

Fall 10-22-2018

My Personal Journey On The Way To Professionalism: An Analysis of Self

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My Personal Journey On The Way To Professionalism: An Analysis of Self

A Plan B Analysis of Self-Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

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In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Counseling

May 2019

Moorhead, Minnesota

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Introduction

Authenticity can be challenging. Allowing people to get to know you for who you are and where you come from seems like a daunting task at times. Even more daunting than that, can involve honesty with yourself. I've often wondered why I am the way I am and how my choices have led me to where I am, but it is never something that I have extensively explored. I think many times analyzing ourselves can be difficult because of past experiences, past choices, and fears of the what the future holds. I know that in order to become a better counselor and grow in my professional development, I must explore my own development in all areas of my life from early childhood until now.

In this analysis of self my personal background, personality assessments, interviews with people close to me, my theoretical orientation, the impact of this paper on myself, and my hopes for continued professional development in order to better know myself and continue to grow as a counselor are explored.

Background Information

Relationships

Immediate Family. There are many people in my life that have helped and shaped me into the person I am right now. I have family, friends, former supervisors, former friends, and many others along the way who have had a significant impact on my life, good and bad. My family, which consists of my dad Jeff, mom Lisa, older sister Andrea, and twin sister Kayla, have done their best to consistently support me emotionally, cognitively, physically, spiritually, socially, etc. My family, along with my experiences with my environment and others around me, has really played a part in my overall development. In many ways I think my development has been shaped by my sociocultural surroundings. According to Russian psychologist Vygotsky the

sociocultural perspective maintains that, “cognitive development is shaped by the sociocultural context in which it occurs and grows out of children’s interactions with members of their culture” (Sigelman & Rider, 45). My earliest memories of my family and environment occurred early in life. My family moved to Fargo for my dad’s new job when I was two-years-old. My mom and dad both worked hard to provide my sisters and I with plenty of food, clothes, toys, etc. However, growing up the environment of my house was always up and down, many times on-edge. My dad, according to himself and my mom, was extremely immature. He worked a lot and when he wasn’t working he was out with friends spending money that we didn’t have. It caused a lot of tension in our family and when he was home he wasn’t pleasant and there was a lot of fighting. I really disliked my dad growing up. I thought he was selfish, impatient, mean, cold, and unworthy of having a family. I loved my mom very much and felt sad for her a lot. I could see even at seven and eight-years-old that she was sad and she wasn’t being supported or loved.

My parents tried to cover up their problems by putting us in a lot of activities. Specifically I remember taking swimming lessons, playing soccer, basketball, volleyball, and track, going to summer camps, spending lots of time with extended family, etc. I really don’t have a lot of memories of the five of us being together and being happy. If we were together there was tension and fear. My parents decided to separate at the beginning of my third-grade year. My dad moved into an apartment about five minutes from our house. I hated the apartment and I hated visiting him. I remember my mom crying a lot that year and I would wake up in the middle of the night to find her sitting in the living room journaling. August of 2003, right before I started fourth-grade my dad moved back into our house. I was not happy. My parents did not try to explain or have any conversations with my sisters or myself. He moved back in and it was as if the past year had never happened. Back then I do not think I necessarily expected or

understood that they should've talked to us, but as I got older I remember being so mad at them for just expecting us to be okay with their choices. I saw a lot of fighting and a lot of crying in my first nine years of life and my parents never once asked me if I was okay, if I needed to talk about what I'd seen or heard, or if I wanted to talk to someone else about the situation. I remember their relationship slowly getting better in high school. My dad was still the same way he was ten years before, but my mom had given up on trying to change him. I was afraid of my dad and mad at my mom for never standing up for herself.

During high school I spent as much time with my friends and/or playing volleyball as I could. I got my driver's license at fourteen and my first real job at sixteen so I could be out of the house and away from the tension. My mom and dad had a few more intense arguments throughout the years. Usually ending in my mom leaving for a few days. She never stood up for herself and it really bothered me. Their relationship hit another rough spot the first week of my sophomore year in college. My mom called me, as I was five hours away, and said that she "couldn't do it anymore." She left Fargo and checked into a hotel in some small town in South Dakota. She asked for me to not tell my dad where she was. I was angry with her for that because I was the only one who knew where she was. My dad knew this because I was always the go-to person, always the person my mom confided in and so I was always in the middle. My mom lacked a lot of self-love and confidence. I think that was the reason for a lot of their issues. She eventually went home and they worked things out. How, I really don't know. They tried couples counseling once and my dad hated it. My mom went to individual counseling to improve her feelings about herself and I really think it helped her. Since that fight in 2013, it is like my parents have made a one hundred and eighty degree turn in their marriage. They support each other, they make time for each other, they listen to each other, and they routinely call each other

their “best friend.” When I see them together now I’m really happy, but more than that I’m just confused.

The first twenty-five years of their marriage was chaotic and painful for me. I remember wishing they would get a divorce so many times. Because I was away at school I did not see first-hand how they made the changes and how they worked through all of their issues. I am truly glad that they did, however, these past five years of happiness doesn’t make up for the first twenty-five. They both have apologized many times in recent years. They feel bad that we saw what we saw and heard what we heard. My mom says that the hardest part of her is knowing she never asked us if we were okay and they never sent us to counseling when we were young. I suppose I do harbor some resentment because of that. Their unstable marriage has affected me emotionally, mentally, developmentally, and socially.

Despite my parents’ marriage, my childhood was not horrible by any means. I do have a lot of wonderful memories with my sisters, cousins, grandparents, and friends. I just don’t have a lot of great memories that involve the five of us together. My parents told me they loved me every day, they gave me plenty of hugs, and they always told me they were proud of me. I always felt secure in the sense that they loved me and would take care of me. Now, I enjoy spending time with them. I watch them hold hands and go on their Wednesday night “date nights.” It makes me smile, but I still have the memories. I do not use the word trauma lightly, but if I were to pick out one experience in my life that was traumatic it was witnessing my parents first twenty years of marriage. While I try to forget, it is hard. My parents can be sitting on the couch having a small disagreement or arguing about something on the television. I immediately tense up and try to leave whatever room we’re all in together. They’re not even fighting, but it just gives me flashbacks. I try not to spend more than a couple of hours at a time

with them together, because I'm usually afraid something will go wrong. They haven't fought or been disrespectful to each other in almost five years, but it has been hard for me to separate their past from where they are now. My sisters and I don't talk about the past a lot. I think they try to forget too. While my parent's relationship has had a somewhat negative affect on me, I do have good relationships with them and my sisters individually.

Jeff. My dad and I are very similar but also very different. We are similar in the sense that we both love sports, we love being social, and we have the same sense of humor. I use to be very afraid of my dad. Not in the sense that he was violent, but he was very closed off emotionally. He had a lot of bad days at work and he would bring it home. He would slam doors, ignore my sisters, and me and just overall be very unpleasant. I just recently found out that he went to counseling on his own when I was in high school. I guess his boss was noticing his temper and said that if he didn't "get some help" he was going to fire him. I'm really glad his boss noticed because he's changed so much in the last eight years. He told me his counselor helped him realize a lot of his behaviors were negatively affecting the people around him and if he wanted to be a happier person he would have to make the necessary behavioral and cognitive changes.

In recent years, around the same time their marriage became stronger, my dad started working on his level of patience, his level of communication, and his level of openness. Unfortunately I think I possess some of his negative traits. I do not have patience for certain things and I'm generally a closed-off person. I do not like these qualities about myself but I think they are learned behaviors from my dad. We are different in the way we think about the world, politics, human rights, and racism. I strongly dislike that my dad is generally racist towards minorities and overall closed-minded about every country besides the United States. However, I

still love him and I still see his good qualities. He is a good listener and if I do feel like opening up about something I know he will be there. I enjoy watching any sport with him on television or in person, and he is probably the funniest person I know. I cannot say I don't resent his choices and behaviors from the past, because I still do at times. However, because he has grown so much I have to try to grow too and get past those bad memories of him. It is not easy, but today I can say that I love my dad and he is my friend. I am proud of his work ethic and proud of the time he's spent trying to improve himself and his relationship with my mom. He has taught me the importance of hard work, time management, respect, boundaries, financial responsibility, and honesty. I'm grateful that he has taught me so many things. However, I think that since starting the Counseling and Student Affairs program I've really realized how much I was affected by my dad's behaviors and my parent's marriage. I truly believe in the power of counseling and seeking help for the things we cannot deal with on our own. So I know I could benefit from talking to a counselor about these dynamics in my life; I just think I'm afraid to learn about myself more and open up about a situation that no longer exists. I guess my thought process has been, "why talk about it now because everything is fine now?" When I know without a doubt I could benefit from talking about it, I just don't want to at this time.

Lisa. My mom has been the most influential person in my life. She has constantly shown empathy, understanding, love, and compassion to everyone around her. She is kind and extremely thoughtful. From her, I've learned how to be a friend, how to keep friends, and how to treat others. I admire my mom a lot because she spent fifteen years working sixty hours a week to support our family and send my sisters and me to school. She is strong and in recent years has found her voice. I think my inability to be open has a lot to do with my mom. Because my dad walked all over her for many years I grew up watching her be timid and hold her tongue. She

never felt like what she had to say was important or worthy of being heard. That's how I feel sometimes, not all the time, but I'm generally a more quiet person unless I'm very comfortable with my surroundings. I learned that from my mom. I'm close with her in the sense that I can ask her anything, but I don't tell her everything. My older sister is very close with my mom and tells her every detail of her life. My twin sister is the opposite and keeps a lot hidden or lies a lot. I'm somewhere in the middle, I share with my mom but I don't feel the need to share everything.

My mom is not the greatest listener, which has caused some tension in our relationship. I sometimes feel that she resents me for the qualities I got from my dad. She can remember every detail that Andrea tells her but often says, "Oh what did you say" or "sorry I wasn't listening" to me. We've had this conversation before and she promises she does not do it on purpose, but subconsciously I think she does. During the concrete operational stage of Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory, children begin to have logic or operational thoughts (Sigelman & Rider, p. 42). I started to understand more around age ten, that my mom needed to work and she wasn't just working to be mean or not spend time with me, but that also didn't mean I still was not angry with her. It continued to be a hard concept for me to grasp as the years went on and even though I had those logical thoughts that I developed during the operational stage I often felt abandoned by her. The resentment I experienced started to take over in high school because she rarely made it to my volleyball matches and wasn't close with any of my friend's moms. It made me sad and I think I was embarrassed because my friend's moms were always around and mine was not. I realize now how hard my mom worked to help pay bills and keep a roof over my head. I regret having those feelings of resentment and I don't feel that way anymore. I think it had a lot to do with my development but also just my maturity level in middle school and high school.

The last area of importance regarding my relationship with my mom is her lack of confidence. Growing up she was very negative about her appearance and had negative body image. She was very mean to herself and would say how ugly or gross she looked in front of me. Those comments really stuck because I have the same body type as her. She is short and petite, but not conventionally thin. However, because I saw myself as being very similar to her, it brought my confidence down at an early age. My twin sister is five foot eight and naturally very thin. When I was younger I would hear her compliment my sister on her beauty and thin appearance. I know my mom never meant to put me down, but I always felt that by putting herself down she in turn was doing it to me as well. I've blamed her for my low self-esteem in the past. I realize now that I can only blame myself if for allowing myself to feel that way for so long. However, I do wish I felt empowered and proud of my appearance when I was younger and I attribute a lot of that to my mother's words. Today my mom and I have our ups and downs, like many mother-daughter relationships. I appreciate her kindness and how she's taught me to treat others how I want to be treated. While she's had her own struggles, I would be lost without her and I hope I can be as loving and nurturing to my children as she has been to me.

Siblings

Andrea. My sisters are two of my best friends. Andrea is a year and a half older than me. We are very different. She has always been a homebody and keeps a few close friends. I love being social and I love having a lot of friends. However, I think we are similar in the sense that we only have a few close friends who we consider "best" friends and whom we can confide in. She has struggled a lot with anxiety in her life and until recently I did not quite understand it. I resented her a lot in high school because she didn't get her driver's license until the summer after she graduated. She also did not get her first job until that summer. I drove her around a lot and

saw my parents give her money whenever she needed it. I often felt frustrated because I had my license, had a part time job, was involved in activities, and went to school. I thought she was just lazy. However, looking back I wish I had been nicer to her because I now understand how anxiety can negatively affect a person's life. She has worked on it and is taking medication, although inconsistently. She went to college and now has a full-time job as a preschool teacher, which she loves. Our relationship is a lot different now. She is very supportive of me, she is a good listener, and she is fun to be around. Something I really admire about her is her ability to forgive people. She's never held a grudge or been resentful of my parents the way I was, and she rarely stays mad at anyone. Through her I've learned that it is not always worth the time we waste being angry. She's taught me that it's okay to be angry but not for too long.

Andrea is also a very complex person. She has struggled with anxiety most of her life but does not believe mental health issues are real. She studied human development and family sciences at NDSU and completed several internships in the Fargo-Moorhead area aiding in mental health, but she typically believes people to be "dramatic." This topic is probably one of the hardest parts about our relationship because she does not support my choice to become a counselor and she constantly puts my efforts towards graduate down. This is an area of our relationship that I get frustrated by, but I'm not done exploring why she thinks this way.

Many people probably have different opinions on that, but I appreciate her willingness to let things go. Because we are so close in age it's interesting to see that while we went through many developmental stages at the same time, we had very different experiences. The relationship I have with Andrea is strong but could be stronger. I hope that as we continue to mature we can become better friends and more supportive of each other. My relationship with my twin sister Kayla has by far been the most difficult and challenging.

Kayla. When I tell people I have a twin most think it is “so cool” or super interesting. I find it to be a daily struggle and mentally exhausting. I can confidently say that the world probably could not find more opposite twins. Physically, we are fraternal, so fraternal that have been called liars by dozens of people over the course of our twenty-four years. We look nothing alike, we have little to no similar interests, we have always been in dissimilar stages socially and emotionally, and we see the world very differently. With that being said the love I have for Kayla is immeasurable. I would do anything for her and there’s nothing she could do to make those feelings change. However, her behaviors, attitudes, and choices over the years have caused significant tension in our relationship and in our family. She has little empathy for anyone, she does not take responsibility for her actions or words, and she does not understand the concept of friendship. When I was younger I just thought she was mean and I was embarrassed at school because of the way she treated me and other people. As I’ve grown I’ve realized she is not purposely mean, she just lacks overall social intelligence and basic social skills. As I’ve learned more about theories, like Erikson’s and Piaget’s, it makes me wonder what happened during the stages where our identities, social and cognitive, were being formed. We lived virtually the same lives for many years yet we are so different.

Growing up I had many friends, was invited to many parties, and overall got along with a lot of people. My sister was the opposite. She blamed her lack of friendship and lack of invites on her looks, usually saying that people were “just jealous” of her. My parents forced me to take her everywhere with me, handing me extra cash or making me feel guilty if I did not include her in my social plans. It started in elementary school and has never stopped. She did not go to a traditional four-year college with dorms so she never got the full “college experience.” She went to school online and did not have the access to making a lot social connections. Therefore she

visited me at college a lot and I invited her into my world of friends. I have friends that like her, friends that tolerate her, and friends that hate her. It is a very difficult dynamic. She has also had much more trauma in her life than I have. She was sexually assaulted when she was nineteen by her abusive boyfriend's friends and is currently in another extremely abusive, domestically violent relationship. She has tried for the past six months to get away from him but always goes back. It has caused a significant amount of stress for my parents and myself. We interact with the West Fargo police department on a weekly basis because she always needs our/their help. This situation has been going on for about a year. At first my parents were angry and did not understand why she cannot leave him. I took them to the Rape and Abuse Crisis Center so they could speak to an advocate and be educated on abusive relationships. Although they understand more now, it has not gotten easier. We are not at the point of alienating her because we know that is what he wants. However, it is difficult to be around her because she is so unhappy, unpleasant, and unresponsive.

My parents come to me because they think I'm educated in this area, when in reality I've taken the trauma class and that's about it. It's hard to try and explain why her abuser is the way he is and why Kayla does not leave him. My parents have asked me dozens of times, "why did she turn out this way, we didn't raise you girls to be like this." That is hard to hear. Because they did raise us well. We were never around violence, crime, drugs, alcohol, physical abuse, etc. And unfortunately that is everything Kayla's current relationship consists of. It has put an unbearable strain on my relationship with her. As I go through this counseling program I am learning to be open, understanding, nonjudgmental, encouraging, and objective with my clients. I never thought it would be so hard to be all of those things for my sister. I want shake her and just scream at her to leave, to get counseling, to learn to love herself, to learn to be independent. However, I know

that would be detrimental to her current mental health state. So I avoid her, I don't see her often, and I don't speak to her often. I know this is what her abuser wants and I'm letting him win by being closed off to her. However, she constantly says she knows she needs to change but never seeks out help. I have gotten to the point where her behaviors are becoming toxic to my mental and physical health. I have trouble sleeping and concentrating, which has been hard with school and work.

My sister had a lot of self-esteem and mental health problems before she was assaulted in college. However, it has only gotten worse in the past five years. I worry about her every day, but currently am lost on how to help her anymore. I attribute a lot of it to my parent's unpredictable marriage when we were younger, but Kayla never likes to talk about that subject. I am not proud of how I view my sister, but I cannot ignore the way she treats my family and me. She is not a kind person, she is not an empathetic person, and she is not an honest person. Those are three qualities that I always look for in a friend. She is my sister so I will never abandon her, but where our lives are currently, I cannot continue to support her behaviors, words, and choices. I've learned a lot about myself through this experience with Kayla and I've learned to control my thoughts and behaviors more because of it. I always wanted my sister to love herself more and realize that she has a lot of good qualities. I have told countless times that she is smart, funny, helpful, and resourceful. But when someone does not see those qualities in themselves, they most likely will never believe anyone else. I remember asking Kayla in high school if she wanted to see a counselor and she became very upset saying that her problems were not that bad. I think I chose the counseling field in part because I have never been able to help my sister. She is not the sole reason, but the more I go through this program and learn about myself the more I've realized she's had a large impact on my occupational decision. I realize now that I will truly never be able

to help her unless she wants to make the changes herself, and even then I can really only support her. I do have hope that things will get better soon. Statistics say that it takes a victim seven to thirteen times to leave their abuser and my sister has tried at least ten times that I can think of (Martin & Nguyen, 2017). I know my sister will get through this difficult time and I'll be there for her every step of the way, it is just difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Seeing my sister go through bad relationship after bad relationship to where she is now has instilled a lot of fear in me in regards to my own intimate relationships.

Intimate Relationships. As I've stated before I don't easily open up to people and although I love being around others, I have to feel very comfortable before sharing my thoughts, feelings, etc. Watching my sister be involved with some disgusting and horrible men has had a large impact on my ability and willingness to be in an intimate relationship. I do not blame her; I have never felt that she is the reason for lack of relationships. However, I'm afraid that she chooses her relationships because she saw my parent's marriage growing up. Because I saw the same thing, I have this irrational fear that I will end up choosing similar men as her. I say irrational because deep down I do not think that I would chose similar people. I have a decent amount of self-confidence, self-love, and I feel worthy of being in a relationship with a good person.

However, I have never let my guard down with anyone long enough to make a relationship work. It does not necessarily make me sad that I have been single for the majority of my adult life. I have a busy life and I fill my time with people and things that are important to me. It would be nice to have someone in my life the way I see my friends have their significant others, but I am by no means devastated with my current status. In relation to stage five of Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory, identity vs. confusion, I think I had difficulty figuring out my

sense of self (Sigelman & Rider, p. 34). My twin sister has always received a lot of attention, positive and negative, from men. When we were in middle school and high school she had many different boyfriends and too many admirers to count. I developed a negative way of thinking about myself in relation to men because I was never given the same attention I saw my sister receive every day. I think I struggled a lot to understand who I was becoming during this stage because I was always comparing myself to my sister. Even now when I have confidence in the kind of person I am and who I want to be I still struggle to find the confidence to date.

In high school I use to get easily embarrassed because I could not find a boy to date. When I went to college I was in a much larger environment and I found myself hanging out with and meeting new guys all the time with friends. There were a few guy friends that I went on dates with or hung out with just one-on-one, but somehow I always found something wrong with them in order to end the relationship before it really even started. Looking back I was definitely afraid, probably still am today. How can I love making new friends and be open and honest with them, but I cannot seem to let my guard down around someone I could see as a potential partner? I have thought a lot about this, and analyzed myself a lot. I've come to the conclusion, whether it is correct or incorrect, that I struggle from low confidence in this area of my life and I am afraid to end up like my parents. Because their marriage is the only consistent relationship I have witnessed throughout my life I'm scared to end up that way. I feel that I am a good communicator, good at compromising, and good at listening. These are three skills that neither of them were good at for the longest time, and it plagued their marriage. However, even though I'm confident I can communicate, compromise, and listening I know that is not all that relationships entail. I'm also fearful that the person I find won't be good at those things and that we'll have to put in a lot of work into the relationship to make it work. I understand that relationships are

work, continuous work every day to be together. However, I don't want my future relationship, my future marriage, to be as much work as my parent's has been. I know that as a future professional counselor it is not great to have such negative, skewed views of relationships or marriage in general. This probably needs that I need to further explore this area of my life and continue to work on changing my negative thoughts in order to be a better counselor for my clients.

While I've struggled for a long time to connect romantically to someone, I have never had trouble finding and keeping good friends. My friendships are the most important thing in the world to me, only after my parents and sisters. I've been lucky to have some friends for over a decade and new friends who've recently walked into my life. All of them are supportive and I feel lucky to know so many great people.

Friendships. Besides doing well academically, there has been nothing in life that I take more pride in than being a good friend. Since I was young I have always loved being around people, meeting new people, and spending quality time together. I think I used my friends as an outlet in middle school and high school because I did not like being at home. It was around this time that I realized how important having friends was to me. In a way, I knew I needed friends as an outlet from my home life, but also I loved being around people. At this time, similar to my struggles regarding my sense of self and intimate relationships, I was in Erikson's identity vs. role confusion stage trying to master the importance of my social identity (Sigelman & Rider, p. 32). I very much tried to fit in when first discovering my role as a friend, but early in high school I knew I was a good listener and I was thoughtful. I met my best friend, Alex, in first grade, although we've only been best friends since eighth grade and I met two more of my best friends, Kelli and Sierra, my junior year of high school. These three women have helped me through a lot

and I've been there for them as well. What I admire about them is their intelligence, humor, and kindness. These are my three longest friendships but I also met some amazing people in college.

Because I went to college five hours away from home I knew I would have to make new friends or I was not going to succeed. I met a lot of amazing people through my job as a resident assistant for two years and I've been friends with most of them ever since. Now that I am in Erikson's intimacy vs. isolation stage I know how important developing and maintaining my friendships can be. I am much more aware of myself than I was in middle school and high school and I believe I've developed the skills to have secure, lasting friendships (Sigelman & Rider, p. 33). My friends have always told me I'm a great listener. I get calls or video chats from several friends a week to catch up or debrief about a situation. I take pride in being the person that many of them call for an understanding ear or for some advice. When I told my friends I decided to apply to graduate school to become a counselor I received a lot of support. Although many of them are not familiar with the counseling field they felt confident that my qualities would translate into a successful counselor.

My parents always told my sisters and I "in order to have friends you need to be a friend." That phrase has always stuck with me. I am continuously trying to be the best friend that I can be. I would say I have about eight really close, best friends. I know each of them very well and it's interesting how different they all are from each other. I know which friends I need to talk to consistently, meaning at least once a week. I know which friends I can talk to every couple of weeks and I know which friends I can go a few weeks without having a long conversation with, but when we're together nothing changes. I think it is important to be genuinely interested in my friends' lives, their happy moments, their bad moments, and everything in between. I cannot expect to be heard and supported if I do not do that for them.

While there are many ethical standards within the counseling profession that involve boundaries, dual relationships, professionalism, etc., I think that there are many similarities between being a great friend and being a great counselor. I believe that I've worked hard over the years through my friendships to build some of the most essential counseling skills such as, being a good listener, being genuine, and being nonjudgmental. While my relationship with my friends is and always will be vastly different from the therapeutic relationships I build, I know that I can use some qualities to achieve success within both.

Academics. School has always been a priority for me. I have learned how to be organized, responsible, and dependable through my academic responsibilities over the years and those are three qualities that I am extremely proud to possess. I remember in my sixth-grade religion class I forgot to do the backside of a worksheet and I was devastated. I was fully capable of completing the worksheet but my lack of attention caused me to receive a zero. Since that day I've never missed an assignment and never turned in a late assignment. In high school I had two interests, English and Art. I loved to write and I loved to draw. I took the Advanced Placement English course my senior year and received college credit for it. Initially when I enrolled in Minnesota State University Mankato I signed up for graphic design classes with a marketing minor. I thought I could use my drawing abilities and writing abilities and combine them to produce great work. I quickly realized that I despised being instructed what art to produce and I was not super fond of constructive criticism pertaining to my drawings. I decided that although I loved to draw and paint, it was something I enjoyed doing for fun and as a hobby. I could not see myself producing art for other people and enjoying it. So, I switched my major to public relations because I still thought writing was a good option. However, I lacked a lot of the skills it takes to be in the PR and marketing world. I am not an aggressive person and I get anxious talking in

front of lots of people. I took an internship in the athletic department at MSU Mankato and for five months I started to understand what having daily anxiety felt like. I felt really lost during my junior year because I did not like public relations and I hated feeling anxious all the time regarding my assignments and internship.

One day towards the end of my junior year, I sat with my supervisor in residential life. He asked me what I thought my strengths were and I told him I was a good friend, a good listener, and good at understanding people's points of view. He asked me if I had ever thought about psychology, social work, or counseling. I honestly had not, because I had not been exposed to any of those careers in any aspect of my life. My supervisor encouraged me to research schools with counseling programs. I knew I could not switch my major again as I was just about to start my senior year. I found MSUM and at the time there were no specific undergraduate degree requirements pertaining to psychology, social work, etc. Without my supervisor, I would not be here. He encouraged me so much and helped me realize my strengths did not have to be something I could see on paper. I wish I could go back and change my academic path. I feel that I still lack a lot of basic psychology knowledge that many of my classmates have. However, I cannot go back so I try not to dwell on my past decisions. I am so happy and content with my choice to further my education in the Counseling and Student Affairs program. I feel like I really am using my strengths every day and I am excited to continue into internship in the fall. Graduate school has been a huge challenge for me though. I have always gotten good grades. I was very proud of myself for making the Dean's List every semester during undergrad. However, I was so nervous to start at MSUM for several reasons. I had no real background in psychology, helping professions, etc. I was afraid that everyone would be light years ahead of me and I would get lost in all class discussions and lectures. I tend to doubt myself a lot when it

comes to assignments. I reread papers a dozen times and I have extreme test anxiety. Luckily, our program is not heavily ridden with exams. I still struggle in class discussions. I have a fear of sounding stupid in front of professors and classmates, but I'm working on that. I plan to finish my master's with good grades, although I'm less focused on my GPA and more focused on what I'm learning. I could not say that about my undergraduate career. I currently have no plans to further my education with a doctorate degree. I will definitely be completing continuing education credits and maybe a certification for something in the future, but I think calling myself Dr. Richmond is not in the cards at this time.

Career/Work. My path to choosing counseling as a career has been quite a journey. I've had several influential mentors and supervisors that helped lead me to realizing my talents in order to choose this path. My dad taught me a lot of things. He taught me how to play sports, the importance of being physically strong, and that you should never let anyone see you cry. Those lessons sound cliché but my dad was very old school when it came to having feelings and being emotional. So when I was younger I measured my abilities and strengths by what I could see myself do or what had a positive physical result. I never considered being a good friend, a good listener, or empathetic to be talents. However, my time spent as an RA taught me that all of those are skills.

My supervisor, John, had such a huge impact on my life. He encouraged me to be proud of myself for having those skills and use them as best I could. John and my other supervisor Matt really introduced me to the world of helping professionals. I decided I was interested in counseling my junior year and I do not regret my decision. I feel confident in my abilities to be an understanding, empathetic, and ethical counselors. While I get nervous at times, I have no feelings of anxiety as I did while learning to become public relations professional. I changed so

much during my time as an RA and I was able to learn so much about who I wanted to be and what I wanted to do. I spent countless hours with students, being a resource, listening, and dealing with conflicts, among many other things. I saw students try to navigate their first years of college while dealing with death, divorce, breakups, and other terrible stressors of life. Many of them reached out for guidance and I was able to refer a lot of them to the counseling services on campus. College is such a transformational process and I think being there as a support and/or guide can help a lot of students to better succeed. After my two years working in residential life I decided that working with college students was something that I really enjoyed. At first when I found MSUM's program I was excited about the Student Affairs emphasis. However, my RA supervisors encouraged me to explore the counseling track and after my first semester in the program I realized that the clinical mental health track was a much better fit.

After graduation I would love to work in a college setting. However, I think I would also enjoy working in an agency with young adults or the adult population in general. Recently I've been interested in learning more about disorders pertaining to body image such as body dysmorphic disorder and eating disorders. This could be an area that I want to specialize in someday. I have had my own struggles with confidence and love regarding my physical appearance and I know millions of people suffer every day from similar negative thoughts. I also thought I was interested in working with victims of domestic violence; this was an area I took interest in early in the program. However, after seeing my sister go through such a difficult relationship I do not think I could do it. Her abuser has taken such a toll on her but also my parents, my older sister and me that I'm not sure I could help others without having flashbacks and horrible memories. I hope the family counseling we are doing can help me to overcome all of the stress I've experienced because of him, but for now I have no interest in domestic violence

counseling. Other than that area I am really open to learning and trying anything. I think being certified in TF-CBT and EMDR would be extremely interesting and beneficial. I guess I do not have any set plans after graduation, which is stressful but also exciting. I am going to be on the lookout for conferences and trainings often, but for right I want to focus on gaining as much from my internship and my remaining classes in the program.

Mental Health. My family's history of mental health is very unknown. I have heard stories about my great grandparents being abusive towards my grandpa, but my grandpa is a very kind and hardworking man. At least that is the side I've always known. Mental health has never been discussed within my immediate family, until recently with my sister's current personal life. Something that I've struggled with but tried to accept is my dad's view of mental health. He believes that counseling can be helpful to people, but he does not believe in mental health disorders. His beliefs that "you can't see it so it's not there" use to take a toll on me. However, I cannot change him or his thoughts so instead of dwelling on it I've tried to move past it.

My mom has been honest about her struggles with confidence and body image, but she has never sought help for any of it. My family is currently going to family counseling. This is very recent. My sister has never been interested in receiving help but my mom suggested we all go as a family first to make her more comfortable. The first few sessions have been alright. I was frustrated and honestly not excited about going. Not because I do not believe in the power of family counseling, but because my sister has always expressed her dislike and disinterest in receiving counseling services. So, in my mind I originally felt it would be a waste of time because she needed the help and did not want it. However, I was very wrong. It has been helpful for all of us. The sessions have not been solely focused on my sister and how her personal life has caused a lot of stress for our family, but about all of us and our approach to healthy

communication. My sister scheduled an individual appointment for herself after our first session together and I felt very relieved. I wish that my family had talked more openly about mental health in the past, but we are working towards improving that and hopefully moving forward.

Personally, I do not have a long mental health history. I've never struggled from more common disorders such as anxiety or depression. I would say that I've struggled with negative thoughts about my body image for many years, however, these thoughts have never been debilitating. I suppose that attending counseling for it at a younger age could have prevented the thoughts from happening for so long. However, I just have never felt that this issue was hindering my life. For example, I have anxiety about giving presentations or talking in front of a large group. While it is anxiety, it is not obstructing my life constantly. I compare that anxiety to my negative thoughts about body image because the thoughts are not constant and they do not keep me from being social, trying to do things, or living my day-to-day life. Honestly, I do think that my negative views of myself physically have probably played a role in my intimate relationships or lack thereof. I did not piece these things together until recently. During my adolescence I focused a lot on what others around me looked like, as well as what I was hearing. I was developing the same body type as my mom and she openly talked negatively about herself and her body regularly. According to Sigelman and Rider, during adolescence, the physical changes that females make can be intensely scrutinized because of early, late, or abnormal development (p. 132). I definitely was my worst critic during these years but did not have a lot of positive reinforcement around me either. I think I need to be more honest with myself and realize that although none of my issues have been overly unbearable, I could definitely benefit from individual counseling of my own. I really have no explanation as to why I'm just coming to this realization, but admitting you need help is not easy.

I attended a few individual counseling sessions my junior year of college after a co-worker attempted to drug me. It was a very bizarre incident. The experience was difficult but not something I haven't been able to move past. I only attended a few, because I was feeling better after a few weeks. Also, the incident was not isolated; he assaulted several of my female co-workers and female residents in the building all in that same night. So we had each other and although it was a horrible experience, it was comforting to have people to confide in. The counselor helped me form some new coping skills in case I was feeling sad or anxious in the coming weeks. The experience with the counselor was pleasant, but because I only went a couple of times I don't have a lot of memories from the sessions.

The incident with my coworker made me reevaluate how I treated people. I could not understand why he targeted me. People told me not to feel bad because he targeted six other females, but I had negative thoughts about myself for a while. I replayed how I treated him in the months before, and the memories were not great. He was not a nice person and he was extremely difficult to work with so I did not go out of my way to interact with him. I ignored him on several occasions and if he spoke to me I was short with him. Did my actions warrant his attack? No, and I never thought they did. However, he obviously was going through a lot mentally and emotionally and I never took the time to ask. I was cold and unwelcoming towards him because I did not like his personality when I could have put my feelings aside and been much nicer. This experience really taught me to empathize with others. I just remember thinking, "Well if I would've just tried to understand him more..." I think if I tried just once to ask him why he was angry or why he seemed angry maybe he wouldn't have ended up in such a bad situation. I am not putting the blame on myself, but I know I could have treated him with a little more kindness and understanding.

Mental health is so important to me. I do think that I could benefit from individual counseling in regards to my parents old relationship and the dysfunctional relationship I have with my twin sister. I don't really know what is holding me back from going, but when I feel the time is right I will reach out.

Chemical Health. Substance abuse has never played a factor in my life or my immediate family's life. I am very thankful that even through my parents had quite of few rocky years together, neither of them turned to alcohol or drugs to cope with the stress and pain. I have had a few uncles deal with alcohol dependency over the years but they both eventually overcome the abuse. Fortunately, I was not raised around an excessive amount of alcohol and virtually no drugs. I became exposed to drugs and consistent alcohol use in high school. My high school was small and everyone knew everyone's business. However, I did not participate in the use of any chemicals at all in high school.

Looking back, I really am thankful for my friends. I can say with confidence that without them I probably would have experimented with something. I wasn't living in a happy home and I was extremely sad at times in middle school and high school. Having such responsible and dependable best friends who were not interested in drugs or alcohol helped me steer clear of them as well. I believe my moral development during this stage was motivated by not wanting to disappoint my parents. I stepped into the conventional reasoning stage and followed the rules that were made by the law and my parents (Sigelman & Rider, p. 370). My parents are also partially responsible for my lack of use because they were good parents and they did monitor what I did and where I was at most times. Similarly, I was decently afraid of disappointing them, making mistakes, and having consequences, so that's probably another large factor in my lack of experimentation and use. It wasn't until my freshman year of college that I tried alcohol for the

first time. I never drank consistently after that as I was an RA on campus my sophomore and junior year and I was fully aware of the repercussions for underage drinking. I had a lot of responsibility as an RA and I knew my parents would be extremely disappointed if I made a mistake involving alcohol or drugs.

For the majority of my first two and a half years in college I used alcohol sparingly. After my twenty-first birthday, I began to participate in alcohol use leisurely. It was very much a part of my social life during my senior year of college and even today I find myself engaging in alcohol use in social settings. I have had some nights where I was less responsible, but I in no way see my alcohol use as an issue in my life. I do not participate in any kind of drug use and I've never had any interest in experimenting in my adult life. I do not consistently use prescription drugs nor has anyone in my family. I am grateful that substance use has never been an issue in my life and that myself and the people around me are healthy in that sense.

Physical Health. My family has been extremely lucky in regards to physical health. I have some extended family members who have diabetes and a few have had cancer, but my immediate family has been very healthy. Because my dad has always been a huge sports fan, he enrolled me in sports early in my life. I swam, played soccer, basketball, volleyball, and ran track all throughout elementary school and middle school. Once in high school I decided I just wanted to play volleyball. Sports were a big part of my daily life for my first eighteen years. I was never thin and never have had a high metabolism, but because I was so active I did not worry a lot about my weight, until later high school. I tried to work hard and eat healthy while playing volleyball but I still never looked like my teammates and I remember that was hard. I was constantly comparing myself to them and I tried to eat less during my junior and senior year. I

never stopped eating or ate so little that I could not function, but it was not a healthy or smart decision. I also struggled in high school because I tore my MCL in both knees.

Ever since then I have had knee problems. I cannot run very well, although I try, and I am in constant pain. During my undergraduate years I felt less pain because I was much less active. I rarely worked out and ate whatever I wanted; it was probably the unhealthiest time in my life. However, after I moved back to Fargo in 2016 I wanted to make a change and feel healthy again. I realized quickly that I could not realistically go back to my early high school size and weight, as I was barely a teenager, so I've been setting short realistic goals. I've lost thirty pounds in two years and I try to work out four times a week. By no means am I an expert, but I try to eat healthy and not restrict myself. I do have fear about gaining weight again so I sometimes get preoccupied with calories and the scale. However, while I know it is unhealthy to fixate too much on numbers, I do not think it has hindered my ability to complete daily tasks or have confidence. I think that by creating short, attainable goals I have been able to keep going and see small improvements. Working out is not fun for me, I actually dislike it a lot, but I have found things that I do not dread getting up in the morning and completing. I have chosen to try and live a healthy life and enjoy things in moderation. I try to sleep seven hours a night, sometimes eight. I have found that if I sleep less than seven hours I struggle to function more and I am very tired throughout the day. Staying motivated to be healthy is hard, but it is one of my main priorities.

Culture. My cultural identity is important to me, but it's something that I'm still trying to understand. Growing up I thought that only people with different skin colors and from different countries could be "cultural." I had no concept of the differences between race and ethnicity and I thought that I was just "white." I identify as a Caucasian heterosexual female but I've struggled to identify past that. My parents and extended family do not have a lot of traditions. I do not

know a lot about my heritage, other than I'm German, Irish, and Scottish. Something that has always bothered me is my family's lack of pride in our family history. No one seems to know anything and doesn't care enough to research. My great-great grandparents moved to America in the late 1800s and that is about all I know. My dad looks down on a lot of minorities and a lot of cultures that are not "American." However, I think celebrating different holidays, religions, milestones, etc. is so interesting. Because my dad and a lot of extended family are closed off to other races, they see their traditions as negative. As a kid it made me sad to hear my family make hateful statements towards others because of their celebrations or ways of living. I always felt that my family was just jealous because we do not have traditions like other cultures. We have occasional reunions but no real traditions connected to our ethnicity.

Now I identify with a lot of the Midwestern American cultural norms. My family is generally polite to everyone, we celebrate the traditional holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, and we eat a lot of potatoes. We have barbeques and watch a lot of sports. We like to go to the lake and we love to complain about snow. Although my culture looks a lot different from what I thought being "cultural" was I love where I've grown up and I love my family. While I wish we knew more about our ethnic background, I am lucky to have close relationships with a lot of my extended family members. In the future I'd like to take the time to learn more about where my family originated, but for now I know I should just appreciate having a family that has a few fun traditions.

Privilege in ethnicity, sexuality, and disability. When it comes to my ethnic background, sexuality, and disability status I am very privileged. I have never struggled with telling my parents about a date I have or a guy I am interested in. I have also never experienced any sort of discrimination based on the color of my skin. Privilege was not a topic talked about

when I was growing up. In fact, the first time I truly understand what having privilege meant was my freshman year of college. I do understand that I was born with the ability to do certain things and go certain places with no judgment. Now that I'm older I also understand that I cannot apologize for being a straight, white female, but I can do my best to make sure that people who are different from me do not feel judged, ostracized, or hated. It was difficult to see the world outside of my predominately white, catholic community when I was younger. It was also difficult because my dad is very close-minded and believes life is "all about choices." He tried to instill in me that no one is privileged; everyone makes choices to be where they are in life. However, I did my best while in undergrad to open my mind to new people and new things. I made so many friends from different places and I learned a lot about my residents from different countries when I was an RA. I also became friends with many people who are a part of the LGBTQ community, which was very new to me as I went to a private catholic school from kindergarten to twelfth grade. I am so glad I moved away for college. It allowed me to be influenced by a lot of people that were very different from me. If I had not moved from Fargo I do not know where I would be or who I would be. I'm afraid I would still think the same way I did in high school, which was similar to my dad. I know I would not be pursuing a degree in counseling if it were not for all of the diverse people I met in Mankato.

I am also extremely fortunate to not have any physical or mental disabilities. Because I went to a privately funded school, there were things I was not exposed to until college. For example, my elementary school, middle school, and high school were all a part of the same Catholic school network. We did not have any special education programs and our school was not the most handicap accessible. So, if a student with a disability wanted to go there, it would've been difficult. I realized what a privilege it was to not have a disability when I went to

college. There were many students with wheelchairs and some with service dogs. I remember at the beginning of each semester professors would ask anyone with a disability who needed extra time or notes taken for them, to contact the professor and someone would assist them. This was the first time I was really exposed to people helping others with disabilities. I was never unaware that there are people with physical and mental disabilities. However, I overlooked them because they were not a part of my world. Privilege is a concept that many do not understand, and while I fully understand my privilege, I know I could do so much more to advocate for people who have less than me.

Religion. The only organized religion I have ever known is Catholicism. All of my extended family on both sides are Catholic. I grew up in a very Catholic environment, although I would say that my parents, as long as I've been alive, have never been strict Catholics. I went through all of the normal Catholic sacraments of baptism, reconciliation, confirmation, etc. My family also attended church every weekend. I went to mass at least twice, sometimes three times a week during school and had religion class every day.

God was a huge part of my daily life growing up. However, my views started to change early in high school. I had very strict teachers who preached things that were never directly said in the bible. I remember one experience my tenth grade religion teacher pounded her fist on her desk and yelled "if you are not Catholic you will never make it into heaven, you will be stuck in purgatory." That statement was the catalyst in my decision to not practice Catholicism anymore. I still went through the motions at school and occasionally went to mass with my mom, but I decided I didn't want to be a part of a religion that was judgmental and exclusive. I realize that not all Catholics believe what some of my teachers preached, however I do not agree with many of the beliefs of the religion as a whole. Currently, I do not belong to any denomination, but I

would consider myself spiritual. I regularly pray and talk to God. I would really like to join a non-denominational congregation, but haven't found one yet. Catholicism was such a huge part of my life for so long that I think I stopped being religious all together because I needed a break. Now I still believe in God and I still want to have a relationship with religion, I just need to do a little more research first.

In regards to religion and the counseling profession, I know I need to do more research about different religions in general. If I can have some background information about a variety of religions, I will probably be able to relate to my clients more and ask more intentional and meaningful questions. I think it's always better to just be honest and ask questions rather than pretend to know or skip over the conversation entirely, if it is something important to the client.

Coping, stress management, and hobbies. I've always been a worrier and an over thinker. I worry about the littlest things, when nine times out of ten things usually work out. In times of high stress I am lucky to have my parents and my friends. Whenever I am stressed my dad is able to talk through things rationally with me to calm down. My friends are there to celebrate or debrief after long weeks, big events, and stressful days. When I get stressed I like to plan and organize how I am going to accomplish whatever is causing the stress. I use a daily planner and I like to plan things by time. I also like to take breaks. I recently realized that sitting in front of my computer or a textbook for hours a time really hinders my productivity. So now I take breaks when working on homework and projects. It helps me clear my mind and reenergize to finish the tasks. For self-care I have found that exercise is my way of reenergizing. I also really love spending time with friends.

Because many of my friends live in different states, I find myself taking road trips every few months to refresh, clear my head, and spend quality time together. I also love to watch

sports, this is usually a coping strategy that I do with my dad. We love to watch football, basketball, and hockey together. If I've had a long day I know I can unwind by sitting with him and talking about whatever game is on that night. I also have unhealthy ways of dealing with stress. Many times I do not want to burden my friends or family so I won't communicate why I am stressed. This usually leads to me feeling frustrated and sad. I often think my stressors or problems are insignificant so I try to deal with them on my own. I also have very high expectations for myself academically and professionally. I am constantly comparing my work to others and it can be very harmful to my mental state. I think my current coping strategies are working well. I do, however, need to improve on remembering that I am not a burden and I have good people in my life who would be happy to listen when I am feeling overwhelmed. Many of my positive coping strategies are my hobbies. I also love to watch movies, spend time with my sisters, and listen to music.

One hobby that I use to do regularly but have not in years is draw. I loved art when I was younger. My parents have kept over fifty sketchbooks that I filled with drawings and paintings. I would draw as an outlet at home when I did not want to be around my family, and I would draw when I was bored or feeling sad. Now I say I have no time for drawing, but really I just think I associate it as a hobby I did during a dark time in my life. I haven't drawn in over five years and in those five years my parent's relationship and my relationship with them, the two biggest stressors in my childhood and adolescence, has greatly improved. I wish I could use drawing as an outlet now, but when I get home at night I usually just want to crawl into bed. It is definitely a hobby I want to do when I am out of school and maybe have more free time. Realistically when I am married have a family I won't have a lot of free time. However, I hope that as I grow into a later stage of life, like Erikson's generativity vs. stagnation and into integrity vs. despair, I can

come to terms with and accept my older age and find things, like drawing and painting, to fulfill my time (Sigelman & Rider, 33). Having a hobby is an important part of self-care. I feel lucky to have people to spend my time with and interests to keep me healthy.

It is important for me to continue to keep my healthy coping and stress management strategies, as I become a professional counselor. I think that there will be a lot of stressful days in my future profession and I cannot forget to take care of myself. I have learned a lot about the importance of self-care over the past few years, especially since my time in the program. I've realized that there really is no way I can be a successful counselor, friend, daughter, sister, etc. without making time for myself a few times a week. I like to have a routine, when I have one I feel the most at ease. Eventually, when I land my first job out of school I hope to have a good routine and balance between work and my personal life so that I can focus on my future clients but also on my mental, physical, and emotional well being.

Strengths. Recognizing my own strengths has taken several years. When I was younger I measured my strengths by my athletic ability and appearance. Because I lacked confidence in both of those areas, I never thought I had any strengths as I measured by only what could be seen. Now I think very differently. I believe I am kind, hardworking, empathetic, reliable, organized, positive, approachable, and understanding. I consider these all to be strengths of mine because I know I who I am and I know how I treat others. I also consider them to be strengths because all of these characteristics can help me professionally. I have learned to think of strengths as the qualities and characteristics that I like about myself. Also, I think strengths can be measured in how they affect other people. My friends have always told me I am a great listener and I'm very approachable. Even though neither of those strengths can garner a material result, they are both qualities that can help others. It is not easy identifying my own strengths, as

I do not like talking about myself or feeling overly confident. Which is kind of ironic as I'm writing this paper entirely about myself. However, it has always been easier to point out flaws and weaknesses. I attribute that to my lack of or low level of confidence. If I thought rationally about my strengths for a few minutes I would say that I am a great friend, student, daughter, and employee. I know I can easily make friends and I've never had problems finding or keeping a job. While school has never been easy, I'm good at time management, organization, and being dedicated to my classes. I sometimes forget that I am confident in my abilities to do well in school, at work, and in most relationships. I would like to find the strength to be confident in my worthiness and physical appearance. I think that those are the two areas of my life where I really lack strength. But I am finding ways to improve those areas. I have been consistently working out for the past two years and I've taken an interest in learning to meditate to help me think clearly and relax. I want to help others recognize their own strengths. I found that during my practicum I would strive to point out and give a certain level of praise to my clients. Whether it was them being proactive about something, being vulnerable, or achieving a goal, I always try to recognize other's strengths. It feels good to be appreciated for doing something and I think even something as small as saying "that's a great strength to have" or "it's awesome that you're able to share that" is important for clients to hear sometimes. I think it's interesting that I can find strengths and great qualities within my friends, family, and clients but I struggle to do the same for myself. I feel like I'm not alone in that realization, as I think it is harder to be kind to yourself than to others.

However, I have grown a lot in the past six years and realize that it is okay to be proud of the good qualities about myself as long as I recognize that there are areas where I can always improve. I think that I can use a lot of my strengths as I develop into a professional counselor. I

also think that as the years go on I'll learn a lot more about myself and maybe even develop some other strengths that I do not possess right now. As a counselor-in-training I think it is important to realize that I have the ability to empower others but I should also try to do the same for myself.

Assessments

Growth is an important aspect in any professional setting. In order to become a better counselor, I must continue to change and adapt in situations. I've seen major growth within myself in the past year and a half in graduate school, but I've also seen personality changes since I started my collegiate career six years ago.

Gallup Strengths Finder

I had the privilege of taking the Gallup Clifton Strengths assessment in 2013 for my position in residential life. I had never heard of the assessment before, but I was eager to see if the test described the personality traits I thought I possessed. My top five strengths included empathy, arranger, adaptability, restorative, and woo. I felt that I really identified with each of my top five strengths. I was empathetic in the sense that I could build deep, emotional connections with people and I had the great ability to understand others. As an arranger, I enjoy managing tasks and being a part of a team. I knew I was adaptable because I could quickly change or respond to stressful situations while still remaining calm. I could also see aspects of the restorative strength within myself as I enjoyed working roles where I was able to solve problems, be a resource, and help with conflicts. Finally, while I did not necessarily see this as a strength I saw woo as a large part of my personality because I always want to win people over, to have them like me, and to be accepted. I saw these five strengths come out a lot during my undergrad years while working in residential life and I felt that the assessment was very accurate

to how I felt about myself. Fast-forward almost five years and I took the Strengths assessment again in 2017 for my position as a graduate assistant in the Office of Student Activities at MSUM. My results were very different and it took to a while to realize how much I had changed in those five years.

The results of my second assessment were positivity, achiever, include, woo, and developer. When I saw that empathy had been knocked out of my top five I was confused. I also felt embarrassed because I thought that as a student in a professional counseling program empathy should always be high on the list of personality strengths. Then I tried to think more rationally and I realized that I only received my top five out of the thirty-four strengths the assessment measures. So, empathy could have been my sixth strength or at least a top ten. I still identify as an empathetic person and really I think my empathy for others has only grown since starting the counseling program. I also realize that it takes a lot more than just empathy to be a good counselor. I know empathy is a strength that some helping professionals do not strongly identify with, however, they are still able to do their jobs well.

My number one strength this time was positivity. I did not agree with that right away because I do not see myself as a super outgoing, loud, energetic person. However, I've noticed a lot that I also try to see the good. When a friend or classmates is venting about something I listen and understand, but I always try to find something good about the situation. In relation to my own life, there has been a lot of stress and sadness in my family this past year. I've realized though, that I am the type of person to always say, "It could be worse." Not to downplay my family's feelings, but the stress and hardships that have happened did not result in the loss of our home, or jobs, or death. We are still physically healthy and we have a place to sleep and food to eat. I do not like people to feel sorry for me and I do not like to share my burdens with others

very often. So, in a way I can see how positivity is my top strength, because there is so much to look forward to and so much to be thankful for that even the bad days can have good moments. I do identify with achiever because I am constantly striving to learn more and do well in school. However, I think achiever can also be a weakness at times because I stress myself out trying to get the best grades and make the best impressions at work and in school. I have never felt that I was overly talented at anything, so seeing achiever, as a top strength was a surprise. When I think of an achiever I think of someone who is extremely smart, wins a lot of awards, or gets a lot of recognition. I don't identify with any of those things. However, I think that graduating college and attending graduate school are my two largest achievements. In the future I'd like to achieve more in the counseling field, like different certificates and maybe even present at conferences. I think that being an achiever is a good fit for me because I always have goals that I want to reach.

Includer was my third strength result from the 2017 assessment. I felt that includer was appropriate for my top five, as I love to be around people, meet new people, and learn about people who are different from myself. My parents and a lot of my extended family are very conservative. I also grew up in a primarily Caucasian community and went to school with maybe two people that were not white. I did not learn to be inclusive growing up. Actually, I was surrounded by a lot of exclusivity and racism. I never thought that the words and phrases being thrown around at my school and at family gatherings were bad. However, as I moved away to college I went through a culture shock. My freshman roommate identified as African American and I lived in a residence hall that was full of people who did not look like me. I surprised myself though, because I was not scared to talk to anyone. In fact, I learned so much from so many different people that I realized there is no reason to not include everyone, at least until they give

you a valid reason not to. To me, there is no reason not to be inclusive. I at least like to get to know people for who they are before writing them off for a surface-level reason. My dad always tells me that I'm naïve and I'm going to "have a rude awakening" one day because I do not like to judge people. However, I think living life always bringing others down when you could just include and uplift them would make for a lot more happiness. I also think that having inclusion as a top strength goes well with counseling because it is my duty to be nonjudgmental with all of my clients.

Woo was in my not five again and I wish it wasn't. Woo, which stands for winning others over, again in my top five. I am not sure why, but I just feel like it has a negative connotation to it. On the Gallup website under woo it states: "You enjoy the challenge of meeting new people and getting them to like you.... there are new people to meet, new rooms to work, and once that connection is made you are quite happy to wrap it up and move on" (Gallup, 2017). To me, that seems cold and not genuine. I do not see meeting new people as a challenge to win, but as people that I could potentially build a friendship with. While I agree that I generally do always want people to like me, I do not go out of my way to win them over. Finally, the last strength in my top five is developer. When I read what developer meant I was confused. For example, "when you interact with others, your goal is to help them experience success" (Gallup, 2017). I slightly disagreed with this result when I first read about it because I was only thinking about it in relation to my personal life. When I'm with my friends and family I try to relax and have fun, not "challenge" them as the description for developer says (Gallup, 2017). However, I think developer goes perfectly with the counseling profession because I always want clients to be successful. Some clients will put in the work and find great success and others may need to be

challenged a little more, but I find that helping client help themselves to achieve whatever goals they have is extremely rewarding.

It was interesting to see such differences between my personality strengths in five years. I wish I could've seen the full report to know which areas I am lacking in that may need more attention and growth. Also, reading these reports with such in-depth explanations of personality traits is just really interesting in general. I've been able to read about traits that I see in my family, friends, and co-workers. I now notice positive strengths about the people who surround me and I enjoy seeing how different I am from people who I spend a lot of time with. Finally, I think that all of my strengths, if I use them correctly, have the ability to make a positive impact on my future clients.

Myers Briggs Type Indicator

Career counseling can be a useful resource for many people. Whether someone is struggling to find his or her passion, a solid career, or jumping back into the workforce after a few years, career counseling can be very beneficial. I never thought I would use a career counseling service because I've been fortunate to have mentors to help guide me. However, I found that during the career-counseling course in the M.S. in Counseling program, I learned a lot about myself through the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and the Strong Interest Inventory. Through the MBTI assessment I learned that I am an ESFP, which means extraversion, sensing, feeling, and perceiving. As an extrovert I enjoy getting energy from the out world of people, I sense by focusing on what is going on around me at the moment, I feel by making decisions primarily based on my values with consideration of person-centered concerns, and I perceive by being flexible and keeping my options open (Grutter & Hammer, 2018). When I first received the results I thought that identifying as an extrovert was a bit of a stretch. However, by reading

more about the energy of extroverts and how they enjoy interacting with others and recharging themselves, I agreed. Also, it was interesting to see that none of my results were scored heavily one way or the other. In fact, I scored below “medium” on extrovert and perceiving, which meant I was very close to being considered I and J or introversion and judging. I scored very evenly on both sides and at first I thought that was a bad thing.

After talking to Mr. Dubbels, our career-counseling instructor, he encouraged me to look at it as being flexible and open to many people, ideas, and information. I can see how ESFP would be useful personality traits as a counselor. While being extroverted is not necessary, it may help clients who are very nervous and unsure about the process. Sensing is a great trait, not just for counseling, but also for life because I am able to pay great attention to the present and remember important details about others and my surroundings. I think sensing is very true for me because I like to see how to use what I am learning; I guess I would categorize myself as a visual learner, so I really identified with the sensing personality trait. The trait I identified most with was feeling. Feeling people believe they can “make the best decisions by weighing what people care about and the points-of-view of persons involved in a situation” (The Myers Briggs Foundation, 2018). I am always concerned about the values and opinions of others when making decisions that will affect people. I guess this is also where my Gallup’s strength of Woo comes in because I like there to be harmony within groups, whether it is social or work.

Lastly, perceiving is a good trait to have because I am flexible and open to change. I think this works well in counseling because although I can have a plan or loose structure for a session, I have to be able to follow where the client wants it to go. I identify the least with perceiving because I do not think of myself as a spontaneous person. I am casual and very “go with the flow” but you’ll never see me hopping on a plane to a foreign country without months

of planning ahead of time. I really enjoyed learning about all of the personality types, not just my own. I can see how the MBTI would be very useful for students or adults looking for guidance in the workforce.

Strong Interest Inventory

The strong interest inventory was very informative with an overwhelming amount of information. The results gave me my highest two themes out of the six offered, which were artistic, social, enterprising, realistic, investigative, and conventional. I scored moderately high in artistic and social so my theme code is AS. I was not surprised that these two codes were my highest, as I like to be creative and I like to be around people. The results also gave me my top five occupational interest areas. Number one was athletics, two counseling and helping, three writing and mass communication, four human resources and training, and five visual arts and design. The results were exceptionally accurate. I love sports and during my undergrad I interned for the athletic department and was a sports writer for the campus newspaper. I majored in mass communication and also love to draw and paint. Essentially I was not surprised by the results. I was happy to see counseling as my second interest area, as I've put my heart and soul into this program for the past two years.

Although, these results should not define a person's career choice, it was nice to see that my personality and my interests match up to the career I've chosen. I also was not surprised that I showed very little interest in the conventional and investigative themes because I have zero interest in science, math, finance, information systems, etc. My top "Strong Occupation" according to the occupational scale was mental health counselor, followed by advertising account manager, community service director, photographer, and artist. This assessment also gave me insight into my personal style in relation to work. The results said that I likely prefer to

work with people, I probably prefer to learn by doing, prefer to lead by example, dislike taking risks, and enjoy participating in teams. I found that some of that information slightly contradicted my MBTI results, but for the most part was true. I think that it would have been so interesting to take this assessment as a freshman or sophomore during my undergrad because I was still unsure about my future occupational plans. It might have given me different results than I currently have, but I think it would have been extremely enlightening. I do not envision myself doing a lot of career counseling in the future but I would absolutely recommend seeking out a career-counseling center that has these assessments for students struggling with career choices or adults looking for a new career path.

Taking this assessment along with the MBTI gave me more reassurance in my choice to become a professional licensed counselor. I can see how far I have developed professionally from my first year in undergrad until now. I think that having a reliable assessment like this can give really anyone more confidence in their choices if they believe in the process, especially on the hard days. When I received my twenty-seven-page report including the MBTI and Strong results I was weirdly nervous. I told myself it really meant nothing because I had already decided what I wanted to do as a professional career. However, I was scared that the tests would show gravely different occupations and I would have to start all over again. Luckily, my choice to take on graduate school for mental health counseling was only reinforced and I'm grateful for the career counseling class and these assessment opportunities.

Overall I was extremely pleased with the results from all of my assessments because all of the information confirmed what I already knew about myself and some of it helped me to understand my personality and interests in a deeper way. I would encourage anyone who has the opportunity to take the Gallup Strengths Finder, MBTI, or Strong Interest Inventory to do so

because although it might not be totally new information, it can give in depth explanations to help you understand yourself more.

Interviews

As I've transitioned from high school to undergraduate school then to graduate school a lot of things have changed. A big change that I've been hoping to see within myself is my level of confidence. I have never been a confident person in a lot of areas of my life. I know I'm a good friend and I know I'm a good student but I lack confidence in a lot of other areas. I decided to interview some close family and friends about their thoughts in regards to my self-confidence and ability as a leader. I interviewed my dad, my sister Andrea, my friends Alex and Sierra, and my paternal grandpa, Keith. I asked them each the same six questions in regards to words they would use to describe me, leadership qualities they see within me, personality traits they see as strengths, where they see my level of self-confidence since graduating high school, and any changes they've seen within me since starting graduate school.

Jeff

For some reason I was a little nervous to interview my dad because although we are close, he is all about "tough love" and I figured he would tell me what I could improve on instead of what strengths I have and what level of confidence he sees in me. However, he surprised me and revealed that the first three words that come to mind when he thinks of me are feisty, caring, and fun. I appreciated his view on my confidence because he said, "well to me you're the most confident I've ever seen. I think if you scaled it I would say your level of confidence seems to be an 8/10 and five years ago I would not have said that." His opinion means so much to me because I want him to be proud. He did his best to teach me how to be kind, respectful, and responsible, but we never have had conversations about being confident. I

appreciated his views on my abilities to lead. He felt that I had the ability to be influential, but that I have always been too quiet or cared too much about what others think to truly lead. I really agreed with his words because I feel like I have the ability to be a leader, I just don't always have the strength to speak up.

Andrea

When I spoke to my sister Andrea, she gave a thoughtful response to my question; do you think I'm more of a leader or a follower? I appreciated her honesty and agreed when she said, "well I'd say you're a leader at times and at other times you're a follower. I think a lot of your friends look up to you and you look up to others." I think she nailed that on the head because I have a lot of diversity within my close friendships. When it comes to certain friendships I tend to be a little more reserved, maybe timid because I am not as outgoing as some of them. My sister also shared that she looked up to me in regards to my ability to be social and make friends. That is something that I was not aware of before, and that really made me feel good. In terms of my professional development I would also agree with her answer, as I am learning to speak up and be a leader in class discussions, but also am more reserved at times. I think I want to continue to learn to have a good balance in regards to my leadership in life.

Sierra

As I've noticed changes in my leadership style, I've also thought a lot about if I've noticed changes within myself since starting graduate school. When speaking with my best friend Sierra she shared, "as a person, I think you've always been inviting and accepting of others. But since starting school I've noticed you stand up for others and you voice your opinion more and I think you've just gained more confidence in yourself and in what you're learning." I would agree with Sierra's statement because I've learned a lot more about things in regards to

diversity, equal rights, domestic violence, and just overall advocating in general. I think I do feel more confident speaking on my opinions and speaking up for others because I have more knowledge. I'm not afraid to have an intellectual discussion or have a difference in opinion with the people around me because I'm more confident in what I know and in what I believe.

Alex

My best friend, Alex, who I have considered to be my best friend for the past fourteen years, had a lot of insight to my questions. She revealed that she has never seen me happier than I am right now and I think I would agree. She stated that in high school she would have described me as “shy, kind, and smart” but now would pick “compassionate, strong, and funny.” I really enjoyed hearing her perspective from almost a decade ago up to this point because it shows that I have changed and developed, but also that I have a great friend who has dedicated time to really getting to know me and grow with me. Alex also shared that she notices at times my level of low confidence in regards to my physical appearance and worthiness. However, she feels that I am “way too hard myself” and that I would not talk to my clients the way I talk to myself sometimes, which is very true.

Keith

Interviewing my grandpa was a bit of struggle, as he became very emotional talking about his views of me over the years. It was sweet to see, but also difficult because he views me in a much different light than I view myself. When I asked him to tell me the first three words that come to mind when he thinks of me he listed ten. When I asked him if he believes I am more of a leader or a follower he described me as a “great leader who is kind to everyone and has to ability to make a difference in anyone’s life.” As I interviewed him I felt that he was being honest, or honest in the way that he knows me. But also, I felt that since he is my grandpa and he

loves me so much, that he was not going to say anything to make me feel “bad”. I know that he believes everything he said is true, but also he does not know me in the same way that my friends do. To him, I’m the greatest granddaughter in the world, but I think most grandparents feel that way about their grandchildren. I appreciated my grandpa’s views a lot and I know he would not want me to be so hard on myself. It would be great if I could see the all of the positive qualities my grandpa sees in me, but that can be a challenging task.

As I asked the questions I revealed to my dad, my sister, and my two friends that I felt my confidence was low and I struggled with negative thoughts about myself a lot. It surprised me that they’re interpretations of my confidence level were so different from my own interpretation. Overall, they said that they viewed me a strong, confident, young woman who has accomplished a lot and although I do feel accomplished so far, I rarely see myself as strong and confident. If I had one goal for the rest of my time in graduate school it would be to change my negative self-talk into more positive self-talk and start trying to see what the people closest to me see.

My confidence and feelings of worthiness are currently a huge struggle for me personally and professionally and that is why I asked these specific questions to my interviewees. I wanted to know if they view me in a similar light as I view myself. As I’ve started my internship at NDSU I’ve found myself comparing my abilities and knowledge to some of the other interns from different programs. I realize that as I observe, learn, and practice more my confidence in my abilities, as a counselor will greatly increase. However, my main goal for my entire internship experience is to gain confidence. I know I will not leave know everything and being the best professional I can, as I’m only training. But I would like to leave feeling like I have improved and feeling like I can really help people. In regards to my feelings about myself, they

are still a work in progress. When I was done with my interviews for this paper I decided to answer the questions I asked my interviewees. The three words I would use to describe myself would be: understanding, dependable, and realistic. I would rate my current overall level of confidence at a 7/10 compared to my undergraduate self, which I would have given a 4/10. I would say that I am more of a leader in the sense that I am not easily influenced by others, at least until I do research and am able to form my own opinions. I think that I have seen several changes within myself since starting this program including my confidence in my academic abilities, my open-mindedness, my ability to be inclusive, and my ability to not be so afraid to try new things. I hope that I can only keep growing in these last nine months of my academic career and even more so as I start my professional career. For now, I want to focus on achieving my goal of being more kind to myself and focus on my good qualities.

Theoretical Orientation

It seems that even with the variety of classes I've taken and curriculum I've learned within this program, the professors have preached the same consistent statement. That statement is at the end of the day it really comes down to the therapeutic relationship you build with clients. Sometimes the techniques and interventions may not be working, or the client may not always be following through with homework, building new skills, trying to change, etc. However, if I can build and maintain a good, trusting, and professional relationship with my clients that will help me be more effective. I have connected with several counseling theories so far, but I do not necessarily think I have a specific orientation.

Person-Centered. According to Corey, "counseling is a personal matter that involves a personal relationship, and evidence indicates that honesty, sincerity, acceptance, understanding, and spontaneity are basic ingredients for successful outcomes" (p. 170). The level to which I

care for my clients, and show genuineness and understanding, is relative to the relationship and the success of the client. I understand that not all clients are going to respond well to building a relationship. Also, a lot of counseling is based on more behavioral interventions and more emphasis is placed on the effective use of techniques. However, I believe I am very person-centered. Person-centered therapy believes that the relationship is first and foremost, the most important part of the counseling process for success (Corey, p. 441). In fact, being genuine, warm, empathetic, respectful, and nonjudgmental are key components of practicing person-centered therapy. Most importantly, remembering to communicate those qualities to the client, so they are aware that I am there to assist and guide them to be happier, better, stronger, etc. I also feel like I identify strongly with person-centered because although it uses a few techniques, it stresses the importance of listening, reflecting feelings, being there for the client, and focusing on the experiences of the client (Corey, p. 443). I think that a lot of my strengths as a person relate to person-centered therapy. I find it very natural to be understanding and genuine and although it may not be right for all clients, it consists of using skills that I know I have. However, I know that solely using person-centered therapy is not going to be effective in my work with clients.

CBT. Cognitive behavioral therapy is a concept that I think I connect with because I really understand a lot of the techniques and I've been able to start practicing them in my work during practicum and now internship. I feel like I can confront faulty/negative beliefs, challenge thinking patterns, debate irrational beliefs, etc. while still being myself in a person-centered way. I find myself using CBT techniques often now at my internship, as I'm working with clients who are college students and there is a lot of general anxiety and depression within this population. I think that if I continue to work with the student population after I graduate this will be a common

intervention that I use. I don't feel extremely confident in practicing a lot of the techniques, but the more I read and research the more I understand them. I am hoping to gain confidence in this area through the rest of my internship.

Adlerian Therapy. Another theory that I feel I understand and connect somewhat with is Adlerian therapy. I often think about people's childhood experiences and how that has caused them to think, act, or develop a certain way. Adlerian theory stresses the importance of personality and how a person's early life events can influence their present behaviors (Corey, p. 98). A few major themes of this theory are choices and responsibility. These two concepts are also prominent themes in my life. I am a firm believer that life is a lot about our choices. I am aware that there are circumstances and events that are beyond our control, but it is how we choose to react that can make a real impact. I sometimes think that so many people want to blame others for whatever misfortune is happening to them, but we really are responsible for ourselves, at least in our adult lives. Adler focuses on the total person in Individual Psychology, and that we must be understood by all of our parts as a whole (Corey, p. 99). This really relates to my wonderings about why people are the way they are, but also what choices led them to where they are. I also really like that Adler focuses on the therapeutic relationship between counselor and client, while also focusing on setting client goals and working in a collaborative environment to achieve them. Although I'm not exactly sure what the entire process would look like using Adlerian therapy, I am very interested in learning more about the techniques and how to help clients be successful through this process.

Making the decision for my theoretical orientation has been a long, stressful process. I still am unsure as to which theory fits me best. I know that being person-centered is at the root of counseling in general and if I solely focus on that, I won't be super successful with my clients. I

think that when I finally understand my theoretical orientation it will be a combination of several theories. Being person-centered is very natural to me, but I really like the concepts of CBT and Adler. While I know I must be able to use a variety of theories and techniques, I think that being person-centered will always come first for me. As I continue to develop as a professional counselor, I hope that I can become more confident in using different techniques and in knowing my theoretical orientation.

Impact of Analysis of Self

Being healthy in all aspects of life is no easy task. There are so many factors that contribute to someone's emotional, mental, physical, environmental, social, and spiritual health. Through writing this analysis of self I've learned that I'm healthy in certain areas and unhealthy in others. As someone who is working to become a mental health professional I think I must continue to always work on my health. While helping professionals have every right to struggle and seek treatments, for myself it is important to be conscious and truthful with myself about my own struggles. I do not think I can be a successful counselor to others if I cannot seek out help for myself. There is no doubt that since starting this project and the overall M.S. in Counseling program, that I understand my mental and emotional health on a much higher level. In writing this I decided to be as honest as possible, obviously for the quality of the project but also really for myself. While creating the background sections I was able to write a lot of my family and the dynamics that have both positively and negatively affected my development and views on life. This is an area that is very personal to me and I have not shared a lot about my parent's relationship or my relationship with my sister to very many people.

While writing I felt relieved because I was able to read it over a few times. The more I read it the more I realized that I'm doing okay, things in life could be worse and I've accepted

that now if I feel overwhelmed with these issues in my life I'm the only one who can start to fix it by seeking out my own help and own individual counseling. While I've had a few counseling experiences, I have there are some more prominent issues from my past that have not been addressed that I believe still affect me today. There is no real reason, other than I haven't felt the need to discuss it, however, I do that I could be a better counselor for my clients if I had the individual experience that they will go through. I've also had a lot of time to think about and process what my character strengths are, while writing this. I think that I was able to analyze a lot my good qualities and see that they can all benefit me as a future professional counselor. The biggest lesson I learned from this experience is that I have to be honest with myself in order to help others.

While my experiences aren't rare, they are my own and if I find they are negatively affecting me in a way that is transferring to my clients I must take action immediately. So many people come from separated or broken homes, many have experienced the pain of domestic abuse, and there are people struggling every day with negative body image. While these areas of my life still have an impact on me, I need to work hard as a counselor so that my experiences do not have a negative impact on my clients. I need to be very aware of my feelings and emotions if I encounter a client with an issue similar to my life, especially if I have still not sought out my own individual counseling. The last thing I would want for my relationship with clients would be countertransference. I had an experience during my practicum at the Community Outreach Center this past spring semester, where my client's sister was in a very similar situation as my own sister. I did my absolute best to stay professional and after the initial session I sought out advice from my supervisor, Dr. Akgul, on how to deal with my feelings in future sessions. When I first started the M.S. in Counseling program I had a fear that because I really enjoy

meeting new people and making friends, boundaries would be hard for me in relation to therapeutic relationships. The more I've learned and the experiences I've had in practicum have showed me that I am strong and I am perfectly capable of being a very professional and ethically sound counselor. However, I know I will encounter those clients that remind me of myself or my family and when that happens I'll have to take a step back, acknowledge what I'm feeling, and seek out supervision. I have fears and a little anxiety about those future encounters but I don't think it's anything I won't be able to overcome.

This process was enlightening and challenging. I had a few people, friends and classmates ask me about my experience writing this analysis of self. Every time I answered them I described it as difficult but worth the hours, stress, and memories. I feel like I know myself better after finishing this project. I also really think I can recognize my emotions and regulate them in a more productive way. While talking about myself is not something I enjoy, I realize that this experience was extremely positive. I would recommend this Plan B project to anyone in the program looking to explore their own emotional, mental, and physical health.

Continued Professional Development

When I started to research counseling as a professional career I realized quickly that the two years of graduate school were just the beginning. I am fully prepared to continue my education by keeping up with any new required classes or certifications. I also am going to try my best to obtain a job where I can complete my two thousand hours for licensure as soon as I graduate. I would like to be able to have the title of licensed professional counselor as soon as possible. While taking classes within the M.S. in Counsel program I have been learning a lot in a small amount of time about a lot of different areas in counseling. I am currently very interested in eating disorders, body image, and domestic violence. However, I also want to become

certified in specific interventions. I have an interest in TF-CBT, but I know that is a very child-centered approach and I do not have all of plans to work with children. I also have an interest in EMDR. A supervisor at my internship site is certified in EMDR and is willing to answer questions and let me observe if I want. It's a great opportunity that I am going to take advantage of at some point.

As my time in the program comes to an end I want to continue to be open-minded as I can while I start job searching. I want to learn as much as I can and be open to different agencies and other places that employ counseling professionals. I do not have a specific goal for a first job but I do want to attend as many conferences and workshops as possible. The ACA conference would be a great national conference to attend in the next few years, as well as local state conferences. I hope that I can work somewhere that supports my continuing education credits and just learning in general because I know some conferences and workshops can be expensive. I see some of my classmates are already very passionate about working in certain areas of counseling or with certain populations. I know I like working with young adults and college students because I have in the past and it's a population I work well with. I would be very comfortable working in a college or university setting. However, as I've been thinking about graduation and job searching I really want to see what else is out there and what areas I have a passion for. It really is amazing how much can change in a few short years. Three years ago I was unhappy with my choice of undergraduate major and now I have eight months until I graduate with my master's and continue to work towards becoming a licensed professional counselor. I think I've always known I wanted to work somewhere where I could be a resource, a guide, and a helping hand. While I still have a few obstacles to get through before I become an

LPC, I'm confident I made the right choice and I will continue to put in the work to become the best counselor I can be.

Conclusion

Analyzing my life and myself for this paper was not easy, in fact at times I hated it. Writing the background information about my family, my health, and who I think I am made me uncomfortable, and at times emotional. Every time I read through it I feel like I could say more, maybe not for the benefit of the paper, but for me. Although difficult, this process was so enlightening. I truly feel that I know myself better than I did four months ago when I started. I feel more confident in my personal strengths and I have more insight into issues in my life that I need to work on or resolve. Being open and honest in my writings has allowed me to understand what I want out of my career as a counselor and what I still need to do to become the best professional I can be.

An overarching theme I found throughout this analysis of self was confidence. I talked a lot of my level and lack of confidence in several areas of my life. I was able to process my thoughts on the good qualities and skills I have to increase my feelings of confidence, and I was able to determine the areas of my life that I need to work on in relation to my level of confidence. I think that it will be very hard for me to be a successful professional counselor if I am not more confident in my abilities and myself. I've always struggled with comparing myself to others and feeling inadequate. However, because I've been able to analyze where I need to improve my confidence I can really only rely on the choices I make and myself from now on to develop it more. I need to be proactive in developing stronger feelings of confidence within myself so I can become a better person, and a better counselor. I hope that as my time in this

program comes to an end I am more confident and willing to grow in my professional development.

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