit participants' thoughts and feelings on journaling in both the addictions counseling course and the program as a whole; for example, participants were asked to describe

their understanding of why professors assigned journals for their counseling courses. Appendix B provides a full list of interview questions. The interviewer posed each of the listed interview questions to each participant. Based on participants' survey and interview responses, the interviewer posed follow-up questions to develop a detailed understanding of each student's subjective experience with journaling.

Participants consented to release their class journals, including feedback from their instructor, to the researchers, and these written documents became an additional source of data. Journals ranged in length between 2600-6300 words, and between 7-14 entries. The average number of words per entry ranged from 300 to 450. One journal was hand-written and the other three journals were typed. All four participants fell within the 78% of the class who earned an A on their journal. The instructor provided additional written feedback for three of the four journals. This feedback was not available for the fourth journal because the student submitted the journal late.

Data Analysis

Interviews.

The primary author transcribed each interview. After all four transcriptions were complete, the primary author and a department staff member from the primary author's home university completed open and axial coding to develop a list of themes from the interview data. These coding procedures provided researchers with a systematic process for analyzing qualitative data (Creswell, 2008). First, the coders independently reviewed the interview transcripts and developed an initial list of open codes. They met to discuss their respective lists. When a code appeared on both coders' lists, it was added to a separate, final list of open codes. When there was disagreement, the coders returned to the interview transcripts to demonstrate the presence or absence of a particular code.

Next, each coder independently reviewed the final list of open codes. They separately developed a list of axial codes under which they could group one or more of the original open codes. The coders met to discuss their lists of axial codes. They compared their lists of axial codes and combined them into a single list. Finally, they discussed which of the axial codes could stand alone or whether some codes should be combined. In deciding whether axial codes should stand alone or be combined, the coders considered whether the code(s) represented separate high-level concepts or were simply different facets of the same concept. In this way, the coders collaboratively arrived at a list of axial codes with supporting open codes. The outcome of the process, as shown in the Results section that follows, is a list of categories (previously axial codes) and themes (previously open codes) drawn from interview data. These categories and themes provide a phenomenological description of students' experiences of journaling in their addictions counseling course and in their master's program as a whole, as described to their interviewer.

Journal entries.

The primary author and the department staff member who coded interview transcripts also analyzed participants' journal entries to determine the participants' level of reflective thinking. Noting the frequency of reflective assignments in education programs, Wong, Kember, Francis, and Yan (1995) sought to develop a system for assessing the level of reflection in students' journals. After analyzing a group of journals using models based on the work of both Boud and Mezirow, Wong et al. (1995) determined that the coding system based on Mezirow's model produced the most consistent results. As stated previously, Mezirow (1991) conceptualized three levels of reflective thinking: non-reflective, reflective, and critically reflective.¹ After reviewing a detailed description of the three levels of reflective thinking in Mezirow's original

¹See this paper's literature review for a detailed description of each of these terms.

text (1991), the two coders piloted the journal coding process by individually reading each journal entry for one of the participants. Separately, they determined whether each journal entry demonstrated non-reflective, reflective, or critically reflecting thinking and documented their decision and their rationale.

After completing this process, the two coders met to discuss the labels they had assigned and their reasons for doing so. When the two coders disagreed on the level of reflection demonstrated in a given journal entry, they returned to the journal entries and cited a specific passage or passages that they believed indicated the level of reflective thinking demonstrated in the journal entry. After each coder shared the rationale for her decision, the coders discussed the differences and reached a consensus. Researchers used triangulation to help increase the trustworthiness of their findings; additional information on measures taken to ensure credibility is available in a later section. Following this pilot coding process, the coders used the same process to individually and collaboratively assign levels of reflection for each entry in the other three journals. They used this information to identify each participant's highest level of reflection as well as his or her most commonly reached level of reflection.

This data on the level of reflection demonstrated in participants' journal entries adds another dimension to participants' subjective experiences with journaling as described in their individual interview. Specifically, it provides clues to the effectiveness of journaling in promoting reflective thinking among this group of master's-level counseling students completing one of their final content courses. Paired with data from surveys and individual interviews, data from the analysis of journal entries helps complete the picture of participants' overall experiences with journaling.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Krefting (1991) offered a definition of credibility in qualitative research that is focused on truth value: “a qualitative study is credible when it presents such accurate descriptions or interpretation of human experience that people who also share that experience would immediately recognize the descriptions” (p. 216). This study employed a number of strategies aimed at increasing trustworthiness, including reducing pressure for participants to provide preferred social responses, triangulation of methods, triangulation of investigators, and reflexivity.

In this study, participant interviews were conducted by a master’s-level counseling student who had no institutional affiliation with the participants’ home university and had no role in assigning participants’ grades or determining their fitness for graduation. This approach differs from some previous studies of the use of reflective journals in counselor and counseling psychologist training programs. Because the interviewer had no influence over the participants’ success in the program, and was in fact a student just like the participants, there was little incentive for participants to obscure their true thoughts and feelings related to journaling during their interviews.

Two forms of triangulation were employed in this study. The first was triangulation among methods of data collection. While individual interviews were the primary form of data, data was also collected through an online survey and through participants’ journal entries. With multiple sources of data, the investigators could be alert to sources of consistency and inconsistency in the data generated for each participant. For example, if a participant’s survey response indicated that she had completed reflective journals for multiple graduate-level courses, the interviewer could confirm this information and inquire about the breadth of the participant’s experiences with journaling during the individual interview.

This study also employed triangulation of investigators. Both the primary author and a department staff member individually coded the interviews and then met to discuss their work and reach a consensus on their findings (Patton, 2002). A similar process of triangulation was used in determining the level of thinking demonstrated in students' journal entries. The primary author identified as a Caucasian woman between ages 26-30. At the time of the data analysis, she was in the second year of her master's-level counseling program with an emphasis in community counseling. The second coder also identified as a Caucasian woman between ages 26-30. At the time of data analysis, she was in the second year of her master's-level counseling program with an emphasis in school counseling. She held a graduate assistantship in her department, and it was in this role that she served as the second coder for this research project. The second coder had not been involved in the research prior to data analysis.

Because investigators play an active role in qualitative studies, it is important for those conducting research to assess and describe their personal feelings and biases regarding the subject matter (Creswell, 2007; Krefting, 2001). Prior to beginning data analysis, the two coders met to describe and discuss their own thoughts and feelings regarding journaling and reflection in both academic and personal contexts.

The primary author has kept a personal journal for more than 15 years. The frequency of this journaling has varied over the years, and the journal is private. She identifies journaling as one of her primary coping strategies. She first developed an interest in journaling in an academic setting as an undergraduate student. Enrolled in a seminar for peer writing tutors, she carried out a small research project on academic journaling. Her interest in academic journaling was renewed when she entered her master's program and began to keep journals as part of course requirements. Overall, she has found journaling to be a useful component of her graduate education. She cites limited time as her biggest barrier in completing her journals for class. For this reason, she

frequently declines to keep a journal in classes for which it is recommended, but not required.

When she writes journal entries for class, she views her professor as her primary audience and struggles with the concept of writing for herself.

The second coder has also had both personal and professional experiences with journaling. She has kept a personal journal in the past, and maintains her personal journaling currently, albeit quite infrequently. The frequency of her personal journaling has decreased as she has gotten older. She has completed required journals for her graduate coursework. She has found journaling to be useful, particularly the journals she keeps for her school counseling courses. She has also experienced limited time as a barrier to the journal writing she has done for class.

Results

Participants' Phenomenological Experiences of Journaling in an Academic Setting

Analysis of participants' interviews initially uncovered 16 themes emerging from the data. Upon further analysis, these 16 themes were collapsed into five larger categories. See Table 1 for a list of these categories and themes. The following sections present each theme with supporting data from participants' interviews. For the purposes of these results and subsequent discussion, "journal" refers to the academic assignment, while "reflection" refers to the intrapersonal and sometimes interpersonal process of deriving new learning from past experience. In this chapter, participants' interview responses and journal passages are labeled with pseudonyms. However, where participants' spoken or written comments could provide clues to their identity, pseudonyms have been omitted to protect their anonymity.

Table 1*Categories and Themes in the Phenomenological Data*

Category	Theme
1. Benefits and drawbacks	<p>a. Reflection provides a “time out” that leads to deeper thought.</p> <p>b. Journals are a place to describe and label thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.</p> <p>c. Journaling increases self-awareness, particularly awareness of areas for growth.</p> <p>d. Struggle is part of the process. Reflection is difficult for both emotional and practical reasons.</p>
2. Experiential learning	<p>a. Rich experiences provide multiple sources for reflection.</p> <p>b. Participants generated meaning by layering different facets of their experience.</p>
3. Developmental nature	<p>a. Written journal entries provide a record of reflective thought over time.</p> <p>b. Revisiting past journal entries facilitates additional reflection.</p> <p>c. Participants became better reflectors over the course of their program.</p> <p>d. Reflection supports personal growth</p> <p>e. Reflection supports growth as counselors.</p>
4. Individual preferences	<p>a. Number of entries, length of entries, and journaling format varied for each participant.</p> <p>b. Preferences regarding instructor feedback varied.</p> <p>c. The structure of this journaling assignment facilitated personal writing, which participants welcomed.</p>
5. Ethical considerations: audience awareness	<p>a. Tension exists between sharing and confidentiality.</p> <p>b. Self-censorship is a reality.</p>

Category 1: Benefits and drawbacks.

Participants expressed that keeping a journal was important and useful for learning, and could also be uncomfortable and difficult at times. Many of the same qualities that made reflection so valuable also made it difficult. As one put it:

I think doing the journaling really kind of forced me to critically look at myself and critically think about some things that I honestly don't know if I would have done because it can be uncomfortable, and you know, pieces of myself that I don't always want to explore. (Participant Four)

Despite the potential discomfort, for those who chose to engage in reflection, the benefits were many. They included incentivizing reflective practice, deepening their thoughts, and allowing them to learn from their experiences.

1.a. Reflection provides a “time out” that leads to deeper thought.

Like many graduate students, the participants described themselves as busy. They acknowledged it can be difficult to make reflection a priority, and that having the assigned journal helped them to do so. Participant Two described it this way: “[Journaling] was really helpful. Because I’m not sure I would have thought as much about it, about what was going on [without the journal]... In doing the journal I was able to sort of think back to that moment.” Participant Four emphasized the sometimes difficult yet very important self-reflective aspect of journal writing:

Journaling is really important because it forced me to sit down and really take a look at things.... Sometimes there are pieces of ourselves that come out that we tend to want to just keep hiding or keep avoiding. So I think having the option of just being reflective in my head, I probably would have avoided a lot of reflective pieces.

Participants One and Three both conceptualized their journals as another way to engage in reflective thinking, one based on writing. Participant Three stated, “I’m always thinking about things, but I don’t necessarily write it down. But I think writing it down does help.” Participant One shared, “[The journal] gave me a place to kind of put together my thoughts and feelings about the situation. We discussed it in class ... but having a chance to write it down gave me a different avenue to express it.”

1.b. Journals are a place to describe and label thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

As described in a later section, the behavior change process challenged participants to think, feel, and behave in ways that were new to them. Participants used their journals to process these challenges and new experiences. For Participants Three and Four, moments of relapse held particular importance. Participant Four reported using relapse experiences as fodder for growth: “I relapsed a few times, and so I was just kind of able to see, like, what was it in those moments that I relapsed? Like, was I making excuses for myself or was it, like, a true need that I had to have that [banned food] or whatever?” Participant Three made a relapse experience the subject of a journal entry, “Focusing on, like, how I felt when I relapsed or how I felt when, like, not being able to take it seriously. Really just admitting to that in my journal.” Like Participant Three, who questioned the legitimacy of the assignment following a relapse, Participant Two experienced a similar thought pattern and used the journal to explore it: “The moments when I thought ... it’s just a class activity, you know, I would say that to myself, and then I would catch myself doing that and then write about it.”

1.c. Journaling increases self-awareness, particularly awareness of areas for growth.

All participants acknowledged the aspects of their program that related to self-awareness and personal growth. As Participant Three put it, “Our program is very personal growth-oriented. And so I think that’s a piece of it. [Journaling] helps us to look at ourselves and what comes up

for us.” Participant One described how the assignment allowed the participant to reflect on many aspects of everyday living, including the behavior change experience: “[The journal] gave me a space to kind of piece together everything that was going on within my life, or I’ve experienced, or I was experiencing during the process.” One participant noted that keeping a journal supported that participant’s efforts toward self-awareness: “[Journaling] reinforced things that are important or big in my life.... It really just helps me be aware of my foundations and what I’m grounded in” (Participant Three).

In addition to basic self-awareness, participants noted that journaling helped them identify opportunities for personal growth. Prior to or during the behavior change experience, each participant identified at least one area for growth. For one participant, this area was related to control: “Relinquishing control is something that I’ve encountered several times throughout the program, but I guess in this situation I hadn’t addressed this portion of it. So bringing that out [through a recovery meeting] was interesting.” In summing up the journal, another participant wrote about a different opportunity for growth identified during the behavior change experience: “I learned a lot about how I need to continue working on reaching out to others and asking for help (big things I don’t like to do)!”

1.d. Struggle is part of the process. Reflection is difficult for both emotional and practical reasons.

As stated previously, participants acknowledged both benefits and difficulties of reflection. Participant One described the process in this way: “[Reflection] is something that we definitely maintain throughout our careers. And I think it’s something that everyone should do. It’s difficult, though. It’s very difficult to do. It’s not easy.” Participant Two explored resistance toward journaling in the context of the participant’s clinical practice, and arrived at the following insight:

I don't journal, and I haven't really ever journaled except for a class.... It's something that I encourage clients to do when I see them. So I guess I'll have to think about that. It's kind of funny that I ask other people to do it and I say it's helpful, but I don't do it myself.

Participants described their barriers to journaling in terms of time and extra work. Participant Two elaborated on an earlier observation: "I think what's keeping me from doing it is to me it sounds like work. It sounds like extra work that I'd be doing. And I feel like I've got enough work, I do enough things." Participant One described barriers in this way: "I get distracted, and during the summer I was just exhausted, so I didn't [journal] as much as I would like to."

Others' responses indicate that there may be emotional barriers underlying surface concerns related to limited time or not knowing what to write about: "I think just putting it down in words... it's not in your thoughts anymore. It's like you make it more real if you're writing it out rather than keeping it in your head" (Participant Three). Participant One expanded upon this further, offering a hypothesis on others' experiences of not thinking they have much to write about in their journals:

If you're not willing to go into certain areas of your reflection, that's where most people get frustrated, I think. Because they're like, I don't want to do this, so I'm going to block all of this, and I don't have anything to write about because there's no issues!

Category 2: Experiential learning.

A commonly expressed sentiment among participants was that the content and quality of their reflections was intrinsically tied to the experiences they were reflecting on. Participant One summarized it this way: "Writing kind of put it together, but the experience brought it out."

2.a Rich experiences provide multiple sources for reflection.

Participants described writing about many different aspects of the behavior change experience. These aspects included attending recovery meetings:

I got to hear a lot of people's personal challenges and how they relate to that and where they are at, and how difficult it is for them, and where they're at now, and how even where they're at now, it's still difficult for them every day. (Participant Two)

Another common topic was experiences within the family system: "There is so much involved in [behavior change] with relationships. That it's not just you as an individual that changes, but other people will or will not change with you" (Participant Three). Participants also frequently described their feelings regarding the behavior change assignment:

"It was hard to take serious at first. And I think the journal piece kind of helped with that, too. Because reflecting on that, then, I was like, oh, why am I not taking this seriously? Or, why are people laughing about it in my life? (Participant Three)

Another participant covered similar territory, with the additional observation of a shame response:

I didn't want to say, you know, I'm doing this behavior change project for school. ... I just felt like one thing led to another, and it was like a snowball effect. And then I would have to tell everyone that I'm going to AA, and it's like, even though I don't have an addiction problem, I still felt shameful. (Participant Four)

2.b. Participants generated meaning by layering different facets of their experience.

Participants described using their journals to identify and reflect on their personal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in the context of what they had learned about addiction and recovery through their didactic academic work and their exposure to people in the recovery process. Participant Two described it this way: “My behavior change is pretty small, but going to this meeting really puts things in perspective... If I wasn’t doing the behavior change for myself, I probably wouldn’t have been able to relate as well to the meeting.” Another participant talked about how experiences from the recovery meeting stayed with the participant throughout the term:

I would just think about [the people in the recovery group], you know, when I was with my friends. And it was weird that I was thinking about these random people. But at the same time, it just gave me a lot more compassion because I would see them and think, no, I can do this for an assignment. They have to do this for their whole life. (Participant Four)

Finally, Participant Three described engaging in meta-cognition in the journal, exploring the participant’s discomfort around attending recovery meetings as a student: “I journaled about how I felt like I was invading space. Like, this is such a personal space, and the relationships they have, and here I am.”

Category 3: Developmental nature.

Participants revealed that the journaling assignments they completed during their program helped them grow as reflective thinkers. Several indicated that their written journals provided a record of growth, and that they could achieve further growth by reviewing past journal entries. Furthermore, participants’ responses indicated that growth – as individuals and as counselors-in-training – was both a motivator for and an outcome of their reflective practice.

3.a. Written journal entries provide a record of reflective thought over time.

Participants spoke of their journals as a chronological record of their learning: “When you do it over time, you know, you can look back and see where you were before and where you are now” (Participant Two). When asked about any regrets related to the journal assignment, Participant Four reported regretting that the journal entries demonstrated the polished product of the participant’s reflective process, rather than the messy early explorations of the participant’s experience. This participant suggests that in journaling, writers may be losing something important by sacrificing a full depiction of their thought processes in favor of a clean, coherent entry: “By the time I got to my journal, I knew what I wanted to put down. But maybe I missed some directions. Maybe I missed some avenues that I could have gone down” (Participant Four).

3.b. Revisiting past journal entries facilitates additional reflection.

In addition to simply serving as a written record of learning, Participant Four expressed that recorded reflections are valuable because re-reading the journal can spur additional reflection and learning: “I think each time you look at something, you see it in a different light, see it just a little bit differently. So I’m able to kind of grasp on to meanings more and more the more that I reflect on it.” The participant described how creating journal entries was a prerequisite to this type of continued learning: “With journaling I’m able to re-read it and, you know, look at different layers of myself that I think can be kind of hard if you don’t really keep track of that, you know, file system in your head” (Participant Four). Indeed, Participant Three expressed regret at not having spent significant time re-reading the journal as the course progressed:

I think [re-reading] would help me to remember it. And, like, something solid rather than just in my thoughts... And then the feedback piece, too. Like, if I were actually to go back and look at it more often, then I could look at it and give myself feedback.

3.c. Participants became better reflectors over the course of their program.

Participants described themselves as reflective people, even before they began their graduate training: “I think that I’m pretty reflective, like, I’m a reflective individual on my own. So I’m always thinking about things” (Participant Three). Participant Two echoed this self-evaluation: “I’m pretty mindful throughout the day. I can recognize what I’m feeling, what I’m thinking, and, you know, at the end of the day I always reflect back to what I am thankful for today.”

However, as advanced students in the program, they demonstrated an awareness of their growth as reflectors over time. Participant Two described growth this way: “Coming into the program I learned so much more, I’ve grown so much more with mindfulness and reflecting and being aware of the present moment as well.” In the words of another, “Through reflecting over the last two and a half years, I’ve been able to learn how to reflect and do it effectively. And do it to a point where it’s not as challenging as it used to be and it’s more meaningful” (Participant One).

Participant One went on to describe growth as a reflective thinker by contrasting two experiences with journaling in the counseling program. The participant described the early journaling experience, in a counseling process class during the participant’s second semester in the program, this way:

It’s really our first, you know, one-on-one contact, and we’re being evaluated, and we’re getting feedback, and we’re having to look at all these different parts, that it was, I’m not sure I really gained a lot from those [journal entries]...I had no idea what angle to take to reflect on anything or how to reflect on anything. (Participant One)

The participant contrasted this earlier experience with a later journal, kept for practicum:

Because it's practicum, because it's your personal experience and reaction to things, it's such a higher level that it's more unfiltered and more personal than the academic, or "I need to get this done" sort of thing...I think because I'm at a different level personally, and the class is at a different level, that we're able to express what's really going on at our sites, with our clients, for us, developmentally, things that we encounter. (Participant One)

Participant Three conceptualized the process of developing as a reflector as a shift in audience away from the professor and toward oneself:

What I struggled with when I first started in the program was just like, OK, I'm writing something for my professors to read. And it's reflective of me, but I also want it to be, like, oh yay, I'm doing good, or I'm changing or I'm growing, you know. Or something that I think they would want to hear rather than taking it as something that could help me...It probably was in [my] group [counseling course] when I finally, probably my second semester in, I was like, I'm not writing for them, I'm writing for myself.

Reflecting on past journaling assignments, Participant Four suspected a scaffolding approach at play:

Maybe [our professor] allowed us that freedom [in our behavior change journals] because we had just completed our second year in the program...So maybe she thought we had learned the skill enough that we'd be able to, you know, develop a journal on our own...So maybe it was kind of a scaffolding technique that they do.

3.d. Reflection supports efforts toward personal growth.

As stated in a previous section, several participants described how they used their journals in their work on previously determined self-improvement projects. One participant spoke of using the journal to continue working on increasing the participant's comfort with addressing personal feelings:

Coming into this program... I didn't really like feelings, talking about feelings, or really just reflecting on how I feel, and voicing that or verbalizing that or making it real was something that I struggled with. And so, you know, just being in the program here and I guess getting feedback and reflection on that, then I'm like, oh, this is definitely an area that I need to grow in. And, so, knowing that it's an area that I need to grow in, then I tried to incorporate it into my work.

This participant then went on to describe the mechanism by which reflection supports progress toward self-change: "When you become aware of something, then you're conscious of it, but then you're working toward something, then it just becomes a part of who you are."

3.e. Reflection supports growth as counselors.

Participants spoke of their journals as helping to reinforce the knowledge and skills they will need to become successful practitioners. These lessons encompass several dimensions ranging from simple knowledge of the recovery process and available resources to increasing empathy to addressing potential sources of counter-transference.

For many participants, the behavior change project provided their first major exposure to recovery meetings and people in the recovery process. As a result, participants gained new knowledge and perspectives will benefit their work with clients:

It opened my eyes to a lot of different things for working with those with addictions [...] As I would write, I'd be like, oh, I can see how this is really

difficult for someone with an addiction, or I can see how this would come up for family members, or how this could become an issue for someone trying to remain in recovery. (Participant One)

[Attending Al-Anon meetings] kind of shifted my view of what the whole recovery meeting was about. It wasn't about, like, the person who had the addiction, but it was about being someone who loved that person or was a family member or friend of that person. (Participant Three)

Many aspects of the behavior change process provided participants with opportunities to practice empathy. For example, Participant Three uncovered empathy while writing about how difficult it was to find a meeting to attend:

We got a lot of rejection at first. And so just journaling about, like, if I were addicted to something and trying to find a recovery meeting and I was constantly, like, getting rejected and not being able to find one, then why would I go to one?

Connected to the self-growth projects discussed in the previous section, one participant addressed how the process of reflection helped address potential sources of counter-transference in an effort to become a more effective clinician:

I went out of my spring semester with a goal of reflecting and really digging deeper for the remainder of the program to ensure that I was viable for clients, I guess. So that I was, there were no barriers to my care...I went into this semester kind of, "I need to do this. I'm going to do this."

Two participants drew clear lines between their reflective writing and skills they employed in their work with clients. One shared that at its heart, the participant's approach to journaling was the practice of reflection, a key counseling skill, in writing: "In the program we talk a lot about, when we're with our clients and stuff, 'Say what you hear, say what you see, and say what you

feel.’ And so I think I focused on [that]” (Participant Three). Another participant shared an understanding of the importance of building up reflective skills through writing so that these skills are accessible in client work:

How you sit with the client and the effect they have on you, mean something. It’s bringing forth something that can help you help them...By giving myself a chance to reflect on it, I am able to access whatever that reaction was because chances are the reaction I’m having matches or is very similar to the reaction the client is having. (Participant One)

Category 4: Individual preferences.

Interview data revealed a belief that in journaling assignments, the student is at the center. As such, it is important for students to be able to individualize their work. Participants emphasized the personal nature of their reflective writing. As one put it, “The journaling experience made the class. Because it made the class my own. And I was able to get out of the class what I put into it, what I put into the journal” (Participant Four). Participants expressed varying approaches to constructing their journals and differing preferences regarding feedback. However, participants were united in their appreciation that the assignment was structured in an open way, allowing personalization.

4.a. Number of entries, length of entries, and journaling format varied for each participant.

Journals ranged in length between 7-14 entries and between 2667-6266 words. The average number of words per entry ranged from 305 to 447. Participant Three, who was on the high end of the words-per-entry average, made a conscious effort to apply counseling reflection skills – “See what you say, see what you hear, see what you feel” – to the journal. In contrast, the

participant on the low end of the words-per-entry average described writing journal entries that provided essentially a digest of earlier thought processes:

I did a lot more, like, processing in my head before I put it down on paper. So I think my journal was pretty cleaned up already. It wasn't really the raw stuff coming out because I had thought about it so much before I really typed it.

(Participant Four)

While most participants chose a typed, modified-APA style, mirroring other written assignments they turned in during their program, one participant chose to handwrite the journal instead:

It just seemed like with what [the professor] described and what was in the syllabus for the journal, that what I was doing [handwriting] matched what was desired... Typing would have gone faster and probably longer, but there's, like I said, there's something therapeutic of just having that actual contact with what you're writing.

This participant described handwriting as having a ceremonial quality: "There's something about a pen to paper that I've always enjoyed. And I actually bought a new journal, like a nice journal... And just opening that up, and the crisp page."

4.b. Preferences regarding instructor feedback varied.

Just as participants' journals reflected differing preferences in the style and format of their writing, participants also varied in their preferred form of feedback from their professor. While the professor provided summative feedback, Participant Three would have preferred formative feedback: "I think if we were to get feedback earlier on and see, like, oh, I didn't really think of it that way or that didn't really pop up to me, would have been helpful for me during the whole process of it."

Others preferred their professor's summative approach. One stated advantage is related to the cyclical nature of reflection: their professor could review the entire process and give feedback that encouraged re-reading of past entries. One participant said, "I think turning it in all at once and then getting the feedback afterwards, you can look back and see all, you know, from the beginning to the end, you're more likely to do that" (Participant Two). Participant Four stated it in a slightly different way: "She was able to see our full process, you know, where we came from, how we started out, and the middle, when it really sucked, and then at the end when it was like, yeah! We're done with this!" In addition, Participant Four felt that getting feedback after the journal was complete reduced the participant's anxiety about submitting the journal for review and evaluation:

There's been other classes...where we have to journal every week, and it would be like, a week or two weeks before we would get feedback back. And that really killed me. Because it was like, I'm putting everything out there, and if I don't get that response back I was left wondering, what are they thinking? Or, do they even read my journal?...So this kind of freed me from that high anxiety because it's like, nope, I'm going to work on it, and then at the very end they're going to give me their feedback, and by then I'm done with the class, so I don't have to, like, be afraid of what they might say or be afraid of what they might be thinking about me based on my personal thoughts and feelings. (Participant Four)

In addition to reduced anxiety, this participant felt that the summative approach to feedback also facilitated independent learning:

I just took more ownership of my learning because I was able to say, you know what, what am I going to say if someone says, "Why don't you want this [banned

food]?” or “How come you don’t want this?” So I feel like I still got to that point in my learning, and it didn’t come from [my professor]. (Participant Four)

4.c. The structure of this journaling assignment facilitated personal writing, which participants welcomed.

Although opinions were divided on their preferred method of receiving feedback, participants were unanimous in their preference for assignment guidelines that supported expressiveness and personal choice in their journal writing: “There were guidelines provided, and it was easy to see that you could write about, you know, get in those guidelines and yet write about what was personal and important to you” (Participant Two). In the words of another,

The criteria, the rubric, matched kind of the idea or the concept of doing the journal. So it wasn’t far-fetched to be graded well on it, as long as you were expressive in it. Which, this far along in the program, it’s hard not to be expressive [laughter]. You get called out very quickly if you’re not. (Participant One)

Participant One contrasted this approach to journaling guidelines with the more structured (and less favored) approaches that the participant had come across in other courses:

When I had the criteria, it kind of felt like it was a paper instead of really reflecting or expressing a point of view. And that kind of created a barrier for me in trying to work through whatever was going on.

In contrast, in this assignment,

Not having to [apply readings and theories] with this [journal] allotted me a chance to move through the experience, and instead of, this is what happened, OK, go back and kind of blend this all together...[This journal] was just kind of, it was far more expressive, I feel, than the other [journals]. (Participant One)

As a complement to their own personal expression, participants spoke appreciatively of their professor's choice to respond to their journal entries in a personal way:

[My professor] made a comment that was something like, your experience has helped me come to terms with something she was experiencing. So I thought that was pretty cool. Because it's, like, wow, she really just connected with what I wrote. (Participant Four)

I remember some of [the professor's] comments I think, like, "Oh, I'm, that made me feel very sad" or something when I wrote about something. So just to have, to know you're not alone in it. And for someone to, you know, be able to be there with you through it. (Participant Three)

Category 5: Ethical considerations: Audience awareness.

Although participants valued the latitude for personal expression they were allowed in their journal, they indicated that they were still very aware of having an audience, and in particular, an audience who determined their grade on the journal assignment and in their master's-level counseling course. For many, this awareness of audience impacted what and how they wrote. In the words of Participant Four:

I still wanted to make sure it was my thoughts, but it was still graduate-level writing. And that's probably what prevented me from writing down my, you know, my initial gibberish. That I wanted to make sure that what I was turning in was still quality reflective work.

5.a. Tension exists between sharing and confidentiality.

Participants reported that they valued feedback from others on their reflections and indicated that this external feedback enhanced their learning. One stated, "[The professor] would just highlight something I would not have really thought about even though I wrote about it"

(Participant Two). Another shared, “Really thinking about what you’re writing about or receiving feedback from peers or from the professor, I think is another beneficial piece of it” (Participant Three). However, participants indicated that this additional learning through sharing and receiving feedback came at a cost:

I think [having an external audience] does take away from how personal you can be with it. And what you’re willing to share... I guess it’s like how much can you trust other people or even yourself when you’re writing it out. So finding that line or finding that balance between that, too. (Participant Three)

5.b. Self-censorship is a reality.

Participants reported censoring their journal entries. They indicated a number of reasons for doing so, including personal boundaries, perceived academic expectations, and not wanting to upset or offend their professor:

I trust my professors, so I’m like, OK, well, I can give this much to them.

(Participant Three)

I still think because I knew they’d be reading my journal, that there would still be parts that I’m not going to go there. Which, I mean, isn’t that the whole point of journaling? ...It’s like the pieces that we should be journaling about are the hardest ones to journal about. (Participant Four)

Maybe if I knew that it wasn’t for a grade, I might be a little bit more raw and a little bit more honest. Because sometimes I thought the assignment sucked. But I didn’t put that in my journal. Because I knew that [my professor] would be reading it, and that it was, you know, part of my grade. And I just didn’t want to go down that path. (Participant Four)

I tried to be as honest as I could, but I know that there were times when I didn't put it in my own words. You know, like, I would have sworn or said something like, "This sucks." But I didn't put that in my journal...Because it's not professional, and I guess I just knew that [my professor] would be reading it, and I don't want to hurt her feelings. I don't want to hurt her assignment that she's, you know, worked hard on. (Participant Four)

However, self-censorship was not universal. Participant One provided a viewpoint of journals as a place to be uninhibited in expression: "[The journal] gave me a place to express my feelings unfiltered...Writing, I always feel like I'm able to just spit it out. And I didn't filter or buffer anything I was thinking at the time."

Level of Reflection in Participants' Journals

Data from the journals themselves revealed that while some entries were non-reflective, all participants demonstrated reflective thinking on a regular basis, and each reached the level of critical reflection in at least two entries. These findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Analysis for Levels of Reflective Thinking

Journal	Most frequent level of reflection	Highest level of reflection
1	Non-reflection, Reflection (tie)	Critical reflection
2	Reflection	Critical reflection
3	Reflection	Critical reflection
4	Reflection	Critical reflection

Non-reflective writing.

Twenty-nine percent of journal entries (12 of 41) failed to meet the threshold of reflective writing. Instead, these entries provided description or demonstrated non-reflective levels of writing such as introspection. For individual participants, the percentage of entries assessed at the non-reflective level ranged from 14% (1 of 7) to 38% (3 of 8).

Much of the non-reflective writing was descriptive. Participants described their behavior change process, things that came into their awareness during the process, and what it was like to attend recovery meetings. The following journal passages demonstrate descriptive writing:

We had a packed schedule [during a week-long conference] so I never really had time for [banned foods]. There was a point where I did let myself get really hungry. It was the last day. We were saying our goodbyes and waited till dinner to go out to eat before heading home. I had not eaten anything but a granola bar that day.

I have picked up a couple of my other hobbies more and am enjoying doing those whenever I get bored. I have been really into woodworking and just designed a

nightstand that I am proud of. I am going to be picking out the wood this weekend and starting it at the beginning of the week.

When I was driving over [to the AA meeting], I noticed all of the alcohol-related billboards and advertisements at stores and gas stations. I even caught myself singing along to the words of a country song about partying and drinking.

There were more people [at Al-Anon] this week, which I wasn't expecting with the holiday. There was an even amount of men and women but I noticed how half of the circle was women and the other side was men. There was also a very strong odor of cigarette smoke in the room, which was slightly distracting.

Another large proportion of non-reflective thinking falls into the category of introspection. Introspective writing describes and explores the writer's inner thoughts and feelings, and does not offer a critique of this content (Mezirow, 1991):

I admit I feel left out on things sometimes. I enjoy a warm cup of coffee in the morning, relaxing and chatting with whomever else is around. I also enjoy an ice cold beer while hanging out with friends on a hot day on the water.

I have been dreading today because it is my friends' wedding and I know there will be cake there...The couple decided to have flavored cupcakes instead of a wedding cake and I gave input on which flavors I liked. Some of the flavors were marble cake with butter cream frosting, chocolate cake with chocolate chip frosting, white cake with strawberry filling, and chocolate caramel. They sound so yummy, just typing these make my mouth water.

This morning, I spent about an hour researching and calling local agencies to find open recovery meetings. I felt angry and disappointed; no progress and wasted an hour. I wanted to give up.

I was very nervous entering the meeting. I had no idea what to expect. I kept having random questions come to my mind. How many people would be here? Would I already know someone?

Reflective writing.

Forty-nine percent of journal entries (20/41) met the criteria for reflective writing. Instead of simply demonstrating awareness, reflective writing goes a step further to record new learning stemming from the awareness (Mezirow, 1991). For individual participants, the percentage of journal entries that met criteria for reflective writing ranged from 38% (3 of 8) to 57% (4 of 7).

The following passages demonstrate reflective writing.

I noticed that certain activities triggered my desire or craving for certain foods. I felt out of place/sorts without having access to or eating [banned foods]. It really felt like something was wrong or missing from the experience.

Through this change process I have noticed that I am disciplined. Yet, I wonder how true that is. Yes I can give up [the banned behavior], yet I see I have replaced the behavior with a different one with similar consequences.

When the meeting got started, the same guy as last time suggested we talk about gratitude. I was annoyed and thinking, did he not remember we already talked about this? After I thought about it, I had more empathy for him. In counseling, sometimes clients want to continually revisit one topic because each time it's

discussed, they absorb more and more and are able to integrate information on deeper levels.

I have come to understand that it is more than me who can overcome these things, more than just the addict who can overcome the addiction – that something greater, higher, is needed and it has to be surrendered. Thus for me, it would be God.

Critically reflective writing.

Twenty-two percent of journal entries (9 of 41) met criteria for critically reflective writing, or what Mezirow (1991) would term premise reflection. Wong et al. (1995) described critical reflection as an analytical assessment that is based on experience, draws upon more than one source of information, and is placed in a broad context. Mezirow's (1991) definition emphasized the critique of one's underlying reasons for thinking, feeling, or behaving in a certain way. The percentage of critically reflective journal entries for individual participants ranges from 14% (2 of 14) to 29% (2 of 7).

Each participant produced at least two critically reflective journal entries, and all critically reflective work appeared in the second half of each individual's journal (for example, the eighth, ninth, and 12th entries of a total of 12). Two examples of critically reflective writing arose in response to moments of intense craving or relapse:

I began to think how this [relapse] would have been if I were an addict. (In some ways I am but if I was addicted to a drug). I can see how emotions can really affect a person's judgment. If an addict is having a really difficult time finding support or cannot adjust well due to co-occurring disorders, this situation could have become very ugly.

This last fifteen minutes could have been a very critical point in my life. This puts into perspective what addicts go through every time they face a craving or compulsion. I really see the meaning of “one day at a time” and the need to have acceptance and be humbled knowing that I have no control over the addiction. So while this urge and this moment have been relatively meaningless (other than furthering my awareness), I have a better understanding of how it could be much greater if I had an addiction. How grateful I am.

Other examples of critical reflection emerged as participants reflected on deeply held assumptions and aspects of their personality that became subject to revision as a result of the behavior change process:

As for accepting others where they are at, man, that is hard for me because I constantly want more for them – to be better, to be achieving, to be happy, etc. And that gets in the way of me just being with them wherever they are at. So tonight’s Al-Anon meeting really helped me to focus on my own acceptance of behavior change and my acceptance of where others are at and how I can be there for them! I am so grateful for this group and their wisdom and knowledge within the stories that they share!

I learned a lot about how I need to continue working on reaching out to others and asking for help (big things I don’t like to do!). I think it’s absolutely necessary to have that support system in place because when I was doing it alone, it was like I gave up [the banned foods] AND the relational experience.

Discussion

Participants' Perceptions of Journaling

The results of this study show that for this group of master's-level counseling students, journaling was an effective means of fostering reflective thinking and self-awareness. Each participant shared that keeping a journal was important to his or her learning. Participant Four demonstrated this sentiment most clearly with this statement: "The journaling experience made the class. Because it made the class my own. And I was able to get out of the class what I put into it, what I put into the journal." Furthermore, none of the participants stated that keeping a journal was not useful or valuable for learning. When participants had critical feedback, it was focused on a specific part of the assignment and how it was implemented rather than on the assignment as a whole.

These results reflect the findings of Schmidt and Adkin's (2012) study of a similar population. The authors summarized their results in this way: "The personal voices of participants substantiate and extend the literature regarding [...] reflection" (p. 89). Participants in the current study identified many ways journaling contributed to both their learning in the course and their overall professional development. These results also reflect the findings of McGarr and Moody's (2010) study of student teachers enrolled in a graduate program. Surveyed after instructors improved their journaling assignment by reducing the amount of required writing, 57 of the 59 students (97%) indicated that keeping a reflective journal had been beneficial for them (McGarr & Moody, 2010).

The findings are dissimilar to those of Hobbs (2007), the researcher who embedded herself among a group of students enrolled in a course as part of their TESOL certification. Hobbs found that students held a negative attitude toward their journal assignment, did not benefit from it, and were simply going through the motions to

produce the type of writing that they thought their instructors would want to read (Hobbs, 2007). There are two potential reasons for these dissimilar findings. The teacher trainees in Hobbs' study were required to meet very specific guidelines in their journal entries, which Hobbs described as "leading and repetitive" (2007, p. 409). In contrast, the participants in the current study received only broad rubric criteria as assignment requirements, which allowed them significant latitude for personal expression. In addition, the participants in Hobbs' study were uncomfortable and resistant to the idea of being forced to reflect, while the counseling students in the present study were generally comfortable with the requirement and had multiple prior experiences with it in their master's program. Furthermore, these participants had a clear understanding of how keeping a reflective journal in their addictions counseling course contributed to their development as professionals.

In their interviews, participants expressed a personal understanding of the importance of reflective thinking in the counseling field. When asked their thoughts on why counseling professors assign journals in their classes, all four participants responded that journals were assigned as a means of practicing reflection, deepening awareness, and/or fostering personal growth. Participants indicated ways the behavior change experience and their reflection on it were helpful to them as counselors. Identified benefits included additional knowledge, deeper empathy, and an understanding of the importance of relationships in recovery efforts. Additionally, at least one participant recognized how keeping a reflective journal was practice for the reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) that is necessary for effective counseling:

I think it's really important, as a counselor, as a provider, to reflect on any situation... If I'm starting to get really tense in the moment, or I feel myself kind

of just distancing myself from a client or a situation, I have to sit in it and kind of, what is going on? Why is this happening? You know, what am I feeling? Am I feeling anxious? Am I feeling sad? Am I, you know, what is this? And by giving myself a chance to reflect on it, I am able to access whatever that reaction was. (Participant One)

Thus, it is evident that in this sample of counseling students, the message that reflective thinking is a skill counselors need throughout their careers (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992a) came through loudly and clearly. These findings differ from those of Sutton, Townend, and Wright (2007), whose study of 19 cognitive behavioral psychotherapy students revealed that students were somewhat uncertain about the purpose of their journal assignment and would have benefitted from further explanation at the beginning of the course.

Evidence of Reflective Thinking in Participants' Writing

Findings from the analysis of participants' journals indicate that participants regularly demonstrated reflective thinking and critically reflective thinking in their journal entries. Entries that demonstrated no reflective thinking were the minority – less than 30%. In contrast, almost 50% of journal entries demonstrated reflective thinking, and the remaining 22% demonstrated critically reflective thinking. These findings provide a counterpoint to literature indicating that highly reflective thinking is uncommon in students' work (O'Connell & Dymont, 2011; Thorpe, 2010). For example, in her study of 52 undergraduate nursing students, Thorpe (2010) found that between 8 and 20 of the students (15-38%, a significant proportion) failed to demonstrate reflective thinking in their journal entries. In the present study of master's-level counseling students, each of the four participants demonstrated reflective thinking on a consistent

basis. Furthermore, in Thorpe's study, only six of the students (12%) could be labeled as critical reflectors based on the quality of their journal entries. In contrast, all four participants in the present study reached the level of critical reflection in their writing in at least two entries.

One potential explanation for these contradictory results could be the different populations of students being studied. While Thorpe and many other researchers focused their studies of journaling on undergraduate students in teaching and nursing programs, this study involved master's-level students in a counselor education program. Falling within the 26-30-year-old age bracket, the four participants were all older than traditional undergraduate students, and had already earned undergraduate degrees. In addition, they had each self-selected into a master's program preparing them for a field that heavily emphasizes reflective thinking (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992b). Thus, they may have been more willing than students in other, less reflection-centered fields to produce reflective writing as part of their coursework. Furthermore, each participant was at least two years into his or her master's program and had practiced reflective thinking and writing in prior courses. For these reasons, it could be expected that this group of students would produce journal entries that demonstrate a greater frequency of reflective thinking and critically reflective thinking than has been seen in previous studies.

Benefits of Descriptive and Introspective (Non-Reflective) Journal Content

While reflective thinking is clearly an important learning outcome for students' journals, results of this study suggest that even non-reflective journal entries can be beneficial for students' learning and growth. For example, many of the participants produced journal entries that, in whole or in part, provided a record of their observations. A good example, quoted in the previous chapter, is a participant's description of an AI-

Anon meeting. The participant described the gender makeup of the people in the room and how attendees self-segregated by gender. The participant also described the smell of cigarette smoke that clouded the room. While on the surface this writing is descriptive, and it fails to meet Mezirow's (1991) criteria for reflective writing, it still has value. It provides insight into characteristics and behaviors of some people who choose to attend recovery meetings, as well as an awareness of the environment. For counselors, these observations of clients and their non-verbal behaviors provide an important source of data (Hill, 2010). It is why this group of students had been taught to "say what you hear, say what you see, say what you feel," advice that they later applied to their journals.

Another form of non-reflective writing demonstrated in participants' journal entries that is important to counselor development is introspection. Again, Mezirow (1991) categorized introspection as thinking about the self that does not yield new insights. One type of introspection is labeling feelings; for example, the participant who described feeling frustrated after spending an hour unsuccessfully trying to find an open recovery meeting to attend. Although labeling feelings and other forms of introspective writing are not truly reflective, they are important avenues toward the self-awareness and self-knowledge that are required for effective and ethical counseling practice (Hubbs & Brand, 2005). Perhaps not surprisingly, the participant who wrote about frustration about finding a meeting is the same participant who spoke in the interview about a personal goal to become more comfortable talking about feelings. Thus, for this participant, the journal became an important tool for furthering progress toward a self-identified goal.

The Relationship Between Experience and Reflection

Results from this study support Kolb's (1984) assertion that reflection is spurred by direct experience. To Kolb, experience and reflection comprised the two main

components of a four-stage cycle of learning. This cycle was evident in both participants' journal entries and their interview data. Participant One succinctly summarized the connection between experience and reflection by stating, "Writing kind of put it together, but the experience brought it out." Journal entries demonstrated that participants mined reflections from a multitude of experiences, including recovery meetings, moments of relapse or near-relapse, and interactions with family members and friends. In addition, journal entries demonstrated Kolb's ongoing cycle of experience –reflection-experience. For example, "I thought about the guys from AA when I was out with my friends and started to have a craving." In this journal entry, the participant reflected on one facet of that experience (attending a recovery meeting), which resulted in new insights, which the participant then recalled during another facet of the experience (interactions with friends). Thus, as in Kolb's (1984) model, concrete personal experience served as both the fodder for reflective thinking and the testing grounds for new insights.

Instructor Feedback: Benefits and Varying Preferences

The process of re-reading journal entries could potentially be seen as an extension of Kolb's (1984) cycle of experience and reflection. Participants commented that re-reading their journals, which they tended to do most frequently when they reviewed feedback from their instructor, frequently resulted in new understandings. For example, Participant Two stated that the instructor's feedback spurred the participant to re-read the journal and generate new understandings by "highlight[ing] some of the things that I may have overlooked even though I wrote about them." This finding is similar to an outcome of Sutton, Townend, and Wright's (2007) study, in which "students who chose to reread their journal seemed to go through a process of further reflection on personal and professional change over time, [which] seemed to create a 'deeper' level of

learning” (p. 398). Thus, for instructors assigning a journal for class, it could be wise to build in a mechanism to encourage students to review their journal entries so that they can continue to learn from their own reflections and experiences.

Four to six months after handing in their journals, three of the four participants recalled specific comments their instructor wrote in response to their journal writing. (The one participant who did not recall a specific comment from the instructor was the individual who handed in the journal late and consequently received limited instructor feedback.) That participants were able to recall specific comments from their instructor months later implies the presence of learning through a one-on-one connection, through writing, between student and instructor. In their review of the literature on reflective journals, O’Connell and Dymont (2011) identify this interpersonal connection as one potential benefit teachers receive when they assign journals: “Instructors and students often develop a much better relationship with each other... This is particularly true if the instructor provides authentic, regular and meaningful feedback to the student” (p. 50). The findings of this study suggest that participants appreciated their instructors’ feedback on their writing, seeing it as another way to learn as well as an opportunity to have their instructor respond directly (and often personally) to their experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

The results of this study, in which participants found their instructor’s feedback to be useful and valuable, differ from the findings of Otienoh’s (2010) study of teachers who kept a journal in an ongoing education class. These participants “pointedly argued that they found facilitators’ feedback very discouraging” (p. 148). Reasons for this discrepancy in participants’ perceptions of their instructors’ feedback could include

differences in the format of the assignment, instructors' commenting styles, and/or students' openness to receiving feedback on their writing.

Participants expressed varying preferences regarding feedback on their journals. While one of the four would have preferred formative feedback, the other three were satisfied with summative feedback. In fact, one of these three expressed a strong preference for summative feedback, sharing that formative feedback would not only have been anxiety-inducing, it also would have impeded the participant's sense of ownership of the behavior change process. This majority preference for summative feedback is counter to Stevens and Cooper's (2009) advice for teachers; they stated, "Summative feedback on journal writing without intervening formative feedback may undermine our basic objectives in assigning reflective writing in the first place" (p. 112).

Desire for Freedom of Expression

Participants' feedback on grading procedures reflected an appreciation for the grading rubric as well as appreciation for the freedom to express themselves. One participant stated, "It was easy to see that you could write about, you know, get in those guidelines, and yet write about what was personal and important to you" (Participant Two). Overall, participants' preferences were for less structure in the assignment rather than more. Looking back on past journaling assignments that included more grading criteria, one participant reflected, "For me, when I had the criteria, it kind of felt like it was a paper instead of really reflecting or expressing a point of view. And that kind of created a barrier for me in trying to work through whatever was going on" (Participant One).

This preference for less structure rather than more mirrors the findings of the study done by McGarr and Moody (2010), who found that student teachers assigned a

journal were more satisfied with the assignment and produced deeper reflections after the requirements for the assignment were pared down. The researchers' takeaway for instructors, which could apply equally to Participant One's comment, was that "Course designers need to consider carefully the reflective practice requirements ... to ensure they are not seen by students as obligatory paper exercises" (p. 589). In their study of student teachers, Greiman and Covington (2007) found mixed preferences in the amount of structure in journaling assignments.

It is possible that in the current study, participants expressed a preference for less structure in part because they had already completed several journals in previous courses and thus felt prepared for, and appreciative of, a less structured assignment that emphasized personal expression over meeting an exhaustive list of criteria. Participant Four indicated some understanding of how the program's journal assignments might have evolved toward greater freedom of expression as students moved toward graduation: "Maybe [our professor] allowed us that freedom because we had just completed our second year in the program ... So maybe it was kind of a scaffolding technique that they do."

Practical, Personal, and Ethical Challenges

Using a journal in an academic setting does have its challenges. Participants cited limited time as a practical concern: "I've got to set that time away, time aside to [write my journal]. Then it seems like work thinking about it" (Participant Two). Another stated, "I'm always thinking about things. But I don't necessarily write it down... I don't have the time to do it all the time" (Participant Three). These findings mirror those of Greiman and Covington (2007), whose participants cited difficulty finding time to journal as the most frequent barrier they encountered. Greiman and Covington's participants

indicated that journaling can often feel like a chore, an unwanted additional task on top of everything else they need to do (2007). These findings are reflected in the outcome of McGarr and Moody's (2010) study, in which student happiness and the depth of reflections improved after the number of required journal entries per week was significantly reduced.

Perhaps worth further study is an illuminating statement from one participant indicating how students might use surface-level practical concerns (in this case, not knowing what to write about) to disguise deeper issues with the journaling process:

If you're not willing to go into certain areas of your reflection, that's where people get most frustrated, I think. Because they're like, "I don't want to do this, so I'm going to block all of this, and I don't have anything to write about because there's no issues!" (Participant One)

Thus, instructors assigning journals may be wise to look beyond surface-level concerns about practical issues (e.g., lack of time, lack of topics to write about) to explore underlying reasons students may not be comfortable with journaling assignments. These concerns could be related to the structure of the assignment, as in McGarr and Moody's (2010) study, or they could be related to dynamics within the student.

For all that has been written about the potential difficulty in evaluating students' journal entries, participants in this study expressed few concerns with the process. As stated previously, participants indicated that the rubric made sense and allowed them freedom to write about what mattered most to them rather than "just answering to make sure they check that box" (Participant One). When asked their opinions on the journal comprising 25% of their overall grade in the course, participants expressed no concerns;

in fact, the reigning sentiment was that it made sense because the journal was such an important aspect of the course:

I think that having the journal was a big part of the behavior change process... So

I think it was fair, given that it was definitely laid out as far as how it was evaluated, and it was a big part of the class. (Participant Two)

These findings indicate that participants viewed the behavior change experience and accompanying journal as a central part of the course. And because the grading criteria matched participants' personal expectations of the assignment, meaning they were allowed the degree of personal expression they desired, they were comfortable with the journal being a significant part of their grade.

Self-censorship was evident for some of the participants. For one participant, self-censorship was connected to concerns about trust: "Finding that balance of, well, what do I want to share and what do I want to keep with myself... Because I trust my professors, I'm like, 'OK, well I can give this much to them'" (Participant Three). These comments reveal an interesting dynamic in which even though the participant feels a sense of trust, the outcome of this trust is not complete openness, but rather a lesser degree of self-censorship. Another participant shared similar concerns:

I still think that there's an element of hiding behind your journal sometimes. Not putting everything all out there. Because we know the professors are going to read it and we know it's going to be graded. And I don't even think taking that grading aspect off of it would make a difference. (Participant Four)

These comments call to mind Morrisette and Gadbois' (2006) "many important questions about privacy, purpose, and consent" that arise in relation to assignments like journals that involve the disclosure of personal information. While one way to address

these concerns is to not require students to hand in their journals (Walker, 1985), students would then not receive instructor feedback, which participants reported that they valued.

Not all participants reported censoring themselves, however. For one participant, the journal was a refuge for uncensored self-expression: “Writing, I feel like I’m, I’m able to just spit it out. And I didn’t filter or buffer anything that I was thinking at the time” (Participant One). For this participant, writing offered a kind of freedom of expression that was not available in other forums such as in-class dialogues or online discussion board posts. This range of approaches, from “hiding behind the journal,” to carefully considered degrees of self-disclosure, to complete openness of expression, warrants further consideration. These differences could be related to personality factors, levels of comfort with writing, past experiences with journaling (in both personal and academic settings), and more.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

The results of this study provide a phenomenological snapshot of four master’s-level counseling students’ experiences keeping a journal for a content course in a CACREP-accredited counselor education program. The findings reinforce some of the existing literature, such as concerns about self-disclosure. In other areas, such as the quality of reflection, the findings challenge the existing literature. However, there are a number of limitations.

Despite multiple recruitment strategies, this study had a small sample size. Additionally, all participants were volunteers. Each indicated that he or she considered himself or herself to be a reflective person and/or had kept a personal journal in the past. Each participant received full points on the assignment. For these reasons, the participants may have been very different from students who chose not to participate in

the study. This study would have benefitted from the viewpoints of additional participants who did not identify as reflective and/or did not receive full credit for their journals. Despite measures to protect confidentiality, such students may have declined to participate out of concern that their critical viewpoints could have been traced back to them and had a negative impact on their success in their graduate program.

As stated previously in the Methods section, this study made use of several techniques intended to increase the credibility of its findings. Because interviews were conducted by a peer (master's-level counseling student) who had no affiliation with the participants' program, there was little pressure for participants to produce socially preferred responses. The study design incorporated two forms of triangulation: triangulation of methods, including analyzing interviews and journal responses; and triangulation of investigators. More information on these forms of triangulation is available in the Methods section. The researchers employed these techniques in the service of generating the richest, most accurate possible description of participants' experiences keeping a journal in their addictions counseling course. Unlike quantitative research, which emphasizes generalizability, the strength of phenomenological qualitative research is in providing rich, detailed descriptions of participants' perceptions of a specific phenomenon. Thus, it is the reader's task to determine whether findings from this study can be extrapolated to other populations (Patton, 2002).

This study has important implications for how counselor educators approach the inclusion of reflective thinking in their curricula. The results indicate a number of directions for further research. Specifically, more knowledge is needed of how counseling students develop as reflective thinkers over the course of their graduate

programs, and how and whether assignments such as journals contribute to this growth.

Other areas for future research include the following:

- Whether counseling students' strengths, demographic data (age, prior counseling experience, etc.), personality factors, and/or values are correlated with their perceptions of journaling and reflective thinking.
- Factors that result in self-censorship (or the lack of it) in less structured writing assignments such as journals.
- Instructor feedback on counseling students' journals and its impact on student satisfaction and learning.
- To what degree, if any, re-reading journals impacts student learning.
- Counseling students' perceptions of practical and ethical barriers to journaling and their suggestions for how counselor educators can best address these barriers.
- The use of journals and other reflective assignments in content courses versus clinical courses.
- Experimentation with various modalities of reflective expression (video, audio, interpersonal, handwritten, typed, and others) and counseling students' perceptions of each.
- The use of an intervention such as the one employed by Samuels and Betts (2007) and whether it impacts the quality of counseling students' reflective thinking.
- Additional phenomenological studies with a broader pool of participants, particularly participants who are less enthusiastic about completing journals as part of course requirements.

- An overview of how various counselor education departments incorporate reflective practice into the design of their courses and structure of their programs.
- Retrospective accounts from practicing counselors on whether their graduate training programs contributed to their development as reflective thinkers.

With research indicating that reflective thinking is a skill counselors need throughout their careers (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992b), counselor educators would continue to benefit from greater knowledge of how to best incorporate this skill development in their training programs.

References

- American Counseling Association. (2014). ACA Code of Ethics. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy B. V., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bennett-Levy, J. (2003). Reflection: A blind spot in psychology? *Clinical Psychology*, 27, 16-19.
- Bennett-Levy, J. (2006). Therapist skills: A cognitive model of their acquisition and refinement. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 34, 57-78.
- Bennett-Levy, J., Turner, F., Beaty, T., Smith, M., Paterson, B., & Farmer, S. (2001). The value of self-practice of cognitive therapy techniques and self-reflection in the training of cognitive therapists. *Behavioural and Cognitive Therapy*, 29, (203-220).
- Binder, J. L. (1999). Issues in teaching and learning time-limited psychodynamic psychotherapy. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 19(6), 705-719.
- Boud, D., Keough, R., & Walker, D. (1985). Promoting reflection in learning: A model. In D. Boud, R. Keough, & D. Walker (Eds.), *Reflection: Turning experience into learning* (pp. 18-40). New York, NY: Nichols.
- Burgess, S., Rhodes, R., & Wilson, V. (2013). Exploring the in-session reflective capacity of clinical psychology trainees: An interpersonal process recall study. *Clinical Psychologist*, 17, 122-130.
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think*. Chicago: Regnery.

- Falvey, J. E. (2001). Clinical judgment in case conceptualization and treatment planning across mental health disciplines. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 79(3), 292-303.
- Fook, J. & Askeland, G. A. (2007). Challenges of critical reflection: 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained.' *Social Work Education*, 26(5), 520-533.
- Ghaye, T. (2007). Is reflective practice ethical? (The case of the reflective portfolio). *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 8(2), 151-162. doi: 10.1080/14623940701288859
- Greiman, B. C. & Covington, H. K. (2007). Reflective thinking and journal writing: Examining student teachers' perceptions of preferred reflective modality, journal writing outcomes, and journal structure. *Career and Technical Education*, 32(3), 115-139.
- Griffith, B. A. & Frieden, G. (2000). Facilitating reflective thinking in counselor education. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 40(2), 82-93.
- Hargreaves, J. (2003). So how do you feel about that? Assessing reflective practice. *Nurse Education Today*, 24, 196-201. doi: 10.1016/j.nedt.2003.11.008
- Hill, C. (2010). *Helping skills: facilitating exploration, insight, and action*. (3rd ed.) Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Hobbs, V. (2007). Faking it or hating it: Can reflective practice be forced? *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 8(3), 405-417. doi: 10.1080/14623940701425063
- Holly, M. L. (1989). *Writing to grow*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Howard, E. E., Inman, A. G., & Altman, A. N. (2006). Critical incidents among novice counselor trainees. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 46, 88-102.
- Hubbs, D.L. & Brand, C. F. (2005). The paper mirror: Understanding reflective journaling. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 28(1), 60-71.

- Ixer, G. (1999). There's no such thing as reflection. *British Journal of Social Work*, 29, 513-527.
- Kember, D., Jones, A., Loke, A., McKay, J., Sinclair, K., Tse, H., Webb, C., Wong, F., Wong, M., & Yeung, E. (1999). Determining the level of reflective thinking from students' written journals using a coding scheme based on the work of Mezirow. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 18(1), 18-30.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45, 214-222.
- Mann, K., Gordon, J. & MacLeod, A. (2009). Reflection and reflective practice in health professions education: A systematic review. *Advances in Health Science Education*, 14, 595-621. doi: 10.1007/s10459-007-9090-2
- McGarr, O. & Moody, J. (2010). Scaffolding or stifling? The influence of journal requirements on students' engagement in reflective practice. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 11(5), 579-591. doi: 10.1080/14623943.2010.516968
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Moon, J. A. (1999). *Reflection in learning & professional development*. London: Kogan Page.
- Moon, J. (2006). *Learning journals: A handbook for reflective practice and professional development*. (2nd ed.) New York, NY: Routledge.
- Morrisette, P. J. & Gadbois, S. (2006). Ethical considerations of counselor education teaching strategies. *Counseling and Values*, 50, 131-140.
- Nelson, M. L. & Neufeldt, S. A. (1998). The pedagogy of counseling: A critical examination. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 38, 70-88.

- Norrie, C., Hammond, J., D'Avery, L., Collington, V., & Fook, J. (2012). Doing it differently? A review of literature on teaching reflective practice across health and social care professions. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 13(4), 565-578. doi: 10.1080/14623943.2012.670628
- O'Connell, T. S. & Dymont, J. E. (2011). The case of reflective journals: Is the jury still out? *Reflective practice: international and multidisciplinary perspectives*, 12(1), 47-59. doi: 10.1080/14623943.2011.541093
- O'Loughlin, S. (2003). Attending to the patient within us. *Clinical Psychology*, 27, 24-26.
- Otienoh, R. (2010). Feedback on teachers' journal entries: A blessing or a curse? *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 11(2), 143-156. doi: 10.1080/14623941003665877
- Parikh, S. B., Janson, C., & Singleton, T. (2012). Video journaling as a method of reflective practice. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 51, 33-49.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Perkins, D. (1999). The many faces of constructivism. *Educational Leadership*, 57(3), 6-11.
- Pollard, V. (2008). Ethics and reflective practice: Continuing the conversation. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 9(4), 399-407. doi: 10.1080/14623940802431788
- Rønnestad, M. H. & Skovholt, T. M. (2001). Learning arenas for professional development: Retrospective accounts of senior psychotherapists. *Professional Psychology Research and Practice*, 32(2), 181-187.
- Ruch, G. (2002). From triangle to spiral: Reflective practice in social work education, practice and research. *Social Work Education*, 21(2), 199-216.

- Samuels, M. & Betts, J. (2007). Crossing the threshold from description to deconstruction and reconstruction: Using self-assessment to deepen reflection. *Reflective Practice*, 8(2), 269-283.
- Scanlan, J. M. & Chernomas, W. M. (1997). Developing the reflective teacher. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 25, 1138-1143.
- Schmidt, C. & Adkins, C. (2012). Understanding, valuing, and teaching reflection in counselor education: A phenomenological inquiry. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 13(1), 77-96.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Skovholt, T. M. & Rønnestad, M. H. (1992a). The evolving professional self: Stages and themes in therapist and counselor development. Chichester, UK: Wiley.
- Skovholt, T. M. & Rønnestad, M. H. (1992b). Themes in therapist and counselor development. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 70, 505-515.
- Skovholt, T. M. & Rønnestad, M. H. (2011). The long, textured path from novice to senior practitioner. In T. M. Skovholt & M. Trotter-Mathison (Eds.), *The resilient practitioner: Burnout prevention and self-care strategies for counselors, therapists, teachers, and health professionals* (2nd ed., pp. 39-77). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Skovholt, T. M. & Trotter-Mathison, M. (2011). *The resilient practitioner: Burnout prevention and self-care strategies for counselors, therapists, teachers, and health professionals* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Stevens, D. D. & Cooper, J. E. (2009). *Journal keeping: how to use reflective writing for effective learning, teaching, professional insight, and positive change*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

- Stoltenberg, C. (1981). Approaching supervision from a developmental perspective: The counselor complexity model. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 28(1), 59-65.
- Sutton, L., Townend, M., & Wright, J. (2007). The experiences of reflective learning journals by cognitive behavioural psychotherapy students. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 8(3), 387-404. doi: 10.1080/14623940701425048
- Thorpe, K. A. (2004). Reflective learning journals: From concept to practice. *Reflective Practice*, 5(3), 327-343.
- von Wright, J. (1992). Reflections on reflection. *Learning and Instruction: The Journal of the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction*, 2(1), 59-68.
- Walker, D. (1985). Writing and reflection. In D. Boud, R. Keough, & D. Walker (Eds.), *Reflection: Turning experience into learning* (pp. 52-68). New York, NY: Nichols.
- Wong, K. Y., Kember, D., Chung, L. Y. F., & Yan, L. (1995). Assessing the level of student reflection from reflective journals. *Journal of Advanced Nursing Practice*, 22, 48-57.

Appendix A: Online Survey Questions

1. Please list your email address.
2. What is your emphasis?
 - School Counseling
 - Community Counseling
 - Clinical Mental Health Counseling
 - Student Affairs/College Counseling
3. What is your graduation date?
 - December 2013
 - May 2014
 - Other, please specify
4. Do you currently keep a personal journal or diary?
 - Yes
 - No
5. Have you kept a personal journal or diary in the past?
 - Yes
 - No
6. Other than Addictions Counseling, have you ever been required to keep a journal for another graduate course?
 - Yes, in 1 course
 - Yes, in 2-4 courses
 - Yes, in 5 or more courses
 - No

7. Have you ever chosen to keep a journal for a graduate course without it being assigned?
 - Yes, once
 - Yes, more than once
 - No
8. During which of the following times would you be available for a 30-45 minute personal interview?
9. Anything else we should know regarding your availability for an interview?

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about the behavior change experience you completed as part of your Addictions Counseling course this summer.
2. What was it like to keep a journal during the experience?
3. How did you decide what you were going to write about in your journal?
4. You were asked to cover many topics including the successes and challenges of your behavior change, reflections on the recovery meetings you attended, and experiences within your family system. How did that go for you?
5. In what ways, if any, did keeping a journal contribute to your learning?
6. If you had to take the class over again, would you do anything differently with your journal?
7. Your journal was evaluated using a rubric, and it comprised 25% of your overall grade. What are your thoughts on how your journal was evaluated?
8. Tell me about any other feedback you got from your professor on your journal.
9. What do you think are some reasons counseling professors assign journals for their courses?
10. Anything else you'd like to share?