

Student Self-Evaluation of Counseling

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During my practicum experience, I learned that self-awareness and reflection are foundational to ethical and effective counseling. This paper focuses on my challenges, successes, strengths, areas for continued development, countertransference experiences, and growth in my theoretical orientation. The supervision I received, as well as the collegial environment of my practicum site and Liberty University cohort, significantly contributed to my professional development.

Challenges and Growth

While I felt comfortable and well-supported at my practicum site, my work with clients managing severe substance use and co-occurring disorders did present some meaningful challenges. One particular challenge involved navigating the unpredictability of client engagement, especially among residential clients who were early in their recovery. Some clients struggled to commit to the process or presented with high levels of resistance and ambivalence. Applying Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) principles helped me maintain a nonjudgmental, present-focused stance while avoiding becoming overly invested in client outcomes. Instead of attempting to “fix” client resistance, I focused on helping clients notice their internal thoughts and emotions and connect with their values, even when their motivation seemed low.

A more personal challenge emerged while I worked with clients who were chronic alcohol users. Because my father struggled with alcoholism, I noticed subtle moments of emotional reactivity and over-identification. Initially, I felt frustration or an urge to “rescue” clients who reminded me of my father’s journey. I worked with my supervisor to process this countertransference in supervision and used personal reflection to help me recognize these

reactions as opportunities for growth. I began to practice ACT's self-as-context and defusion strategies with myself, which helped me create distance between my emotional history and the needs of my clients in the present.

Successes and Encouragement

Several moments throughout the semester reinforced my development as a counselor. One of the most rewarding successes involved helping a residential client reconnect with their core values during a period in which they were struggling in their recovery journey. Through ACT-based interventions such as the choice point and the implementation of values clarification worksheets, the client began to shift from self-judgment to self-compassion. This shift in the client's perspective affirmed my belief in the power of ACT to foster psychological flexibility, even in the midst of deeply ingrained maladaptive behaviors.

I also found success and increased confidence in leading group sessions for both outpatient and residential clients. While there were times where I felt uncertain about how to balance structure with the organic nature of group process, I gained confidence in facilitating meaningful discussions around values, acceptance, and committed action. The feedback I received from my site supervisor and peers often highlighted my grounding presence, active listening, and ability to build rapport with clients in a marginalized population who are often mistrustful of mental health professionals.

Identified Strengths

I noticed several strengths became more clearly defined during the semester. I was able to consistently demonstrate an ability to build rapport with clients across a variety of presenting issues and treatment settings. My authenticity and calm demeanor helped create a therapeutic environment in which clients felt safe enough to explore painful thoughts, emotions, and

histories. Both my site supervisor and colleagues affirmed my strength in holding space without judgment. I feel that it is a quality that aligns well with ACT's philosophical stance.

Another strength that I noted was my adaptability. Working in both outpatient and residential settings required me to adjust my therapeutic pacing, intervention style, and documentation practices. I found myself able to respond with flexibility to different situations. In addition, my commitment to meeting clients where they were at the time, rather than their different diagnoses, helped me maintain a compassionate, client-centered perspective even in difficult sessions. This approach seemed to enhance my ability to create a therapeutic rapport with clients.

Areas for Continued Growth

While I appreciate the growth I have experienced, I also recognize that there are key areas for continued development. One area involves the expansion of my skill in the integration of psychoeducation within ACT. While I am comfortable guiding clients through experiential work and metaphors, I sometimes hesitate when offering concrete explanations about how substance use impacts the brain or how co-occurring disorders interact. I plan to improve this by studying evidence-based educational approaches.

Another area for growth is the establishment of clearer treatment goals early in the counseling process. While ACT emphasizes process over content, I have learned that establishing collaborative goals rooted in clients' values is essential for the structure of work with the clients. With supervisor feedback, I have begun to improve this by tying treatment planning directly to clarification of client values, desired outcomes, and functional behavioral assessments.

Countertransference Reflections

As mentioned earlier, working with clients who struggle with alcoholism activated emotional responses connected to my father's addiction. Through supervision and ACT self-work, I began to defuse from urges to "fix" my clients and ground myself in the therapeutic stance of curiosity and compassion. I practiced staying in the moment and reminding myself that each client is on their own unique journey. This experience deepened my empathy and reminded me of the importance of non-attachment to client outcomes.

Theoretical Orientation and Evolution

I entered practicum with a strong commitment to ACT, and my experience this semester solidified and deepened my commitment to this model. ACT's emphasis on values, mindfulness, and psychological flexibility felt particularly well-suited for working with clients experiencing substance use disorders and co-occurring conditions. I frequently used interventions such as the choice point, the leaves on a stream metaphor, and creative hopelessness exercises to help clients explore their internal experiences and move toward committed, values-based action.

What changed for me was not my theoretical orientation itself, but rather my confidence and to use ACT with diverse clients. I learned how to flexibly adapt ACT tools to fit both brief residential stays and longer-term outpatient care. In addition, I found myself drawing connections between ACT and complementary models such as Motivational Interviewing, especially when working with ambivalent clients. This expanded perspective has allowed me to conceptualize client struggles with greater nuance and cultural sensitivity.

Goal Progress and Plans for Internship

At the start of the semester, I set three goals: (1) strengthen my ability to conceptualize clients using ACT, (2) increase my comfort level with group facilitation, and (3) improve my treatment planning and documentation. I feel that I made significant progress in all three areas.

My conceptualizations became more values-driven and behaviorally specific; my group facilitation skills grew through practice and supervision; and my documentation became more efficient and clinically coherent over time.

As I continue in my practice, I will focus on further development of my multicultural competence. While I have been exposed to clients from diverse backgrounds, I recognize the need to further explore how culture, race, identity, and systemic oppression impact client experiences and engagement with treatment. I plan to seek supervision and training that will help me provide culturally responsive care.

Supervision Reflections

My supervision experience, including the site, faculty, and group, was consistently supportive and growth oriented. My site supervisor offered a healthy balance of affirmation and constructive feedback, and I appreciated her trust in my clinical judgment as the semester progressed. She modeled professional integrity, ethical decision-making, and cultural humility, all of which I found inspiring.

Faculty supervision helped me connect theory to practice more clearly and challenged me to reflect on how my personal values intersect with my work. Group supervision was a space of shared vulnerability, where I found validation and learned new strategies from peers.

Suggestions and examples provided by classmates who subscribe to a variety of theoretical orientations expanded my knowledge base and instilled the desire and curiosity in me to consider alternatives to my current paradigm.

Moving forward, I will seek supervisory relationships that offer clear feedback, cultural responsiveness, and space for reflective dialogue. I have learned the value of supervisors who are

both clinically grounded and committed to the growth of their supervisees. I hope to continue cultivating similar professional connections throughout my counseling career.

Conclusion

The practicum experience was one of profound growth, both personally and professionally. Through challenges with countertransference, therapeutic uncertainty, and the demands of clinical work, I learned to anchor myself in the ACT framework and the values that led me to this profession. I developed deeper trust in the process, greater confidence in my interventions, and a clearer vision of the counselor I want to be. As I continue, I will carry forward not only skills and insights but also a sense of purpose and commitment to continued growth in service of my clients.