

**CACREP – Professional Counseling Identity**

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## **CACREP – Professional Counseling Identity**

The eight common core areas of professional counseling identity are Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice, Social and Cultural Diversity, Human Growth and Development, Career Development, Counseling and Helping Relationships, Group Counseling and Group Work, Assessment and Testing, and Research and Program Evaluation.

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) “standards play a crucial role in maintaining the quality and consistency of counseling education.” (CACREP 2016 Standards). Through Chadron State College (CSC) CACREP standards have played a crucial role in developing my identity as a professional counselor. The educational process at CSC provided insight into the roots of my own thoughts and feelings, the understanding of which has enabled me to define the reasoning behind my desire to work as a mental health counselor. Understanding development, abnormalities in the developmental process, evaluation and assessment, and the tried and proven tools and processes that have come from the work of psychology pioneers has strengthened my ability to connect with others and meet them where they are developmentally, socially, religiously, culturally, etc. One key concept that became a key point in my learning process is that no two people are the same, some may appear similar but everyone experiences life differently. I feel, more than anything, cultural awareness and the ability to adapt to peoples’ differences is key to helping; I recognize that every single person I work with needs individualized care.

## **Counseling Professional Identity**

Long before I ever considered becoming a professional counselor, I feel I have been developing my professional and personal identities. I believe they are integrally connected. It started with my cultural roots and experiences of growing up in the southwest United States and

the ideals instilled in me by my parents. In the *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision* Jesse J. Lile states: “The professional identity of counseling as a unified profession and the development of individuals professional counselor identities ...mutually inform one another with professional identity shaped by the individuals it represents and the professional identity of individuals cultivated by the larger professional body.” I recognize this statement to be similar to my belief that my personal identity and professional identity will also “mutually inform one another.” I cannot be one person in my professional life and another in my personal life. I feel that respect for the law and ethical decision-making must be present in both, my personal and professional life, to succeed at both. I would be at odds with myself if they were not in agreement. (Lile, J. J., 2017, Forming a professional counselor identity).

I have lived through poverty and experienced prejudices because of my family of origin, religion, race, gender, and at times for what felt was just because. I grew up hoping and searching for equality and fairness. However, as much as I desire equality and fairness my experiences lead me to believe that equality and fairness will never be present in the world as a general rule. I have learned, however, that it *can* exist in at least one small space, a space of my own creation through my own understanding and engagement of social and cultural diversity, ethical practice, and being someone that others can count on as a helper and advocate by how I engage in life, personally and professionally.

I grew up in New Mexico, number 11 of 12 children. I am Hispanic and my family has lived in Northern New Mexico since before New Mexico was a state in the Union. I went to a small largely Hispanic and Native American school with very few students of Caucasian descent and even fewer of African American descent. I am introverted and have always had a habit of watching people. I felt back then that I could almost feel the feelings of those I watched as they

engaged in daily life. When at school, I watched both the inclusive behavior and the biased behavior take place. The oppressed were not the Hispanic or Native American population, but rather the white and the black, the non-athletic, homosexuals, and non-Catholics. I learned that oppression is not limited to certain groups, it just depends what group you are in at the time it is present.

### **Legal and ethical issues**

It is important that whomever I work with be aware of what I can do, the limits thereof as a professional, and what the expectations are for all involved through the therapeutic process. The duty to warn, practicing within my credentials, and the boundaries of privileged communication are vital elements of the counseling relationship. Providing ethical counseling services must include the principles engrained in the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics of “autonomy, justice, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and fidelity.” To that end, I aim to work diligently to provide a thorough orientation to new clients and keep them updated on these expectations of myself and the client and any process changes that may occur. I plan to, every day, work legally and ethically to provide knowledgeable service and advocacy. Yet, I am also aware that regardless of what I plan and hope for, there may be situations or persons that will create obstacles. I feel that the best way I can address concerns that may arise in my life, personal and professional, is to continue to live legally and to further develop my ethical reasoning.

My fear of repercussions for not complying with the law of the land has been a natural ongoing deterrent for me. Ethics in professional practice on the other hand scare me. Laws are legally binding elements of our world including those affecting the counseling profession, whereas ethical behavior; although a requirement of the counseling profession, is, to an extent,

subject to individual interpretation in some cases. Understanding that everyone is different, thinks differently, observes differently, and interprets observations differently makes ethical dilemmas more difficult to decipher and contend with. I am new to the counseling world and I have learned that what I feel isn't always what I should do. With this understanding, I feel a good place for me to return to is the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics for help in identifying where I stand on the subject of ethics when a particular problem arises. I will also regularly review my thoughts while engaged in ethical contemplation with colleagues for clarification, perspective, and support.

As I reviewed the ACA core professional values during my very first counseling classes at CSC, I felt the ACA Code of Ethics was supportive of how I think and that they had the words I didn't have to describe how a service provider should practice ethically. I also felt that these ethical guidelines would give me answers when I needed them and help me further improve my manner of being. However, experience has shown me my naiveté and today, in reflection of my thoughts from then, I feel I would be foolish if I thought that any dilemma would be easy to work through legally and ethically simply because I know and respect the law and have the ACA guidelines at my fingertips. I worry about doing anything that could cause another harm. I feel this worry will not allow me to become complacent in practice.

I recall a visiting lecturer in my first ethics class at CSC years ago. He was a well-established businessman who described his business and business practices, highlighting the unethical things he did at the start of his career and his view of those practices' present day. He received compliments from some of the students, including me, for having changed his behavior to do business more ethically. He responded that he wished he could have practiced ethically from the start and be in a place now where he could reflect on what ethical practice brought him

instead of wishing he had done it differently; it is something he will never know and a shame he will never forget. Recognizing my imperfections and the shame I have experienced for my mistakes has helped me empathize with that man. Success is something most of us strive for, but how we get there is something we should be learning about and developing from our earliest moments as much, if not more, than the steps we take to learn to be successful. I feel ethical living is a most pressing issue in working as a counselor and I fear nothing will ever be enough to ensure it, but that only means it should be a constant endeavor.

### **Professional Competence**

The most significant areas of strength I have as a professional counselor and as a human being lie in my gifts of creativity, empathy, self-motivation, honesty, and a soft voice and demeanor. I have a quiet nature, recognize that it is God-given - not of my own doing, and I believe it has given me an innate ability to watch and hear others with an increased ability to empathize and make them feel welcome, comfortable, and heard. However, I am also gullible, which has taught me to rely on what is tried and true. I rely on what I have learned through my courses at CSC. My courses on human development, how our bodies and minds develop as we age, and the abnormalities that we experience because of our imperfect existence, have helped me understand people better and made me better equipped to meet them where they are, be it substance abuse, career/employment problems, or relationship or mental health issues. Additionally, learning about assessments has helped me to help a client identify discrepancy in what they are saying versus how they are behaving and help them make changes they desire to reach their goals. I have also learned to identify similarities in various individuals to help people learn from each other in a group setting. The value of evidence-based practices that have been developed through research has been an integral part of my ability to help these individuals make

the changes they desire. These resources, researched and evaluated by pioneering professionals such as Skinner, Piaget, Bandura, Festinger, Rogers, and others have provided invaluable support through internship, and I feel I will rely on them heavily as a counseling professional.

### **Continuing Development**

Throughout my years of living, I have learned that we are never done learning. My time at CSC further highlighted this fact. I am elated that I am finally completing my master's degree in counseling, but I am not satisfied with where I am at reaching this milestone. I feel I need to know more to do an adequate job at counseling others. My intention is to further my education regarding children, families, and couples. I will be working on earning accreditation for Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Family Counseling, and Couples Counseling starting as soon as I can locate programming to do so. I would also like to learn more about behavioral analysis with a focus on behavioral concerns with at risk youth. Along with additional course work I plan to continue my professional development by honing my abilities in counseling by reading and rereading books about the various therapies and techniques especially cognitive behavioral, gestalt, and person-centered therapies.

I am grateful for my experience through CSC and even more grateful that it is CACREP accredited allowing my education to be seen by prospective employers for the quality experience that it has been. As a little girl growing up in poverty in the mountains of northern New Mexico, experiencing prejudice, oppression, and humiliation for things that were not in my control I never once dreamed that my life's journey would take me on a route that would allow me to become that person I spent so much time searching for in others. My education along with faith in the spiritual presence of something greater than myself has given me what I need to feel complete.

## REFERENCES

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