

Counselors Perception of Life Experiences Affecting Their Longevity in Counseling

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Department of Community Care and Counseling

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

Liberty University

2023

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine counselor perceptions of life experiences on clinicians remaining in the counseling field. The theory guiding this study is self-efficacy as it relates to clinicians' positive experiences that supported them in counseling over time. In total, 10 state-licensed mental health counselors participated in semi-structured interviews with the researcher. The data collected was analyzed for common themes from all interviews. The common themes included the following: personal trauma, intrinsic motivation, faith, community building, theoretical application, and enjoyable activities. Counselors should engage in more positive activities to increase longevity in counseling.

*Keywords:* counselors, self-efficacy, perceptions, life experiences

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### **Dedication Page**

To my family, thank you for your unwavering support and for giving me the strength to never give up on my dreams.

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**List of Abbreviations**

Self-care -SC

Self-efficacy-SE

Self-efficacy Theory-SET

Social Cognitive Theory-SCT

Job Satisfaction-JS

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Overview**

Mental health counselors have faced many challenges when working with clients in the field (Testa & Sangganjanavanich, 2016). Past research has yet to identify the positive experiences that have supported counselors to remain in the field. Examining job satisfaction (JS), burnout, and stress was crucial to understanding why it was necessary to perform this study. Assessing positive experiences from counselors supports the field by providing methods of coping with working with clients. Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) provided a basis for completing this study (Bandura, 2018). SET focuses on individuals' beliefs about changing their environment. Bandura believed that individuals were agents of their change. Individuals were thought to be able to change their level of self-efficacy (SE). As a clinician in the field, examining the positive experiences of counselors supports them in remaining in the field.

### **Background**

#### ***Historical***

Researchers have not investigated the effect of positive experiences on counselor longevity in the field. Researchers such as Cook et al. (2021) focused on stress and the levels of burnout experienced by clinicians working in the field. Counselors were found to be at greater risk of developing burnout due to working conditions, hours, pay, and client caseload (Cook et al., 2021). Counselor educators who exhibited more significant levels of burnout reported lower overall job satisfaction levels (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). Subjects who reported greater exhaustion and burnout documented lower JS in their positions. Past research has examined how supervision supports clinicians working in the field (McCarty et al., 2023).

McCarty et al. indicated that counselors can prevent early burnout when working with clients through supervision. Past researchers assessed how the support of clinicians in the field prevented burnout. Having someone to speak with supported the counselors to keep them from experiencing stress and burnout. Researchers frequently examined burnout and stress-related factors among clinicians. There was a clear gap in the positive experiences of counselors.

It was important to consider how researchers in the past assessed stress among practicing counselors. Mullen et al. (2017) found that ethical dilemmas were a significant stressor for counselors working in the field. Those clinicians with greater ethical dilemmas were found to experience higher stress levels. Increased stress among clinicians was reported to cause burnout in the field. Mullen et al. (2017) observed that subjects who experienced significant stress were likelier to leave the field—experiencing and coping with stress-affected counselors working in the clinical field. There was a considerable gap in the research examining how positive experiences affect clinicians' desire to remain in the field. The counseling field has benefited from learning about the long-term effects of these positive experiences to support future counselors.

Job satisfaction was considered within the historical context of mental health counselors. Job satisfaction is defined as the ability of an employee to feel content, satisfied, and self-motivated by their job (Viegas & Henriques, 2021). Researchers determined that the conscientiousness exhibited by workers often affects the level of JS found among workers (Topino et al., 2021). Workers who displayed more conscientiousness at work were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. Highly satisfied employees reported being more motivated to perform well (Topino et al.). Researchers noted that the day of the week influenced how employees felt about their positions. Pindek et al. (2021) noted a difference in employee

satisfaction depending on the day of the week. Workers reported lower levels of JS at the beginning of the week (Pindek et al.). Workers noted higher levels of JS at the end of the week because of the pending weekend. Workers reported greater JS because they would spend time with family over the weekend (Pindek et al.).

### *Social*

Clinicians have considered race, work-life conflict, and resiliency when examining how stress affects JS and burnout among clinicians (Shell et al., 2021). The limited scope of adverse experiences was primarily addressed in the past. Shell et al. analyzed the effect of race on mental health counselor JS and burnout. Examining the impact of race on counselor JS was important. Shell et al. found that African American counselors were more stressed and experienced greater levels of burnout when they experienced race-related stress on the job. The type of race-related stress was considered a part of the society within which counselors of various races lived. Clinicians working in the field reported experiencing stress related to their job positions. Mental health counselors incurred stress that was a part of their everyday lives. Experiencing stress in their daily lives outside and at work would be significantly difficult for counselors each day. Performing this study supported clinicians in understanding what experiences contribute to them remaining in the field.

The overall impact of stress and burnout on work-life conflict was considered in this study. Examining this fact supported mental health counselors and first responders working with the public. Viegas and Henriques (2021) found that police officers who experienced greater stress levels reported more significant work-life conflict. Police officers could not spend quality time with their families due to job demands. When discussing counselors and other first-line workers, society often feels the effects of their jobs. The personal satisfaction that a worker may

feel at home would be dramatically affected if they are significantly overwhelmed and stressed at work (Viegas & Henriques, 2021). Police officers may experience stress when attempting to manage a home-work balance. Stressed police officers reported lower levels of JS in their current position (Viegas & Henriques). Investigating JS and how it affects work-life conflict supports this research study by providing a basis to determine how personal experiences affect a person's career.

### ***Theoretical***

Past research needs to address the theoretical perspective supporting the current study. Albert Bandura's idea of self-efficacy (SE) was significant when discussing guidance for clinicians remaining in counseling (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is an individual's belief that they can perform at a level that will affect their lives (Sawyer et al., 2013). Counselors who felt they had the tools to perform the job were likelier to remain in the field. Sawyer et al. proposed that more experiences provided clinicians with a means to develop greater SE before working in the field. The inclusion of experiences supported future counselors in their success in the future. The current study identified which positive experiences had the greatest effect on counselors. Rising counselors in the field will benefit from understanding which experiences will support them in remaining in the counseling field in the future.

The concept of self-care (SC) SE was considered for this research study to support the positive personal experiences that clinicians experience. Eller et al. (2018) reported SC SE as the ability of a person to provide SC for themselves. Individuals can give themselves SC when necessary. Eller et al. (2018) reported that those patients with higher SE developed SC techniques when appropriately educated. The more education an individual receives, the more likely they are to seek out SC when necessary. Eller et al. focused on how education has helped

to ensure that SC was performed with patients who were ill. This research study was different because it was independent of how much education a counselor has gained regarding SC. Clinicians who have remained in the field for an extended time were asked to report on the positive experiences that have supported them in the counseling field.

Another theoretical concept that supported this research study was Albert Bandura's Self-efficacy Theory (SET) (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016). They defined SET as a person's beliefs about their ability to make things happen through actions. Self-efficacy Theory assumes that human functioning consists of behavior and intrapersonal and environmental influences. Individuals believe they can control what happens based on their actions (Ng & Lucianetti). SET applied to this research because it supported the belief that positive experiences help clinicians remain in counseling for an extended time. The more significant amount of fear and anxiety caused lower SE among workers (Ng & Lucianetti).

### **Situation to Self**

The philosophical assumption that I most identified with was ontological. Ontological research focuses on multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a clinician, it is essential to consider the life experiences that strengthened a clinician to remain in the field. Clinicians in the field should know what experiences will help them stay focused on clients and remain in the counseling field. Working with clients in the field can be difficult for counselors. I have worked within the community mental health field and found it challenging and rewarding. Counselors must have access to resources that support counselors when working with clients.

Another theory that supported my research was social constructivism. Social constructivism focuses on the participant's view of reality (Creswell & Poth., 2018). Social constructivism examines how the participant views reality. The opinions of the participants were

used as a part of the study. Using social constructivism as a primary theory helped me as a researcher to determine what positive experiences have supported clinicians in remaining in the counseling field. Hennrikus et al. (2020) described Social Constructivist Theory as a collaborative learning model within social and cultural contexts. As a researcher, I interviewed participants within their environment and determined what social experiences affected their counseling careers.

### **Problem Statement**

This research study focused on the positive experiences described by mental health counselors that have supported them in remaining in the counseling field. Past research has yet to focus on determining what positive experiences helped counselors increase the time spent working in the field. The participants were interviewed to establish their past experiences and how these experiences have supported and encouraged them to remain counselors. Past research has focused on several key issues that have accounted for counselors' attrition, including burnout, stress, and JS (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016). No research has focused on what positive experiences have helped clinicians remain in counseling.

In the past, researchers investigated burnout as a factor in counseling (Cook et al., 2021). They determined that emotional exhaustion contributed to counselor burnout in the field. Clinicians who experienced significant amounts of stress were likely to report greater levels of burnout. When treating clients, clinicians often face huge workloads, long hours, and low wages (Cook et al.). These factors often cause counselors to experience more significant stress and burnout when working in the field. Clinicians who developed maladaptive coping skills were more likely to experience burnout (Thompson et al., 2014). Mental health counselors who blamed themselves, used substances, and denial were more likely to experience burnout.

Creating a good work-life balance was another predictor of burnout and JS (Thompson et al., 2014). Researchers have focused on how stress levels on the job often cause significant difficulty for workers within the home. Previous studies have examined the deterioration of work-family relationships among police officers (Viegas & Henriques, 2021). Increased stress levels determined that an officer had significant difficulty with family relationships within the home. An organization's ability to improve the work-family relationship has benefitted employee JS (Vickovic & Morrow, 2020). Supporting workers will help ensure that companies do not significantly strain the workers' family lives. Organizations determined that those workers who reported higher levels of JS were more compliant with organizational rules and had trust in company policies (Vickovic & Morrow). The more trust was developed between the worker and the company, the more likely the worker would comply with company rules.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how positive experiences support mental health counselors who remain in the counseling field. Positive experiences were defined as those experiences provided by the subjects during the semi-structured interviews. The theories guiding this research included SC, SE, and SET. SET and SE were founded by Bandura (Bandura, 2018). SET is an individual's belief about their ability to make changes through actions (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016). Bandura believed that people could choose what they wanted to do with their lives. People think they are agents of the changes to things that occur in their lives. The positive experiences that people engage in allow them to feel supported and choose to remain in the counseling field.

### **Significance of the Study**

Performing this research study has supported clinicians working with clients in the field. Clinicians benefited from understanding what positive experiences help counselors to continue working with clients. Bandura's (2018) SET describes individuals as believing that their actions can affect what they want in their lives. SET proposes that individuals can choose actions that will change their lives. The change will come about through the individual's level of SE (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016). Counselors' experiences were proposed to affect SE if they remain in the field. Counselors can choose to experience more positive events in their lives. More positive experiences will allow counselors to develop greater career SE.

The counseling field benefited from this research because counselors in training would understand what was necessary to be successful in the future. Counselors would be exposed to and know what experiences support their longevity in the field. The counseling field benefits because clinicians can provide other clinicians with information and research on what supports them in remaining in the counseling field. The working environment of clinicians would benefit drastically because employers would be aware of the necessary experiences to provide clinicians with a sense of trust and belonging for the future. Employers will know the experiences required to encourage employees to ensure that they remain in the field for some time.

### **Research Questions**

Included below are the research questions and a brief explanation of each that were addressed within the study:

**RQ1.** What positive lived experiences do state-licensed counselors working in the community share that support them in remaining in the field?

State-licensed counselors working in the community have faced numerous significant challenges within the counseling field. Social constructivism uses cultural context and communication tools to relay information to others (Henrikus et al., 2020). Relaying the positive stories and experiences that counselors experience provided tremendous information to counselors entering the field and those currently working there. Burnout, stress, and JS drastically affect mental health counselors when working with clients. Counselors-in-training primarily benefited from learning about the stories. Lee et al. (2018) documented that counselors who were older in training were more likely to have prior experiences that supported them in resisting burnout. Providing counselors-in-training with knowledge and expertise greatly aids them in being successful in their careers.

**RQ2.** How do mental health counselors with seven or more years of experience describe the positive personal experiences that supported them in counseling?

Understanding the experiences of mental health counselors within the field supported clinicians in being better prepared for working with clients. Mental health counselors with seven or more years of experience were sought to document what experiences have helped their longevity. Lee et al. (2018) determined that counselor trainees with more experience were less likely to report symptoms of burnout. Older counselors-in-training were found to have significantly more experience, which may have prevented burnout.

**RQ3.** What supportive measures do mental health workers depend on when working in the field?

Mental health counselors are exposed to various stressors when working with clients in the field. Shell et al. (2021) found that African American counselors can be exposed to secondary traumatic stress when working with clients regarding race-related stressors.

Counselors working with clients can be traumatized and experience stress from their daily work with clients. It was important for counselors to share what supports they have created to cope with stress while working with clients.

### **Definitions**

1. Self-efficacy (SE)– People believe they can perform at a level that will influence events in their lives (Sawyer et al., 2013).
2. Self-care self-efficacy (SCSE) – The ability of an individual to perform self-care activities for themselves (Eller et al., 2018).
3. Social cognitive theory (SCT) - an individual’s beliefs about their ability to make things happen through actions (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016).
4. Burnout – Experiencing chronic emotional and interpersonal stress in a professional setting that leads to overload (Lee et al., 2018).
5. Stress – An individual’s reaction to threats and job demands that come from one’s job (Wu, 2019).
6. Job satisfaction (JS) – Gratification is felt when an individual’s work needs are met (Vickovic & Morrow, 2020).

### **Summary**

Mental health counselors face several demanding situations when collaborating with clients. Through this research study, I offered counselors insight into what positive experiences would support them when working in partnerships with clients in the field. Using SET and SE together has developed an effective study to determine the necessary support for counselors. Utilizing the information collected from subjects would offer counselor training programs and counselors in the field the traits required to succeed.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Overview**

Mental health counselors face several unique challenges when working with clients. The research needs to address the positive experiences that support counselors in remaining in the counseling field and determine a link between life experiences and longevity. It requires examining the following research areas: burnout, stress, JS, mindfulness, and the Christian perspective. The research study examined the life experiences that contributed to counselors remaining in the counseling field. By thoroughly investigating burnout, stress, JS, mindfulness, and the Christian perspective, this study provided great insight for future counseling clinicians.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Self-efficacy (SE) relies on the belief of individuals when performing job duties (Butts & Gutierrez, 2018). Counselors rely on their ability to be successful in the field. Butts and Gutierrez found that the more personal distress exemplified by a counselor, the lower levels of SE. Those counselors who were not able to effectively cope with their emotions were more likely to experience lower SE. Santos et al. (2018) found that clinicians with high emotional intelligence were more likely to make better career choices. Counselors who could better manage their emotions were found to have greater success in making sound career decisions. Researchers in the past have not considered examining the positive experiences that supported clinicians to remain in the counseling field. Butts and Gutierrez determined that future research is needed to assess the necessary self-care (SC) skills for counselors-in-training and supervisors when working with clients. It was important for the clinicians to understand and identify their emotions to support them in daily functioning. It was determined that research needs to be done to examine the experiences that will support counselors in remaining in the counseling field.

Self-efficacy (SE) was created by Albert Bandura (Lyons & Bandura, 2019). Self-efficacy is a person's belief about their ability to produce levels of performance that affect their lives (Sawyer et al., 2013). Individuals who have greater SE approach situations differently than those who do not have greater levels of SE. Self-efficacy was determined to be different from self-confidence because SE has more to do with the level of effort and behavior within an environment (Lyons & Bandura). Self-efficacy was found to affect counselors' level of preparedness when attending a graduate-level program. Clinicians benefitted from real-life crises (Sawyer et al., 2013). Counselors who were exposed to more real-world situations felt as though they were prepared to deal with crises when treating clients. The literature does not address the need for clinicians to have positive experiences within the field. These positive experiences may affect how long a counselor will remain in counseling.

Emotional arousal in SE was noted to be a significant factor when Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory was examined (Bandura, 1977). Individuals' perception of how well they will perform in situations often depends on their emotional state (Bandura, 1977). An individual who experiences greater stress often will not perform well under pressure. If a worker is stressed, they are likelier to perform more poorly than a worker who is not. It was essential to examine the past experiences that have affected clinicians. The more positive experiences will support the belief that good experiences helped clinicians remain in counseling. Bandura (2012) determined that individuals' perception of an event affects the way they perform during an event. An individual may perceive an event negatively based on their actions. The individual fails to consider how the circumstances around the event may have impacted their actions. The emotions that a person will feel at the time of the event often affect one's actions. Individuals can perceive the events as unfavorable solely based on their emotions.

Counseling programs must begin to evaluate the needs of counselors working in the field over a long period. Haktanir (2022) described counseling SE as the ability of counselors or counselors-in-training to provide counseling in the future. Counselors-in-training felt they would need help effectively providing services to clients in the future. Counselor programs can utilize counseling SE information to determine if a student is ready to begin counseling clients. Haktanir proposed that counseling programs would use the students' beliefs in their ability to provide quality services as evidence for them to continue through the program or seek out additional support. Counseling programs will be able to offer more personalized counseling practice opportunities to those counselors-in-training who did not feel they would be able to provide high-quality services. Programs will be able to provide clinicians with the necessary support to ensure that they effectively remain in the counseling field.

Haktanir (2022) found that counselors-in-training were more likely to report greater levels of counselor SE as they progressed through their counseling program. Doctoral-level students reported greater levels of SE due to the more advanced courses that were required. Counselors-in-training often felt comfortable after training with the treatment of clients. Counselors were not provided information regarding what positive experiences would support them in the future. Clinicians reported greater confidence in their skills when treating clients (Haktanir). More research should be examined to determine the effects of positive experiences and how they provide clinicians with the belief that they can remain in counseling.

Self-efficacy was reported to be affected by the individual's self-esteem (Suh et al., 2018). Suh et al. found that as overall self-esteem increases, counselor SE decreases. Master's level clinicians reported higher confidence levels than doctoral-level graduate students. The master's level counselors were found to be more confident in their ability to treat clients and in

their belief in treating their clients. Suh et al. reported that an over-inflated sense of being able to treat clients accounted for this finding among participants. Clinicians at the doctoral level may not fully comprehend the magnitude of the counseling field. Researchers have examined levels of SE among graduate-level students (Mullen et al., 2015). The research does not address the need for counselors to learn what positive experiences support counselors in the field. Mullen et al. found that counselors' SE increased as master-level clinicians continued through the program. Counseling students who progress through programs often develop greater confidence in their beliefs that they can successfully treat a client in the field. Counseling programs support students to learn the skills they need to perform sessions. The counseling program does not teach students what is required to remain in the field for long.

It was essential to consider role theory when examining life experiences among counselors working with clients. Wang and Peng (2017) reported that work-family conflicts occur when the role demands between the two are not compatible. Individuals who feel unable to balance the two roles often experience stress. Work-family conflict only occurs when individuals feel they cannot meet the demands of their jobs. The greater the distress noted by those in a work-family conflict, the more likely the individual is to suffer from psychological issues such as depression (Wang & Peng). The inability to handle the conflict created by the imbalance between home and work resulted in feelings of helplessness and depression. Counselors working in the field must find a balance between work and home.

Counselors working with clients must also consider a healthy work-life balance when working in the field. Past research has not addressed the positive experiences that create a significant balance between work and family for counselors (Bandura, 2012). Clinicians may be exposed to a long-term stress that drastically affects their ability to remain in the counseling

field. Researchers have considered boundaries when discussing counselors-in-training. Decelis and Falzon (2022) found that setting boundaries between the counselor and the client was a part of ethical counseling. Counselors must ensure that they abide by the ethical guidelines outlined for clinicians. Counselors disclosing their opinions could harm the client (Decelis & Falzon.). Supporting counselors in training to set boundaries was a necessary component of counselor training programs. Program leaders need to ensure counselors can set boundaries with clients and perform SC regularly (Laurenzi et al., 2020). Counselor education programs must ensure that trainees receive the appropriate information regarding setting boundaries and performing SC.

### **Self-Care Self-Efficacy (SCSE)**

It was essential to include the concept of SC when considering the SE of clinicians in the counseling field. The study allowed clinicians in the field to report positive experiences related to their ability to include SC in their routine. It was essential to understand how SC and SE related to one another. SCSE was a construct that was determined to affect individuals in many career fields (Eller et al., 2018). Eller et al. defined SCSE within psychology as the ability of an individual to perform SC activities for themselves. Those individuals who were more confident were found to have greater levels of SC. Those individuals who believed in themselves felt more confident in practicing SC.

Researchers found a unique link between SE and SC. Self-efficacy was determined to be a precursor to SC performance (Eller et al., 2018). Individuals were more likely to perform SC if they demonstrated greater SE. SCSE was often measured among individuals who were undergoing care. Bohanny et al. (2013) determined that by enhancing the SE of diabetes, the SC utilized also increased. The researchers determined that educating patients about diabetes encouraged them to use more SC strategies. Nguyen et al. (2022) determined that clients

undergoing hemodialysis would require significant changes in diet and lifestyle. Those patients who received more education regarding the changes within their liver exhibited higher levels of SE. The patients who exhibited more significant levels of SE felt they could control their SC. The patients who received appropriate education felt more in control of their SC and appeared to engage more often. Patients in the study who reported greater levels of SE reported being more compliant with treatment directions (Nguyen et al.). Greater compliance led to greater SC for each patient in the study. Those patients who scored higher on SCSE demonstrated lower levels of depression in the study. Huang et al. (2022) determined that those clients who earned higher educational degrees were more likely to seek out information about their cancer treatment. Gaining this type of knowledge supported the patients in developing higher SE and using SC techniques. The patients who obtained higher degrees were much more motivated to take charge and learn about their diagnosis. Patients felt they were in control of their lives and happier with their current situation.

Social support was noted to affect the SC performed by individuals. S. Li (2021) examined how relationships affect the levels of SE demonstrated by elderly patients. The elderly clients who experienced significant chronic pain scored lower in terms of SE than those who did not exhibit pain (S. Li). The elderly patients who experienced pain reported higher levels of SCSE when they felt supported. S. Li (2021) found that elderly patients who reported living with family members reported engaging in more SC activities. Chronic pain patients reported a more positive outlook on their symptoms and less pain (S. Li, 2021). A sound support system helps with their SC and the patient's SE level. Huang et al. (2022) assessed the differences in how marital status affects SCSE levels in cancer patients. Individuals who were married were more likely to engage in productive SC. The support found within the home helped the cancer patient

to take more control over their care and seek out SC to support themselves. It was determined that married cancer patients were found to have greater SE levels than those cancer patients who did not have a partner (Huang et al.). Previous research has failed to examine how experiences and social assistance from family affect counselors in the field. It was essential to consider the positive events or interactions that may have supported clinicians in the counseling field.

Mindfulness was another factor to consider when discussing SCSE. Dye et al. (2020) determined that counselors-in-training who were taught mindfulness understood the importance of SC. Counselors-in-training noticed the difference when they engaged in mindfulness techniques when coping with stress (Dye et al.). Counselors learned that it was important to perform SC early to reduce the amount of stress they experienced. Dye et al. reported that increasing mindfulness techniques increased the overall desire for counselors to increase the amount of positive self-talk used when experiencing stress. Counselors-in-training tended to avoid using negative self-talk after having practiced mindfulness techniques over time (Dye et al.). The counselors-in-training appeared to accept and engage in mindfulness after practicing the technique.

### **Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)**

A discussion on positive experiences must analyze social interactions' effect on workers. Albert Bandura discussed the importance of SET on human functions (Bandura, 2018). How an individual sees themselves in the world significantly affects their behavior. SET is an individual's beliefs about their ability to make things happen through their actions (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016). This concept was referred to as SE. SET subscribed to a three-way interaction of causation for human functioning: intrapersonal influences, human behavior, and environmental influences (Ng & Lucianetti). Intrapersonal influences refer to the changes that

take place within the individual. Individuals may begin to change their thought processes regarding a situation they are experiencing. Another factor to consider when examining SET includes individuals' behavior in the environment. An individual's action or behavior affects future behavior. When individuals experience fear or anxiety within the workplace, they often report lower levels of SE (Ng & Lucianetti). One of the best methods to increase SE is reducing the fear and anxiety experienced at work. If the worker is more stressed and experiences more distress, they are less likely to contribute meaningful ideas (Ng & Lucianetti). It will be necessary for supervisors to ensure that workers feel less stressed at work to improve their performance. This study examined whether more positive experiences would support clinicians in remaining in counseling over time.

Workers often behave in a manner that seeks to support themselves in the workplace. Ng and Lucianetti (2016) determined that workers usually avoid situations that cause anxiety or embarrassment. Employees seek out companies that they trust and believe will support them in the future. Trusting a company makes workers feel more comfortable and supplies additional ideas and innovations (Ng & Lucianetti). Those workers who do not feel they can trust the company they work for are less likely to remain in the field and supply innovative ideas. Workers who trust their employers often report lower anxiety levels (Ng & Lucianetti). Lower anxiety levels mean that individuals demonstrate increased productivity when at work. Increased productivity at work enables workers to feel more confident in their skills. The confidence built up over time supports the worker in being more productive at work. This study will help workers determine what past events will support them in remaining in the counseling field.

Bandura's (2018) social-cognitive theory was based on the agentic theory of functioning. Bandura believed that one's action intentionally influences a particular effect. The impact of a

person's actions is based on their actions. The agentic theory was based on the following functions: forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura). Forethought was based on the concept that people create plans for themselves. Bandura believed that people create goals for themselves to work toward. The goals that are created are based on the individual's future outcome. People often create an idea of the outcome they want to see. One example would include a worker who envisions themselves receiving a promotion if they work hard and are dedicated to the company. Those individuals see themselves achieving their goals and working toward making them a reality. The study determined what the subjects believed were positive experiences in their life that helped them remain in the field. Bandura described forethought as providing meaning, direction, and coherence to a person's life. The individual would be able to understand that they are working toward a particular goal or vision in the future. The person would be motivated to continue until the goal is achieved.

Bandura's (2018) agentic theory accounts for another property known as self-reactiveness. Self-reactiveness is defined as individuals regulating their behavior (Bandura, 2018). Individuals will examine their behavior to meet the standards of their living situation. The evaluations people give themselves are either positive or negative (Bandura). People evaluate their behavior as good or bad and issue sanctions when necessary. Workers may assign a positive or negative sanction after completing a project within the agency. If the worker completes the tasks on time and works hard to achieve the goal, they will be happy.

Another property to be considered with the agentic theory of SET included self-reflectiveness. Self-reflectiveness is an individual's ability to examine behavior (Bandura, 2018). Individuals were determined to reflect on their values and morality in a specific situation. People often judge their values and beliefs after experiencing a given situation. People must continually

assess the morals of specific conditions when problematic (Bandura). One example would include workers who feel conflicted when working for a company they do not feel is helping others. The workers begin to judge their actions and feel they do not meet their moral standards.

Social-cognitive theory (SCT) posits that individuals can change their behavior. Bandura (2018) proposed that society-wide changes can be made to help individuals. They were changing how individuals in the world would support higher levels of SE among individuals. SET has been applied to individuals' careers. Mozahem (2022) determined that social roles played a significant role in determining the career field that men and women choose. The researcher found that women who were discouraged from entering a given career field would often avoid the one they were previously interested in. Women in college who were discouraged even slightly by others would choose a different career field of interest (Mozahem). Men who were discouraged demonstrated less interest in entering into a given career field. The fact that the individuals were discouraged from entering into a career field was found to have the greatest effect on individuals. Mozahem's findings resembled those of Betz and Hackett's (1981) study examining the impact of SET on career choices. Betz and Hackett found that females were less likely to follow career paths dominated by males. Women reported lower SE levels than men when looking at career fields dominated by men. Men did not report lower SE levels when considering a career (Betz & Hackett, 1981). Males reported no relevant changes in SE when pursuing a career primarily dominated by males or females. The males in the study could pursue their career choices without worrying about how others perceived them (Hackett et al.). Bandura's SET believes that individuals will not seek out careers in fields that are beyond their capability (Mozahem).

Betz and Hackett (1981) used SET to determine that the environment within which one lives affects what career choices an individual makes in the future. Betz and Hackett determined that women from a young age are discouraged from engaging in activities that do not fit into given gender stereotypes. Young women are not encouraged to enter career paths dominated by men (Hackett et al.). Not encouraging young women to explore career options and activities forces them to choose from a smaller group of careers worldwide. Young women are denied the ability to develop positive SE in terms of their ability to select a career field. Women believe they will not be supported if they do not choose a socially acceptable career field.

### **Related Literature**

As a clinician, it is important to consider what keeps individuals working in the field. Counselors who believe in their ability to work with and treat clients effectively accomplish significantly more work-related tasks during the day (Santos et al., 2018). The clinicians felt less stressed and more motivated to complete the tasks they were given. Having a greater SE allowed the clinicians to feel as though they were able to complete the task. C. Li et al. (2018) found that counselors from different cultures who have become more acclimated to the U.S. experienced greater SE and developed better connections with their clients. The counselors who developed significant relationships reported feeling more confident in their treatment of clients. The counselor felt a greater connection with others when counseling.

### ***Burnout***

The research available for clinicians documents a significant amount of information on burnout among counselors working in the field. Thompson et al. (2014) determined that burnout was affected by the coping strategies developed by the counselor. Burnout is defined as experiencing chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors within a professional environment

that lead to overload (Lee et al., 2018). Clinicians who use self-blame, denial, and distraction reported higher levels of burnout than those who used effective coping strategies (Thompson et al.). Determining effective coping strategies often helps counselors ensure that they do not develop symptoms of burnout. Burnout due to poor coping skills has affected the performance of clinicians working in the field. Cook et al. (2021) found that participants who used negative coping strategies were more likely to report symptoms of burnout. These negative coping strategies included overeating, avoiding eating, alcohol, smoking, and excessive television watching (Cook et al.). Counselors working in the field attempted to find other means of coping with their emotions rather than dealing with their feelings. Mullen et al. (2017) determined that counselors who experienced significant moral dilemmas when working in the field benefited from developing appropriate coping strategies. Clinicians who developed appropriate coping strategies would be more likely to suffer fewer symptoms of burnout.

Research has considered emotional exhaustion as a factor of clinician burnout when working with clients. McCormack et al. (2018) reported emotional exhaustion as one of the most common forms of burnout among counselors. Emotional exhaustion was noted to be a stress response that caused individuals to engage in negative coping mechanisms. Individuals suffering from emotional exhaustion often attempted to avoid coping with the feelings they were experiencing at the time (McCormack et al.). Working in the mental health field can be demanding and significantly strain the clinician. Clinicians who became immensely involved with their clients often had to make much effort to support the client. Clinicians who become deeply involved often find that the experience drains them. Counselors often place others' needs before their own. This may have caused significant burnout because the counselor must think about the best method to treat the client.

Although the research does not fully address the positive aspects of clinician longevity in counseling, the research does address burnout among counselors. Thompson et al. (2014) discussed the importance of compassion fatigue, mindfulness, working conditions, and maladaptive coping skills as significant factors in counselor burnout. Considering the individual when discussing symptoms and the probability of burnout among counselors is essential. Lee et al. (2018) determined that clinicians with a more stable attributional style were more likely to suffer from symptoms of burnout. An individual's attributional style is defined as how they view life events. The counselors-in-training who believed that an adverse event could not be changed were more likely to suffer from symptoms of burnout (Lee et al.). Greater cynicism and less professional efficacy were found among those who reported a more stable attributional style. Globality as an attributional style was found to increase the symptoms of burnout experienced by counselors in training (Lee et al.). A global attributional style was associated with individuals thinking negatively across numerous situations (Lee et al.). Those counselors who believed that the cause of a negative event would last longer placed them at significant risk of burnout. The counselors who continuously thought negatively were likely to report greater burnout when working with clients. Allan et al. (2019) found that clinicians reported greater levels of burnout when feeling a decreased sense that their work was meaningful. Counselors who maintained a more positive view of their work were less likely to suffer from symptoms of burnout.

Demonstrating an effective work-life balance was found to impact burnout symptoms reported among counselors in the field. Kotera et al. (2021) found that greater rates of burnout were reported for those counselors without a proper balance between their personal lives and work lives. Cook et al. (2021) determined a significant correlation between connections in a counselor's personal life and burnout symptoms. It was found that counselors who experienced

burnout symptoms reported a lack of interest in hobbies, poor work/life balance, and decreased SC. Due to losing sleep and interest in activities, many participants separated themselves from family connections (Cook et al.). Counselors reported that the positions' demands required them to work significantly more hours without a pay increase. Determining a good personal life balance supported clinicians in remaining in the field for a significant amount of time. Yue et al. (2022) found that medical physicians who were married were less likely to experience burnout. Those physicians with significantly more support and balance could remain in treating patients. The married clinicians may have been better supported as they were working with patients.

Wilkinson et al. (2017) examined university counselors counseling students enrolled in courses. The clinicians noted that the demands were much more significant due to the higher levels of psychopathology reported. University counselors were found to be on call over the weekend and evenings, which caused them considerable stress. Counselors reported that being on call was not reflected in their pay. The counselors felt they needed to be adequately compensated for their work. Those university counselors with more years in the field were found to suffer from more symptoms of burnout.

Consistent SC was a significant factor when examining burnout among counselors working with clients. Ko and Lee (2021) found that those social workers with significantly more education belonged to the typical SC group. Social workers with more education were likely to ensure that they included time for SC. Social workers were found to lose themselves when caring for patients frequently. Counselors who reported lower levels of SC disclosed feeling incompetent. The counselors were less likely to manage their time and complete tasks on time (Ko & Lee). Counselors who did not maintain and establish a balanced lifestyle noticed a significant decline in their relationships. Counselors often show excessive care and concern for

their clients over taking care of their personal lives. Ko and Lee revealed that their private life imbalance impacted counselors' sleep, diet, and concentration. Counselors must find an effective balance between treating clients and doing SC. Emotional exhaustion among counselors was a result of not performing adequate SC (Ko & Lee). Clinicians who do not take the time to care for themselves exhibit great difficulty coping with their personal lives.

Trauma appeared to be a significant factor in the amount of burnout experienced by individuals working within the medical profession. McKinley et al. (2020) reported that the doctors within the study reported greater levels of burnout due to secondary trauma. The environment in which the doctors' worked caused them significant stress. Doctors who were employed within the emergency room and family medicine clinics reported a more substantial number of burnout symptoms due to stress. Working in a high-stress environment and not knowing what to expect each day caused significant stress to those doctors working in the field (McKinley et al.). Counselors who treated clients were exposed to significantly stressful environments with numerous demands. Woo et al. (2022) determined that counseling educators often experienced burnout that affected their daily performance. Clinicians who experienced an excessive amount of stress were more susceptible to burnout. Litam et al. (2021) found that stress and resiliency were indicators of burnout in counselors. Those clinicians who exhibited significant amounts of stress were more likely to report symptoms of burnout. Viegas and Henriques (2021) found this statement true for police officers who worked in extreme conditions. Being exposed to extreme conditions affected the physiological and mental well-being when working with the public. Officers who felt more pressure and worked in poor conditions exhibited poor communication with community members. The lack of communication skills resulted in the officers developing poor relationships with others in the community. The police

officers were more likely to suffer from burnout due to their exposure to poor working conditions. It was reported that officers also experienced difficulties within the home due to their working conditions.

## **Stress**

Stress often affects counselors when working with clients. Rico and Bunge (2021) reported that junior and senior graduate students were likelier to suffer from significant stress. Graduate-level psychology students were reportedly expected to do more clinical work than students at the onset of the psychology program. High levels of stress and exhaustion were found to be due to the significant strain of doing clinical work and completing a dissertation (Rico & Bunge). Psychological students cannot effectively cope with the stress of completing the academic and clinical demands of the degree program. Badu et al. (2020) found that nurses were under significant stress on the job. It was determined that the workplace conditions contributed to the overall stress level of the nurse. The workload, budget, administration issues, job tension, conflict, and role ambiguity contributed to stress among the nurses in the study (Badu et al.). Those nurses who dealt with significantly more difficult clients were found to be more stressed when working. Nurses who were confronted with bullying within the workplace also reported greater levels of stress on the job (Badu et al.). Strained work relationships affected the ability of the nurses to feel confident when completing job duties. The strain and stress caused symptoms of anxiety and depression to appear among nurses who suffered significant stress from bullying (Badu et al.). Depression among nurses affected the quality of care that patients received. Nurses who suffered from greater levels of depression were less motivated to provide higher-quality care to patients under their care.

Another factor that was considered when discussing stress was resiliency among medical professionals. Badu et al. (2020) noted that it was essential to consider SE and mindfulness as strategies to cope with stress on the job. Self-efficacy was noted to deal with positive thinking and an individual's emotional intelligence. The nurses who demonstrated greater resiliency were found to cope with stress better during the workday. The resilient nurses demonstrated key characteristics such as organization, meditation, clinical supervision, and healthy work-life balance. Nurses who demonstrated greater levels of resilience could effectively cope with the daily stress on the job. Nurses who showed organizational skills demonstrated the ability to identify and attempt to cope with stressors.

Counselor educators often face countless significant stressors when working to help educate future counselors. Moate et al. (2016) found that counselor educators often fall into two categories—adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists. A maladaptive perfectionist reported higher levels of stress than a maladaptive perfectionist. Maladaptive perfectionists were found to be more critical of their work and struggle to take pleasure in other activities (Moate et al.). Counselor educators who were found to be maladaptive perfectionists faced significant challenges when working in the academic setting. A greater pressure to succeed and meet the demands of students and upper management was also a significant stressor in the study (Moate et al.). The maladaptive perfectionist would perceive stressors differently than the adaptive perfectionist. Adaptive perfectionist reported fewer stressors because they were less critical of their actions (Moate et al.).

Occupational stressors often affect individuals in different ways. Siu et al. (2021) found the occupational stressors were as follows: job insecurity, interpersonal conflicts, quantitative workload, organizational constraints, and work-home interface. The workers who were

significantly more stressed reported feeling lower family satisfaction. Siu et al. (2021) determined that the more stressed the individual felt, the more it diminished their capacity to have positive relationships. The employees may go home feeling worse and are less likely to have a positive experience within the home. Workplaces were suggested to implement friendly environments that support the workers in diminishing the likelihood of stress. It was recommended that employers provide training opportunities to ensure workplace success and appropriate development of coping skills.

Examining the effect that stress has on the worker's family life is essential to consider when discussing longevity in a field. Vickovic and Morrow (2020) found that correctional officers who expected to work long hours did not report being stressed. The officers understood that their positions required long hours and were relaxed by the work. The officers' families were also aware of the hours that were to be worked by their family members. Those officers aware of the job duties were less likely to become upset and frustrated by the hours. Viegas and Henriques (2021) found that job stress among police officers correlated with work-family conflict. Those officers who experienced a significant amount of stress reported conflict within the home. Officers experienced stress due to the strenuous hours spent away from family and friends. Small amounts of stress were found to be helpful for officers to fulfill their duties (Viegas & Henriques, 2021). When the stress became too overwhelming, officers made errors while on the job. The officers could not work effectively with the community when they were highly stressed.

Past research has focused on when workers felt the most stressed by their jobs (Pindek et al., 2021). Pindek et al. determined that individuals appeared more stressed at the beginning of the week rather than at the end. Workers were found to use the weekend to recharge themselves for the week. After returning to work, any daily activities that prevented the workers from

reaching the goals that they set for themselves over the weekend caused them significant stress (Pindek et al.). The workers reported feeling there would be a long time until their next break to recharge. The need to recharge to complete work caused the worker's significant stress. Stressful events on Friday were found to cause less stress with the worker due to the upcoming weekend (Pindek et al.). The worker viewed the week as ending and having the appropriate resources at home to help deal with stress. Workers may have viewed Monday as being too far away and not having the appropriate access to resources available over the weekend.

Organizational changes were determined to have an impact on the stress felt by the workers as well. Pindek et al. (2021) found that companies that implemented organizational changes at the beginning of the week were significantly more stressful for the employees. Companies should have attempted to implement organizational changes at the end of the week so that workers could cope with their feelings at home. Workers often rely on support systems outside of work to ensure they are ready to return to work the following week.

Previous research has examined the effects of race and trauma on the levels of stress experienced by clinicians working in the field (Shell et al., 2021). African American counselors face a unique variety of challenges when working with clients. Shell et al. determined that African American mental health counselors experienced race-related stress, such as individual racism, cultural racism, and institutional racism. Race-related stress was discussed as being a workplace and societal stress that can be overwhelming for African American clinicians. African American counselors who experienced race-related stress often affected their psychological well-being. Counselors were more likely to report feelings of depression and exhaustion resulting from the stress experienced at work or in society. Race-related stressors were estimated to be a significant factor in the burnout of clinicians in the field (Shell et al., 2021). When African

American counselors experienced burnout, they began to experience greater levels of stress on the job. Shell et al. found that an increased number of work hours resulted in higher stress levels among African American mental health counselors. The counselors who worked more hours experienced significant increases in stress levels while working.

### ***Job Satisfaction***

Job satisfaction (JS) varies across different careers. Viegas and Henriques (2021) defined JS as the extent to which a worker feels content, satisfied, and self-motivated. Workers were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs when they believed they had job stability, career growth, and a comfortable work-life balance. Viegas and Henriques noted the importance of police officers maintaining high levels of JS to support adequate job performance and retaining officers in the field. Those officers who reported lower JS levels often were ineffective while working with the community. The police organization was believed to be successful overall if the officers reported greater levels of JS among employees. Higher JS was related to better work performance, higher salary, career growth, and recognition (Viegas & Henriques). Officers who reported enjoying their position were likelier to take pride in their daily work. Police officers were likelier to report a negative work-life balance when their job duties interfered with their private lives. The increased interference with a worker's personal life resulted in lower JS among officers. The conflict between work-family was noted to be a significant inhibitor to officers performing job duties. Officers who reported being much happier were likelier to take pride in their work and work hard during their shifts. Officers who reported lower levels of JS were more likely to experience family problems, substance abuse, and alcohol addiction (Viegas & Henriques). Police officers often reported experiencing a conflict between work and their

personal lives. The conflict existed due to the overtime, weekend, and holiday work hours that prevented the officer from spending time with family.

The overall JS of workers was affected by numerous factors. The day of the week was the most influential factor in workers' JS in China (Pindek et al., 2021). Employees who experienced incivility at work earlier in the week were more dissatisfied with their jobs because they did not have a way of dealing with it. Workers who experience an adverse event at work were likelier to think about it throughout the week. The worker did not believe there was a more appropriate way to cope with the stress they had experienced over the week. The workers who would be significantly impacted by the work to be completed would benefit from being told at the end of the week. The workers who experienced a negative event closer to the end of the week may have felt that they could cope with their feelings over the weekend (Pindek et al., 2021). Recovering over the weekend would help the worker to greater JS.

Prior research has found several other factors that profoundly affect workers' JS levels (Topino et al., 2021). Researchers found that those workers who exhibited more conscientiousness were likelier to show greater JS (Topino et al.). Those workers who wanted to succeed in their current positions were likely to show more conscientiousness when performing work duties. The workers who reported greater JS had a more positive outlook on their work and were more likely to earn rewards. The rewards earned by the worker often increase the worker's overall JS. Workers who received intrinsic and extrinsic rewards were more likely to work harder while on the job. Researchers estimated that younger workers rated higher in JS and conscientiousness (Topino et al.). As the individuals aged, the workers reported being less conscientious and had decreased JS. The workers could have been less impressionable and less likely to change their opinion of their work. Younger workers were likelier to report being

conscientious and have greater JS. The younger workers were believed to be much more open regarding their work and were willing to work hard in their current positions.

Topino et al. (2021) explored the concept of perseverance when considering JS among employees. Perseverance was negatively correlated with unproductive behavior in the workplace. Workers were found to be more productive if they reported greater perseverance. Researchers determined that younger workers demonstrated greater perseverance and JS (Topino et al.) Younger workers reported more perseverance on the job. Increased perseverance may have been reported for the younger workers because they are more willing to change to meet the needs of their current employers. The older workers may have been more resistant to change and unwilling to work as hard. Older workers with low perseverance reported being less satisfied with their jobs.

Another factor to consider when examining JS includes emotional exhaustion. Sangganjanavanich and Balkin (2013) reported that emotional exhaustion accounted for more significant job dissatisfaction among counselors. Clinicians working in the field who scored higher in burnout and emotional exhaustion reported more dissatisfaction with their current jobs. Sangganjanavanich and Balkin also noted no significant differences between age, gender, and tenure when examining JS. The researchers determined that an individual's gender or ethnic background did not affect their level of JS. Researchers suggested that counselor education programs support future clinicians in developing the appropriate coping skills to ensure JS and longevity (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin). They also believed that clinical programs should support clinicians in finding effective skills to deal with stress effectively.

Researchers have determined that one factor that affects JS is stress. Wu (2019) found that hindrance stress affected individuals' JS. Hindrance stress was defined as job demands that

constrain employees' work achievement, resulting in negative feelings. As an individual's level of hindrance stress increases, the participant's level of JS decreases. Individuals may experience more significant stress and cannot cope with their work conditions. Wu determined that individuals experience challenging stress when on the job. Challenge stress was associated with potential gains that workers may receive from completing tasks (Wu). It was determined that those workers who experienced challenge stress did not report a significant decrease in JS.

Researchers have found that past diagnoses affect JS. Bae (2021) found that women with a diagnosis of depression were more likely to report lower JS. Depression decreases the ability of individuals to focus and concentrate. Reduced concentration and focus affect work efficiency throughout the workday (Bae). Researchers suggested that employers monitor employees' work hours to ensure job efficiency. It would support employees by ensuring that they are not overwhelmed. Monitoring employees would allow the employer to maintain a positive work environment for all personnel.

Counselors working in the field often experience things that can affect their overall JS. Heydari et al. (2022) found that half of the participants reported high levels of JS. A little less than half of the other participants in the study reported a medium level of JS. Age was found to have a greater effect on JS levels (Heydari et al.). Those counselors with more experience were found to have lower JS levels than younger clinicians. Younger clinicians were believed to be significantly more enthusiastic about the job and performing duties (Heydari et al.).

Working conditions were another major factor in determining whether an employee was satisfied. Gómez García et al. (2018) reported that most social workers were dissatisfied with their jobs due to working conditions. The study focused on social workers in a rural area that did not have adequate access to supplies (Gómez García et al.). The social workers reported being

frustrated by the hygiene issues and working conditions they often were forced to work in or through. The social workers noted that the workspace was inappropriate and lacked adequate hygiene levels (Gómez García et al.). Those social workers in charge reported higher satisfaction levels due to being able to control the conditions they experienced while working.

The research study will examine how positive experiences affect the longevity of counselors in the field. Examining the effects of positive experiences on counselors would support clinicians entering the field. Neale-McFall et al. (2018) determined that colleague support, work-family enrichment, and mothering responsibilities affected JS levels among female counselor educators. It was estimated that approximately 86% of female counselor educators reported moderate JS during a study (Neale-McFall et al.). Female counselor educators at teaching institutions were found to have higher JS scores due to more manageable responsibilities (Neale-McFall et al.).

### ***Role Theory***

It is essential to consider the role of social roles established by counselors entering the field. Established social roles often affect the way that individuals behave in the world. (Anglin et al., 2022). The behavior of individuals was believed to be predictable, knowing the role of the individual and future expectations for the role. Role theorists attempt to predict how an individual responds to a particular situation. Established norms or roles may guide the lifestyle of individuals in the world. The basis of role theory focuses on individuals' roles in life and how these roles affect an individual's social behavior (Biddle, 1986). Individuals must be willing to accept their roles within the agency and their personal lives to be successful.

Socially, individuals have critical expectations of their lives that determine their roles. Biddle (1986) found that role theorists primarily align with field or phenomenological theories in

social psychology. Both theoretical approaches allow the researcher to observe the subject's environment. The researcher was able to determine the implications of accepting specific roles through observation or interviewing the individual. Mead first discussed the idea of symbolic interactionist role theory. Symbolic interactionist role theory focuses on individuals as actors in life (Biddle). The role of an individual develops through social interactions that take place over time. Individuals often adjust their roles by interpreting the reactions of their own and others' behavior (Biddle). Social interaction role theorists believe norms shared between individuals are associated with social positions. A person's role reflects their norms, contextual demands, and their definition of the situation in the environment (Biddle). Symbolic interactionists believe that individuals' roles affect the relationships formed from interactions and emotions. People experience various emotions and stressors resulting from the individual's interpretation of different roles. Individuals examine their roles and how others react to them to determine their emotions.

Symbolic interactionists have placed a great deal of emphasis on how the individual interprets their world (Anglin et al., 2022). Past researchers noted the importance of ensuring that individuals could distinguish between multiple roles that must be adopted. Anglin et al. determined that symbolic-interactionist role theorists examined the relationship between work and home roles among individuals. Examining how workers handle changes to their roles at work and home was crucial to determining what supports clinicians in remaining in counseling.

Workers are often affected by their roles when employed by an organization. Vandenberghe et al. (2017) found that workers seek to absorb the organization's goals and beliefs as a part of their jobs. Those workers who absorb the roles are better able to adjust to the roles they have chosen. As clinicians treat patients, their role may influence their staying in the

field. Vandenberghe et al. found that employees' interpretation of the company's values and beliefs changed over time as employees remained with an organization. Workers often reassess how their values, beliefs, and social experiences align with the company's. Those workers who experience discord between their personal beliefs and those of the company often cannot continue working with the company. Over time, workers base their beliefs about themselves on who they are working for. The transition to another role was noted to have gone without being studied (Anglin et al., 2022). Researchers have not examined how traditional gender roles may affect individuals when entering management roles within a business.

Role theory was found to have several key concepts that enable it to be studied easily. Biddle (1986) noted that consensus was a factor used by role theorists. Anglin et al. (2022) determined that researchers often refer to consensus as role consensus. Consensus was defined as an agreement among people about the role expectations shared among social groups. The norms established within a social group affect the roles assigned to individuals. Individuals who feel their roles match those in their social group's expectations are more likely to accept their current positions. Anglin et al. noted that more masculine roles demonstrated by women in leadership positions make success more challenging. Females in leadership positions do not ascribe to the assigned social roles typical working women belong (Anglin et al. Women in leadership positions must be able to work through the difference between their social roles and their roles at work.

Role conformity was another factor supporting the use of role theory in research. Anglin et al. (2022) defined role conformity as how closely an individual adheres to the role expectations of society. Role conformity determines an individual's compliance with a group's assigned social roles (Biddle, 1986). Individuals in society are expected to conform to certain

established roles within a group. An individual who follows the role expectations of a particular social group will receive more positive feedback. Individuals who do not conform to the typical (al.) expectations of the group will face consequences from those in their social group (Anglin et al.). Role conformity and role consensus were found to be dependent on one another because an individual who does conform to the typical social roles goes against social consensus expectations. Anglin et al. determined that African American women in leadership positions go against customary social role consensus. Individuals in leadership roles typically were described as male and Caucasian. African American women are viewed as being more masculine than what is deemed appropriate for their social group.

Role identity was another belief supporting role theory as easy to study. Role identity is defined as the meaning individuals apply to themselves (Anglin et al., 2022). Individuals were found to view their roles as appropriate or inappropriate. Actions that match the individuals' role will make them feel like they are doing well. Individuals may adapt their interpretation of a role over time to fit into the socially appropriate role (Anglin et al.). Role salience and centrality focus on the importance individuals assign to roles in their lives. Anglin et al. defined role salience as the willingness of an individual to act out an identity based on an individual's beliefs. Salience does not rely on being aware of oneself. Role centralities refer to what an individual believes will be desirable based on their point of view (Anglin et al.). Workers who demonstrated more significant levels of role centrality and salience were noted to be more focused and passionate about their given careers. Workers were more likely to be dedicated to their chosen field of interest. The dedication exhibited by workers was found to be detrimental to the individual's relationship within the home.

Role conflict and role ambiguity were determined as a part of role theory, which helps it to be easily studied. Role conflict is when an individual has developed multiple roles, and one role is incompatible with another (Anglin et al., 2022). Individuals adopt different roles and must be able to accept the behavior that goes along with the role. Individuals who cannot accept the new role experience stress and try to cope with the new behavior (Biddle, 1986). A role conflict was noted to create significant stress for individuals in the workplace. Workers who experience role conflict were found to be less committed to an agency and have high accident rates, poor job performance, and resignations (Biddle). Those individuals who experience a conflict between two distinct roles will be more prone to experiencing stress. The stress experienced will show at work through the employee's poor performance. The research study will examine the positive experiences that have taken place at work in a clinician's personal life that supported them as a counselor. Role ambiguity is how an individual views and understands their role (Anglin et al.). Role ambiguity focuses on the individual feeling confused regarding their personal or professional role. Biddle believed that role ambiguity would arise when an individual does not have clearly defined roles for behavior. Workers may experience role ambiguity when they do not understand their basic job duties.

Role accumulation and role enrichment were concepts identified early on that supported role theory as easy to study. Anglin et al. (2022) stated that role accumulation focuses on a person acquiring multiple roles simultaneously. Workers often must take on multiple roles that represent themselves. An example would include a female supervisor who would need to take on the role of mother at home and supervisor at work. Female workers would have multiple roles they would need to take on in life. Role accumulation was determined to be a crucial factor when discussing structural-functional role theory. Anglin et al. determined that it was important to

examine the stress that taking on roles creates for individuals. Those who assume more roles are prone to experiencing significantly more difficulty in their lives. Role enrichment was described as supporting another role in one's life (Anglin et al.). Accepting one role may support an individual and help improve life in another role. Those individuals who have adopted the role of father and entrepreneur may understand the need to organize and prioritize tasks. The individual learns what to put first and understands the need to delegate specific tasks to ensure they are completed on time. The relationship between roles held at work and those within the home was believed to help improve the lives of those with multiple roles.

Role transitions were a factor that researchers believed made it easy to study. Role transitions were defined as changing roles (Anglin et al., 2022). Changing roles could be mental or physical within the same or different environments. Clinicians transitioning from counselor to clinical director or supervisor will experience role transitions. Individuals must change how they identify themselves when entering a new career field.

Another factor that affected workers in the field included the beliefs of the supervisor. Vandenberghe et al. (2017) determined that a supervisor makes up the entire organization. The worker will generalize that the supervisor represents the beliefs of the agency. Workers will evaluate how their beliefs match those of the agency they are currently working for. Those individuals who feel as though their beliefs do not match with the company are less likely to remain at the agency. Vandenberghe et al. determined that employers should gear their efforts to find employees whose beliefs align with the company. The individuals who have similar beliefs are more likely to remain. The employees' beliefs should align with the companies' beliefs, making the workers more satisfied with their jobs.

### **Summary**

Counselor's perceptions of positive life experiences should be examined using the theory of SE and role theory. Examining the counselors' feelings regarding working with clients helps support them in remaining in the field. Examining stress, burnout, and JS supports the study in forming a basis for the need to study how positive experiences support counselors remaining in the field. Current research does not address the positive life experiences that support counselors remaining in the field. Future research must address the experiences that will help future counselors who enter the field. Future research questions should address the motivating factors and life experiences that support counselor longevity.

## **Chapter Three: Methods**

### **Overview**

A qualitative research method was used to examine the positive life experiences that have affected the length of time clinicians have remained in the field. The study detailed the experiences that have supported clinicians in staying in the counseling field. The researcher outlined the reasoning for the research design, initial questions, participants, and procedures followed throughout the study. The researcher scrutinized the life experiences gathered through interviews with mental health counselors working in the counseling field. The researcher focused on research questions to determine what supportive measures or experiences helped clinicians remain in the field. The setting, surveys, and potential analysis were described for the reader. Including these items supported the researcher in developing an effective plan to determine the factors that allow clinicians to remain in the counseling field.

### **Design**

A transcendental phenomenological study design was utilized to study counselors' positive experiences that helped them remain in the field. Heppner et al. (2016) reported that phenomenological studies describe everyday life events to understand the phenomenon. A transcendental phenomenological approach was used to understand counselors' experiences clearly. The researcher could listen and understand the experiences and how they supported the clinician. The researcher determined common themes among the experiences that may support the counselors. Heppner et al. (2016) found that phenomenological research allows the researcher to interpret and draw conclusions from the interviews. Criterion-based sampling was utilized in this research study to determine the common themes for the phenomenon. The following criteria were set for subjects to be selected: subjects must have experienced the

phenomenon, and participants must be able to state their past experiences (Heppner et al.). Criterion-based sampling allowed the researcher to collect information from participants who had worked in the field for at least seven years. Seven years was chosen to ensure clinicians' longevity within the counseling field. Clinicians who have remained in the field for seven years have demonstrated a desire to counsel clients.

### **Research Questions**

Several research questions were addressed in this study. The research questions addressed through this study are included below: What positive lived experiences do state-licensed professional counselors working in the community share that support them in remaining in the field? What supportive measures do mental health workers depend on when working in the field, and how do mental health counselors with seven or more years of experience describe the positive personal experiences that supported them in counseling?

### **Setting**

Whenever possible, the researcher scheduled in-person interviews with potential participants. The researcher attempted to schedule appointments within the mental health center whenever possible. All participants were offered to perform interviews through video conference programs such as Skype, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom. Every effort was made to hold interviews in private areas to maintain confidentiality. All participants participated in interviews through Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Interviews were scheduled at the earliest convenience of each subject.

### **Participants**

The researcher primarily used criterion sampling to determine the appropriate participants for the research study. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that criterion sampling allows the

researcher to include participants based on a particular set of criteria. The subjects were chosen based on their occupation and years within the field to support the study. All participants were sought out through state licensing board referral sites. Participants were required to have a minimum of seven years in the counseling field. The researcher utilized the internet and clinical directories for state-licensed mental health treatments available to the public. The researcher used phone calls, email, and mail to seek out participants for the study. Approximately 10 participants agreed and completed the interview and the surveys. Two potential participants were excluded due to the researcher's inability to verify state counseling licensure. Pseudonyms were utilized for all participants to ensure anonymity.

A total of 10 subjects participated in the research study. Approximately seven females and three males agreed to serve as participants. Four participants identified as African American and six identified as Caucasian. The average income amongst all 10 participants was estimated at \$80,000. The average number of years working in counseling for all participants was 19.

### **Procedures**

The researcher completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application for the research study. Full approval was obtained prior to the onset of data collection and presentation of informed consent to participants. All participants were provided a demographic questionnaire identifying the following: age, ethnicity, marital status, licensure status, number of years as a counselor, and highest degree earned. The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews with each participant. Heppner et al. (2016) stated that qualitative interviews allow the participants to state their own experiences. Subjects participated in the interview and were reminded to complete the counselor perception survey.

### **The Researchers Role**

The researcher primarily served as the interviewer for all subjects participating in the study. Heppner et al. (2016) noted that the researcher influences qualitative research at each phase of the study. All attempts were made to ensure that participants in the study were unfamiliar with the researcher. Heppner et al. stated that the researcher's questions often were shaped by the worldview of the researcher performing the study. The documentation of the researcher's worldview and experiences was discussed and studied through this research study. The researcher ensured that readers were aware of the current occupation of the researcher and the potential impact of the career on the study. Being employed as a counselor in the field will significantly affect the clinician's ability to provide insight into the career field.

### **Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews were utilized during this research study. The researcher obtained permission to do research through the Liberty University IRB committee. Upon approval, the researcher sought out the individuals to participate through email, phone, and postal mail. Participants were sought out through community behavioral health centers located across the US. The first contact was made via email whenever possible. A second attempt was made to contact the participants via phone to ask for their participation. Participants were provided a copy of the informed consent in person or via email. After obtaining consent from the subject, the participants were scheduled to participate in the interview. The participants were reminded that the interview may take up to two hours. A link was forwarded to the subject so they could join a Microsoft Teams or Zoom session with the researcher. Whenever possible, the researcher scheduled an in-person interview and forwarded a calendar invite to the participant as a reminder.

On the interview day, the researcher utilized a recording device to ensure accurate data transcription. The researcher presented the participants with a demographic questionnaire to complete. The researcher performed the interview and ensured the data was stored on a computer separate from the client's contact information. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend that researchers utilize computer programs to ensure adequate and appropriate explanations of data. The researcher ensured that the participant's personal information was not released to others on the Internet. Participant data was transcribed for the researcher in this study.

After the semi-structured interview, subjects were contacted to participate in a counselor perception survey. All participants received an email notification regarding the survey after participating in the study. Subjects were emailed a link via email to answer questions for the survey. Participants were informed that personal information shared during the survey was not directly released. Whenever possible, pseudonyms were utilized to protect the participants in the study. Upon confirmation of completion of the survey, participants were sent a gift card. All participants were emailed that the study had concluded and thanked for participating.

### **Surveys**

Participants were required to complete a demographics survey prior to beginning the interview. Each subject was asked to report the following information: race/ethnicity, age, income, years employed as a counselor, licensure credentials (fully licensed/licensure as a supervisor), and marital status. This information supported the research study when data obtained from each participant was compared. Subjects were assigned a random number to ensure anonymity for the purposes of this study.

Participants were asked to complete a counselor perception survey following the interview. The counselor perception survey asked participants to share details regarding their

positive experiences in the counseling field. Upon completion of the counselor perception survey, participants received a gift card. The counselor perception survey consisted of six short answer questions. Participants were asked to complete the following questions during the survey:

1. Why did you decide to become a counselor?
2. Who has been the most positive influence during your counseling career? Please state why you chose this person.
3. What was your most memorable moment as a counselor?
4. What strengths do you possess that supported you as a counselor during your career?
5. Share an aspect of your work or life experience that has kept you motivated when working with clients.
6. Share two SC activities that you have enjoyed over the course of the past year.

The question served as a fundamental background question to begin the survey.

Participants were asked to write what made them enter the counseling field. Question two allowed participants to share a person who has positively affected their career in counseling. Subjects were asked to state why they chose that person. Question three asked participants to report their most memorable moment as a counselor. Questions one through three focused on making participants more open to reporting their feelings about counseling.

Question four focused on the subject, discussing what character traits or strengths helped them to remain in the field. Subjects could reflect on the internal strengths that have strengthened them throughout their careers. Question five asked participants to state anything within their personal or professional lives that has motivated them to continue working as a clinician. Question six focused on determining which SC activities counselors have engaged in over the past year.

## Interviews

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview format during this study. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to use structured questions and allow for a better interview with the flexibility of asking additional questions (Heppner et al., 2016). The semi-structured interview has an interview protocol for all participants to follow. Utilizing this interviewing format allowed the researcher to discuss and use follow-up questions regarding information provided by the subject. The researcher conducted interviews with the subject through videoconferencing software. The following questions were asked during the semi-structured interview:

1. What university did you attend? What graduate school did you attend?
2. Please describe your current position.
3. Describe your most positive and defining moment as a counselor.
4. What inspired you to become a mental health counselor?
5. How long have you worked as a mental health counselor?
6. Describe your most traumatizing moment as a clinician. How did you cope with that experience?
7. What emotional and psychological supports have family members offered you over the course of your career as a clinician?
8. Describe your most positive experience as a clinician with a client.
9. What advice would you give another counselor entering mental health counseling?
10. Describe the moment when you decided that counseling was your chosen field.
11. How would you describe the counselor's role in the mental health field?

12. In the past month, what types of self-care activities have you engaged in? Please provide an estimate of the number of times per week you performed these activities.

Questions one, two, and five were background questions. Heppner et al. (2016) note that background questions attempt to get the history of the client. The researcher gained insight into the history and background of the client within the agency. The background questions were used to support the research study in determining the longevity of the clinicians within the field. Asking for the total years within the counseling field supported the researcher in determining the length of time the clinician has spent working there.

Questions three, six, eight, and ten were noted to be behavioral questions asked of participants. The questions were focused on determining the opinions or beliefs of the clinician when working in the counseling field. Heppner et al. (2016) provided that behavioral questions focus on the actions or actions of the subject being interviewed. Questions three and eight focused on the positive experiences while working in counseling. The researcher determined what experiences profoundly affected the willingness of clinicians to remain in the counseling field. Questions six and ten concentrated on the subject's description of their traumatic experiences and the experiences that helped them to remain in the field. The researcher gained insight into what supported the clients in remaining in counseling.

Questions four, seven, nine, and 11 were the subjects' opinion questions. Heppner et al. (2016) noted that opinion questions allow the client to state how they feel things are going at the time. Question seven emphasized social and psychological supports that helped the subject during tough times. Questions 4 and 11 addressed the role of the counselor in the field. The participants could provide their opinions on what they had experienced in the field. Question nine highlighted the issues the subject feels new clinicians should understand about counseling.

Question 12 addressed the type and number of times that counselors have engaged in self-care activities over the past month.

### **Data Analysis**

I utilized data coding to analyze the information provided by participants during the interviews. Information collected through the interviews was coded for themes. Heppner et al. (2016) referred to themes in the research as recurrent patterns in data. The emerging themes from the participants were examined and placed into categories. Researchers must consider the political implications of the research studies (Heppner et al.). The researcher must ensure that the information shared represents all the subjects within the study. Researchers must be clear about how they interpret the data.

I utilized the qualitative content analysis methods for this study. Moustakas (1994) utilized the following method of qualitative data analysis: horizontalization, clustering the invariant constituents into themes, individual textual descriptions, composite textual and composite structural descriptions, and synthesis of textual meanings and essences. The researcher analyzed all statements from the interviews and focused on those statements regarding positive experiences that affected their careers. Moustakas referred to the analysis of statements at horizontalization (Moustakas). The underlying themes that emerged from the interviews were created. The recognition of themes was called clustering the invariant constituents into themes (Moustakas). The emerging themes were identified and labeled for the subjects. The researcher constructed individual textual descriptions for each participant (Moustakas). A clear description of the meaning and themes of the experience was provided for each participant. The researcher provided the subjects with one week to analyze and view the description of themes and meanings provided in their interviews. The researcher developed and created a list of themes that have

developed from the group of subjects. Moustakas referred to this process as synthesizing textual meanings and essences. Coding and clarity for each theme were analyzed and reported to readers.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was addressed in this research study by using a coding system. Morse (2015) noted that researchers developing a coding system will increase the validity of the study. The researcher ensured that the appropriate analysis was performed and created the necessary negative case analysis to increase the amount of trustworthiness when conducting semi-structured interviews. A coding system was designed to depict all possible answers to the questions to ensure that the researcher could use questions that could be coded by another researcher. The use of coding ensures that multiple researchers would be able to code the data received from participants. Morse stated that negative case analysis was used to examine the questions not answered by participants. A negative case analysis allowed the researcher to explore the questions that were unanswered during the interview. As a researcher, it was important to consider and examine the cases of individuals whose answers do not go along with the responses from others within the group. The researcher examined the questions that still needed to be answered during each interview. The information gathered was presented to the reader for future research consideration.

### **Credibility**

The credibility of the research study was guaranteed by the researchers supplying the reader with direct quotes from the subjects. Participants' information was hidden to the best of the researcher's ability. Participants were assigned a pseudonym in which they were referred to throughout the study. Heppner et al. (2016) noted that researchers must provide accurate

information as presented by subjects, and including the subjects' quotes in the research study ensured that readers understand what the subject experienced as a clinician. The researcher accurately depicted the environment and time the subjects worked during their experiences.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

The findings from the research study were presented as they were coded during the research study. The researcher provided an accurate depiction of the interview environment for each subject. The researcher ensured that subjects were interviewed within their local environment whenever possible. Being interviewed in their natural environment supported the clinician in accurately sharing information regarding their experiences throughout their counseling career. The researcher ensured that the information shared did not identify any subjects participating in the study. All transcriptions and interview statements were deleted from computers or flash memory drives.

### **Transferability**

The researcher ensured that all established methods of coding and analyzing the data were completed. The information was shared with readers to ensure future replication of the study. Participants' information was protected throughout the study. Data collection methods and interpretations were shared with readers to ensure adequate understanding and replication of the study. The researcher ensured that all university protocols outlined by the IRB were followed.

### **Ethical Considerations**

It is crucial to consider the ethical implications of the study. Heppner et al. (2016) noted that researchers should attempt to guard against negative implications from interpreting the data. As a researcher, I found it essential to consider the counseling field. As a clinician, it is important to understand that potential biases could arise if the researcher is not careful of the interpretations

made. It was important to ensure that all information, along with interpretations, are shared with all readers to ensure information is shared for others to read and interpret in the future. The researcher adhered to the code of ethics regarding research as outlined by the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014).

### **Summary**

The phenomenological study focused on the positive life experiences of clinicians who have remained in the field for at least seven years. The subjects participated in a semi-structured interview performed by the researcher. Attempts were made to interview participants in their natural environment. The researcher used direct quotes, coding, and negative case analysis to ensure the reliability and credibility of the research study. The researcher shared information regarding the setting and time of the interview with readers.

## Chapter Four: Findings

### Overview

The research study demonstrated several key themes that affect the positive life experiences of counselors working in the field. Through the examination of participant interviews and responses to the Counselor Perception survey, several major themes were examined from the 10 participants in the research study. The identified themes were as follows: personal trauma, intrinsic motivation to help others, community building, theoretical application, affecting change in others, enjoyable activities, and faith. A thorough analysis of each participant's responses and evolving themes provides insight into the positive experiences that support counselors in remaining in the field.

### Participants

#### *Richard*

Richard was a private practice counselor with over 30 years of counseling experience in the southern United States. He self-reported being a 69-year-old Caucasian male who is a state-licensed counselor. Richard has served children and families to support them during significant periods (i.e., divorce and custody settlements). He primarily focused on adults who needed support with coping with mental health diagnoses such as depression, anxiety, and grief. Richard reported an average income of over \$100,000.

#### *Joanne*

Joanne reported that she is an African American female, a state-licensed counselor in her late 40s, with over 15 years of experience in counseling. She currently owns and operates multiple private practices that service minors and adults. Joanne now offers services to individuals who require support with significant past traumatic experiences. Her practice services

various clients within the rural southern United States. Joanne reported an average annual income of over \$100,000.

***Parker***

Parker described himself as a Caucasian male, approximately 32 years of age, employed as a counselor within a private practice in the southern United States. His average annual income was estimated to be between \$40,000 and \$50,000 as a state-licensed mental health counselor with eight years of experience. Parker's clientele includes primarily adults who have experienced difficulty with maintaining relationships with others. During the interview, he detailed serving many couples who require marriage support.

***Karen***

Karen self-reported that she is a Caucasian female in her late 60s and has her private counseling practice in the southern United States. She reported serving primarily adults who have experienced significant trauma. Karen said an average salary is between \$70,000 to \$80,000 per year. She reported providing services to those who have experienced significant trauma for the past eight years in the southern United States.

***Paula***

Paula presented as a 55-year-old African American female licensed to practice counseling in the southern United States. She reported sharing private practice ownership with her spouse and employing multiple therapists. Paula's annual average income was between \$70,000 - \$80,000. The practitioners serve minors and adults with valid insurance or self-pay. She stated that she has over 15 years of experience working with adults and children with various levels of mental illness.

***Laura***

Laura self-reported as a 60-year-old African American female, licensed to practice mental health counseling in the southern United States. She indicated having 15 – 20 years of experience working with minors and adults throughout her career in private practice. Laura's annual income was estimated at approximately \$80,000 to \$90,000. She reported that she was previously an Armed Services member before entering the counseling field.

***Barbara***

Barbara presented as a 71-year-old Caucasian female with over 30 years of experience in mental health counseling. She owns and operates a private mental health practice in the southern United States. Barbara reported primarily working with adults who are experiencing difficulty with addictions and PTSD. She reported an average annual salary between \$90,000 to 100,000.

***Marc***

Marc presented as a Caucasian male with over 30 years of experience in mental health counseling. Marc was in his late 60s at the time of the interview. He owns and operates his mental health practice in the southern United States. Marc reported working primarily with individuals overcoming addictions within his private practice. Marc did not indicate his annual income on the survey.

***Sarah***

Sarah reported as a Caucasian female, 59 years of age, with about eight years of experience in mental health counseling. She owns and operates a private practice located in the southern United States. Sarah reported making over \$100,000 annually.

### *Vanessa*

Vanessa presented as an African American female in her early 40s with approximately 15 years of experience in the mental health field. She is currently employed by a state agency offering mental health services to employees. Vanessa reported an annual salary of over \$100,000.

## **Results**

### *Theme Development*

Several themes emerged upon having examined the personal interviews performed by the researcher. Through the process of a demographic survey, a semi-structured interview, and a counselor perception survey, the researcher was able to gain significant insight into the themes of the study. The demographic survey provided background information on subjects to determine years of experience, licensure verification, average annual income, age, race, and gender. The researcher verified state counselor licensure for all participants using state licensing board verification websites.

Coding was performed using qualitative content analysis (Moustakas, 1994). During the coding process, all transcriptions were read and reviewed thoroughly before beginning. The researcher used horizontalization to list every expression relevant to the positive experiences of counselors working in the field. Horizontalization was used to identify valid, relevant expressions made by participants. All statements considered valid were screened to ensure that no repetitive statements were included in the study. The statements were analyzed for themes and reflected on to ensure accuracy.

The themes that emerged during the research study were as follows: Personal Trauma, Intrinsic Motivation to Help Others, Community Building, Theoretical Orientation, Affecting

Change, Enjoyable Activities, and Faith. The themes described above were found to be an essential part of the interviews performed with participants. Several participants reported that counseling was just something that they coincidentally went into the counseling field. Joanne stated, “Uh, when did I pass that licensure test? When I went in there and, I did all that studying, and I passed. Well, this is the field we are going in.” Joanne stated that she felt the field was the one she could achieve and decided to stay. The theme was apparent amongst other clinicians when performing interviews. The clinician felt the field was chosen for her and wished to continue working toward success.

Personal Trauma was a common theme found in many interviews performed with subjects. Participants noted that they had some personal experience that supported them in entering counseling or continuing to work in the field. Participant Karen stated, “So, I have a lot of my trauma and then. When my children went through trauma. Trying to find a therapist to work with them. Who was any kind of good.” Karen described the significant trauma that she had experienced as a child and what trauma her children experienced. Karen found it challenging to find a quality counselor and entered the field to help others. The ability of trauma to affect individuals to choose a career to support others was evident when speaking with the subjects.

An Intrinsic Motivation to support others was a clear theme that emerged among participants. Many participants found that they were naturally motivated to want to help. Helping behaviors were exhibited at an early age. Participant Richard stated, “I love helping others and advocating. It seems like what I should be doing, and I get to do it. So, it's a daily happiness...” Richard reported a natural desire to support others and the local community. His connection with the community appeared to have supported him in continuing his studies in the counseling field.

Theoretical Orientation was another major theme that emerged among counselors during their interviews. Counselors stated that it would be helpful for future clinicians to determine their theoretical approach early. Subject Parker said, “As soon as you can find a theoretical orientation that you feel most matches with how you view the world in general.” The counselor recommended that other counselors entering the field find a theoretical approach close to their beliefs. Parker noted the importance of ensuring that the theory a clinician believed in reflects real life.

Affecting Change was another theme that emerged when examining the interviews with the research participants. Affecting change became a theme based on the need for counselors to feel they were helping others within their counseling sessions. Counselors appreciated seeing the change in each client they worked with in sessions. Participant Paula stated, “I challenged them to in the ways they were approaching conflict, the ways they were speaking to one another...They have a complete turnaround and have the most positive outcome that you could hope for.” Paula witnessed the change within counseling sessions and was excited to see that clients had progressed. Seeing the change in clients supported her in continuing her journey in the counseling field.

Appreciating and finding enjoyable activities was a theme that emerged from the interviews with participants. The counselors engaged in several activities to support them in coping with the stress of counseling. Self-care was found to be a major part of each counselor’s life. Participant Richard stated, “I would always include taking good care of your physical and mental health, and it has to be a priority in your life over that of your clients.” Counselors determined that SC was essential to them being able to provide quality care to clients. Learning to focus on other activities supported them in remaining focused during counseling sessions.

Faith emerged as a theme among many counselors interviewed for the research study. Faith and spirituality helped some counselors remain in the field for an extended time. Counselors use their faith as a source of support to help clients. Participant Laura stated, “So, I said it wasn't nothing but God. You know my faith is, uh, you know, strong in God, and you know that is what drives me also.” Laura depended on her faith to ensure she provided her clients with services. Her faith and spiritual beliefs were heavily relied on when things became strict with clients or her business. Laura’s faith supported her in ensuring she could meet her clients' needs during sessions. Faith appeared to have guided her to continue within the counseling field when she was experiencing difficulty in the counseling field.

### **Research Question Responses**

#### ***Personal Trauma***

Several interview questions answered by the participants were placed under the theme of Personal Trauma. Personal Trauma was a driving force for several counselors to remain in the field. Participants described their trauma when asked to describe what influenced them to enter the counseling field. Participant Karen stated, “I have a lot of my own trauma.” Karen described entering into the counseling field to cope with the trauma that she experienced in her own life. Her goal was to provide high-quality counseling services to others. When Participant Karen was asked to describe her emotional and psychological support from family members, she reported, “I am in therapy because of them.” Karen believed that her family caused her significant trauma in the past and was not fully supportive of her. Offering high-quality services to those with a trauma background inspired her to remain in the field.

Several other participants described how personal trauma drove them into the counseling field. Participant Marc was open about sharing his experiences when asked about this.

Participant Marc stated, “I am in recovery myself.” Marc described giving back to his community through his traumatic experience. He reported feeling safe within the field and knowing this was what he should be doing. Marc appeared to need to help those who experienced issues with addiction.

Participant Sarah found personal trauma as a driving force for her remaining in the counseling field. Sarah was open regarding her experience when asked what inspired her to become a mental health counselor. Participant Sarah stated, “I had an older brother who went through and still has some psychiatric problems.” Sarah’s personal experiences with her family supported her in remaining in counseling. Witnessing her family members’ struggles helped her to understand the importance of mental health counseling.

Sarah reported a natural desire to help her family when completing the counselor perception survey. Participants were asked to share an aspect of their work or life experience that has motivated them when working with clients. Sarah stated, “The losses gave me a unique perspective and motivated me to help others who may feel helpless and hopeless.” Sarah wanted to ensure others did not feel hopeless or powerless.

### ***Intrinsic Motivation***

An intrinsic motivation to help others was a central theme in the interviews with many participants. Several participants noted that they needed to help others from a young age. Participant Richard was asked to describe his most positive and defining moment as a counselor during an interview. Richard could recall many of the positive notes and cards he received from former clients. He stated, “I love helping others and advocating. It seems like what I should be doing, and I get to do it. So, it's a daily happiness.” Richard described being able to advocate and

support others as a genuine source of happiness. He noted being able to continue to enjoy his work because he felt as though he had made an impact on other's lives.

Participant Parker stated that he felt a need to help others. His desire to help and dedication to the field helped him enter counseling. Participant Parker stated, "So I was looking at other options and saw I wanted to help people. That has always been something that I went into school to do." He felt that counseling would be a good way for him to continue to help others, which was his ultimate goal. On the Counselor Perception Survey, Parker shared that he often felt fortunate after leaving a client session when asked to share an aspect of counseling that kept him motivated to continue in the field. Supporting clients and seeing their progress inspired him to remain in the field.

Participant Joanne reported being intrinsically motivated to want to help others. When she was younger, others in her community identified her desire to help others. During her interview, Joanne stated, "Umm, so my guidance counselor spoke to me umm, and she was like, well, perhaps maybe you wanna do something like counseling or in the healthcare. You seem to help people in the class." Other individuals in Joanne's life noticed she wanted to help those around her. Joanne's response on the Counselor Perception Survey to the question regarding her most memorable moment in counseling was, "Seeing my young clients process trauma and get back to a level of normal functioning." Participant Joanne found that she enjoyed seeing progress made within her clients and wanted to help them in their journey.

Participant Paula reported feeling as though the counseling field was something that she went into wanting to help. As she worked in the field, Paula noticed that the local community needed the support of counselors. She stated during her interview, "I can definitely say that sometimes when you start doing this work, you really don't know how well it's needed or how

much its appreciated.” Through her work in the community, Paula appeared to understand how valuable her job was to others around her. The community relied on her in terms of employment opportunities and counseling sessions.

### ***Community Building***

Community Building was a theme that emerged among many participants during the interview and the counselor perception survey. Participant Joanne stated a strong desire to support the local community when asked why she became a counselor. Joanne said, “That’s part of the social change. When you see a gap, you got to be able to identify what those services are in counseling to be able to make a difference. And that’s really what motivation or my why was.” Joanne’s motivation stemmed from helping those in the local community. She noted that identifying the needs of those in the community was important. On the Counselor Perception Survey, Joanne emphasized a need to serve those living in rural areas for counseling. When asked why she wanted to become a counselor, she stated, “To bridge quality professional services in rural counties where access to services is limited.” Joanne sought to meet the local community's needs through her counseling services. Meeting the needs of those in the community supported them and ensured she was helping others.

Participant Paula demonstrated community support as a theme when being interviewed. She stated that she relied on the community when asked about her SC activities over the past month. Paula stated, “And so that is that community support is crucial, and it's crucial. So, getting back involved, I have attended a couple of conferences, women’s conferences that has been great.” Having the community's support and being connected with the local community supported her in a career as a counselor. Her community helped her to continue to work toward supporting clients.

Participant Richard noted the community as a primary focus within his counseling career when he was interviewed. When asked to describe the counselor's role, he stated, "Whether it's being the counselor that lives on your street or the counselor that happens to know a bunch of lawyers and may be able to help affect some things in that venue. Or the counselor who is active in their church or the temple." Richard stressed the importance of being a part of the community and understanding that the work done supports the entire community.

### ***Theoretical Orientation***

A counselor's theoretical orientation was a major theme throughout several participant interviews. Participant Parker found that determining a theoretical orientation was one of the critical factors for counselors to remain in the field for an extended period. When asked in an interview what advice he would offer counselors entering the field, he stated, "As soon as you can find a theoretical orientation that you feel most matches with how you view the world in general." Parker stressed the importance of identifying with a theory related to the counselor's beliefs. Aligning personal beliefs with counseling beliefs would support clinicians in remaining in the field. Counselors would feel more connected to the work being completed with clients.

Participant Joanne noted Theoretical Orientation as essential for a counselor entering the field. Joanne stated, "So, it takes asking more questions. You know and know your theories to be able to implement them. Not just saying that you know them if that makes sense." Counselors should determine which theoretical orientation would best support clients. Joanne indicated that counseling programs often do not allow counselors to practice applying theories when working with clients. Counselors must take the time when entering the field to consider what theoretical approach and techniques they would like to use when working with a client.

Participant Richard reported when asked in the interview regarding what inspired him to become a mental health counselor. Richard's overall theoretical approach supported him in identifying and helping clients during counseling sessions. Richard stated, "And it was an approach to family therapy that was outside the bounds of what had been established, and it sort of resonated with me. That and Jungian psychology were the two big areas that resonated with me." Identifying with Jungian psychology supported Richard in his career and focus as a counselor. Richard established a clear theory and techniques to support his clients during sessions.

Participant Laura identified theoretical orientation as a primary component when asked about advice she would offer those counselors entering the field. Laura recognized the importance of being well-versed in a theoretical approach that a counselor would like to use with clients. Laura stated, "Know their areas of concentration. Just because we have training to do a gambit of different diagnoses or theories. You have to pick one and become the subject matter expert in that one." Counselors must choose a theory they feel comfortable with and utilize all the tools with the theory to the best of their ability. Counselors should be experts in applying a given theory.

### *Affecting Change*

Affecting and witnessing change among clients was a significant factor for several counselors when being interviewed and in their survey answers. Participant Richard determined that seeing and hearing about the changes in his clients has been one of the most positive things that has happened to him as a clinician. Richard stated, "...a couple of notes that I've gotten just out of the blue. Of not only hearing about survival and thriving. But, hearing, you know, great milestones that you know they, they attribute things that they learned during the time..." Richard

was greatly affected by the change he had heard about from past clients. Hearing of the changes and adversity they overcame supported him in developing a more positive view of counseling.

Richard was happy to hear about the good things that his clients were doing.

Participant Parker determined that watching the change in his clients was instrumental to his counseling career. When asked to state one positive experience he said, “And that always feels good when it gets to the point where I am thinking this may have been as far as I can take them. They have a complete turnaround and have the most positive outcome.” Parker found hope when witnessing clients make a change during sessions—seeing a client making progress supported him in feeling more positive in the counseling field. Witnessing the change may have supported Parker’s desire to remain in counseling for longer.

Participant Karen reported that witnessing the change within clients was overwhelmingly positive for her as a counselor in the field. During the interview, when asked about the most positive experience as a counselor, she stated, “So when a client puts into practice things we have worked on, it’s like yeah.” Karen found it rewarding when she was able to see that her clients utilized the techniques and tips provided during client sessions. Learning that she was a part of the change in a client’s life supported her in counseling. Knowing and understanding the change she made in an individual’s life increased her feelings of SE within the counseling field.

### ***Enjoyable Activities***

Counselors interviewed for this research study determined that incorporating SC activities required them to perform to the best of their ability. Creating more positive experiences appeared to support the client’s SE and ability to remain in the field. Participant Parker noted that he engaged in SC regularly. When asked about his SC activities during the interview, he stated, “Meditation, yoga, playing guitar.” These activities helped him to ensure that he was

focused when working with clients. On the Counselor Perception Survey, when asked about the strengths that have supported him as a counselor, he stated, "...I am very good at compartmentalizing, being non-judgmental, and being at peace with the conflicting concepts..." Parker determined that having a clear separation between work and his personal life was effective. This delineation between work and homemade Parker is more effective when working with clients.

Richard reported having some SC plans or enjoyable activities as a critical point for counselors. Self-care was a significant factor for Richard when he was asked for advice that he would give to another counselor entering the field. Richard stated, "I would always include taking good care of your physical and mental health, and it has to be a priority in your life over that of your clients." Taking care of yourself would support counselors in providing quality care to clients. Self-care offers counselors time to recharge and be prepared for their next session.

Participant Barbara indicated that SC was essential to her career as a counselor. When asked about her SC activities during the interview, she stated, "...I signed up for an art class..." Art and her pets helped her to provide quality care to her clients. Barbara was focused on spending quality time with her family through short day trips. Using various types of SC supported her in ensuring that she remained in the field for an extended period.

### ***Faith***

Several counselors reported Faith and spirituality as primary factors during the interviews. Participant Paula reported that her relationship with God was a big factor in her success within the counseling field. She attributed her ability to remain in the field for a long time because of her relationship with God. When asked about her practice, Paula stated, "Yeah, God is... God is amazing, so, and I always feel like when you have these, these big plays for

yourself that you feel like this is what we're gonna do." Paula relied on her faith to help guide her through her journey in supporting her clients and community. Paula mentioned being active within her local church community when describing SC activities she had engaged in over the past month.

Participant Laura indicated that spirituality was a major factor in her career as a counselor. She described relying on her faith when she first opened her private practice, and things were hard. Laura described relying on her faith when asked how long she had been a counselor. Laura stated, "And I stayed in business. So, I said it wasn't nothing but God. You know my faith is, uh, you know, strong in God, and you know that is what drives me also." Laura found that her faith supported her in remaining in counseling when it was difficult. She relied heavily on her spirituality to provide hope for the future.

Participant Vanessa described her faith as a primary focus for her counseling career. Vanessa described her faith as a primary factor when seeking support from her current employer. She stated, "It was all God". Vanessa's faith supported her in changing how counseling was viewed within the agency where she worked. Her faith and belief in her skills helped many other employees to gain access to services.

### **Summary**

The themes that emerged within the research study were determined to have a dramatic on the length of time that individuals spent in the field. Counselors who served as participants stated how themes such as Faith, Intrinsic Motivation, Personal Trauma, Community Building, Theoretical Orientation, Affecting Change, and Enjoyable Activities supported them in the field. Many participants relied heavily on these themes to ensure they remained in the field and

provided the best quality services. Each participant described how their positive journey through counseling as a career ensured they were effective with each client.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

### **Overview**

The purpose of the study was to determine what positive lived experiences affected counselors remaining in the field. Participants were required to be at least 18 years of age, currently employed in the mental health field, have at least seven years' experience within the mental health field, and be state-licensed as a mental health counselor. Chapter five provides an overview of the study's research findings or significant themes. The major themes that emerged included Personal Trauma, Intrinsic Motivation, Faith, Community Building, Theoretical Orientation, Affecting Change, and Enjoyable Activities. The above-listed themes supported the idea that positive lived experiences helped counselors remain in the field. Several emerging themes would help support future generations of counselors working with clients in the field.

### **Summary and Findings**

The research findings supported the belief that positive life experiences help counselors remain in the field. Personal Trauma, Affecting Change, Intrinsic Motivation, Faith, Community Building, Theoretical Approach, and Enjoyable Activities were determined to be the significant themes described by participants in the study. Several research questions were addressed through this research study. Included below are the research questions and a brief description of how the researcher addressed each:

1. What positive lived experiences do state-licensed counselors working in the community share that support them in remaining in the field?

Participants in the research study described how they utilized their faith, intrinsic motivation, community building, theoretical orientation, and affecting change to support them in remaining in the field. Counselors working with clients described affecting change and

community building as positive experiences that supported them remaining in the field. The participants indicated that being able to witness the changes within clients supported them in remaining in the field. Supporting the local community and seeing the changes helped them know they were making effective change.

2. How do mental health counselors with seven or more years of experience describe the positive personal experiences that supported them in counseling?

Participants described their faith as a dominant factor in remaining in the field. Subjects based much of their success and career choices on their spiritual beliefs. Their faith helped to guide and support them in continuing their path in counseling. Enjoyable Activities was another theme that emerged from the positive experiences that supported counselors in remaining in the field. Participants stated the importance of including SC in their daily routines.

3. What supportive measures do mental health workers depend on when working in the field?

In terms of supportive measures, participant's responses focused on the themes of Faith, Theoretical Orientation, and SC in their responses. Faith was the supportive measure that many of the participants relied on during challenging times in their careers. Incorporating faith and spirituality into their lives supported them in seeing a reason to continue their careers. Relying heavily on their theoretical orientation increased counselors' SE when working with clients, identifying a theoretical approach, and using it with clients-supported counselors within the field. Self-care was a major theme identified by the participants when discussing supportive measures when counseling clients and using SC-supported counselors to remain in the field for an extended period.

## Discussion

The SET was a corroborating factor in counselors remaining in the field. Ng and Lucianetti (2016) believed in Bandura's theory that individuals make things happen through actions. The participants in the study played a significant role in their counseling careers. The subjects demonstrated greater SE for their careers when they felt they were making a change in people's lives. Participants were satisfied with their jobs and wanted to continue to work in counseling. The counselors felt as though they could cause change with clients.

SCSE was demonstrated when examining the responses of participants. Eller et al. (2018) defined SCSE as the ability of an individual to determine if they need to perform activities to support them in reducing stress. Engaging in healthy behaviors to reduce stress helps counselors remain in the field for an extended period. Many of the participants within the field stated that counselors entering the field would be able to serve clients better by ensuring they make time for themselves. Butts and Gutierrez (2018) noted that counselors with SC activities were more likely to continue to be effective and work with clients in the future. Many participants reported that SC was a daily activity that needed to be completed. Self-care supported participants in being more effective and knowledgeable about working with their clients.

The research study extends knowledge for future counselors entering the field. The major themes that emerged from the study demonstrated that counselors often rely on several positive experiences to ensure they remain in the field. Counselors can utilize the themes created through the study to determine what would be helpful for them when treating clients. Understanding how much of an effect these positive experiences have on counselors would offer support to those just entering the field.

## **Implications**

### ***Theoretical***

The positive experiences described within this study relate to the theories discussed at the onset of this paper. The research supported SCT, SE, and SCSE. The participants described the need for counselors within the field to have several positive experiences to ensure they are successful in the future. The themes discovered were as follows: Personal Trauma, Faith, Community Building, Theoretical Orientation, Intrinsic Motivation To Help Others, Ability To Affect Change, and Enjoyable Activities.

Past research regarding SE often focused on burnout and stress among counselors (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). Much research focused on stress, burnout, and JS. This study examined the positive experiences that supported counselors in remaining in the field. The more positive experiences counselors have affected their time working with clients in the field. SET, as outlined by Bandura (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016), stated that individuals should be able to increase their levels of SE by decreasing anxiety or fears. The research study supports that counselors who remained in the field could increase their levels of SE by participating in more positive experiences.

### ***Empirical***

The empirical implications of the study revealed several major themes after analyzing the data presented through the interviews and the surveys. Through qualitative content analysis (Moustakas, 1994), the major themes were determined by examining the critical statements made by participants. The thorough examination of each statement and grouping into categories supported the researcher's careful examination of the statements. The primary themes developed

were faith, Community Building, Theoretical Orientation, Intrinsic Motivation To Help Others, Personal Trauma, Ability To Affect Change, and Enjoyable Activities.

The major themes developed were taken from interviews and counselor perception survey answers provided by participants. Examining each statement and creating theme categories supported the counselors in ensuring that information from each subject was shared appropriately. Each theme described the positive experiences that supported counselors in remaining in the field. The statements chosen were chosen, placed under the category, and presented within the research study results.

### ***Practical***

Several practical implications resulted from the research study that was performed. Novice counselors will know those positive experiences that will support them in remaining in the field. Ensuring counselors are aware of the necessary tools to succeed will help them. Novice counselors can provide support to ensure they do not suffer from burnout early in their careers. Counselors can choose which experiences would help them when working with clients in the field.

Counselor education programs can benefit from the results of the research study. Counselor education programs will be able to educate future counselors regarding the need to have more positive experiences when working in the field. The ability to educate counselors about what is necessary to remain in the field will allow them to decide early on what experiences to have in the field. Recognizing a need for positive experiences will support counselors in understanding the role that they play in choosing what they would like to do in the future.

### *Christian Worldview*

Faith and spirituality profoundly affected the choices made by counselors working in the field. Faith was a major theme identified by subjects throughout the study. The reliance on faith and making choices that fit with one's own beliefs was significant for many counselors. Faith was something that many subjects relied on during times of transition and difficulties with their counseling career. Faith and spirituality were found to have a dramatic effect on individuals' choices in their career and personal lives. Incorporating faith as a part of one's career was found to be something that novice counselors should consider.

Faith and spirituality could be viewed as social support for clinicians. Participants viewed faith as helping them remain in the field. Fellow parishioners served as a source of support for participants. Huang et al. (2022) found high levels of social support among participants with greater levels of SCSE. Faith and spirituality served as a form of support for the participants in the study. They were more likely to depend on the support of others to cope with stressors they experienced when counseling others.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Several delimitations were used to support the study. The original research participant qualifications were changed due to the limited pool of participants. The researcher resubmitted information to the Internal Review Board to change the participant pool to include the following criteria: seven years of experience working in mental health, currently employed within the mental health field, being at least 18 years of age, and being a state-licensed mental health counselor. The modifications were made to ensure an adequate participant pool for the research study.

The researcher could not obtain written consent for two of the research participants during the study. The research participants provided verbal consent to participate in the study during the interview process. Two participants were excluded from the study due to an inability to verify their counselor licensure at the state level. Participants were informed regarding the exclusion of data.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should focus on the role of personal trauma in determining why counselors enter the field. The ability of counselors to take their trauma and use it to help others would be interesting to examine. The participants in the study noted that having lived through or seen family members live through trauma helped them remain in the field. Examining what motivated them to overcome their trauma would support future counselors. Novice counselors would understand the necessary tools to overcome adversity while pursuing their counseling dreams.

More research should examine the longevity of counselors working with clients. Future counselors would benefit from determining what counselors could do to remain in the field. Future studies should focus on what programs would benefit counselors in continuing their counseling. Examining programs to increase longevity would provide future counselors with the necessary support to continue working in the field.

Future research should focus on the effects of counselor education programs and educating clinicians on positive experiences. Understanding the impact of positive experiences and longevity would support future clinicians. Novice counselors would know and understand the importance of focusing on the positive aspects of counseling. Counselor education programs would help clinicians understand the effects of positive experiences when working with clients.

### **Summary**

The study focused on the positive experiences that supported counselors in remaining in the field. The major themes from the interviews with participants demonstrated that many positive experiences affect counselors' remaining in the field. Future counselors will understand the importance of positive experiences that will help them to remain in the field. Clinicians in training will be better prepared to cope with the stress and experiences when working as a counselor.

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**Appendix A**  
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 7, 2023

Melissa Kennedy  
Andrea Barbian-Shimberg

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-67 Counselors' Perceptions of Life Experiences Affecting  
Their Longevity in Counseling

Dear Melissa Kennedy, Andrea Barbian-Shimberg,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 104(d): Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the

subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by S46.1 1 1<sup>(a)(7)</sup>.

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard.

Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,  
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP

Administrative Chair

Research Ethics Office