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## Understanding Myself as a Counselor & Individual

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Understanding Myself as a Counselor & Individual

Jacob Johnson

Minnesota State University Moorhead

### Acknowledgments

I am fortunate to have benefitted from many wonderful friends, family members, and mentors over the course of my life and I could never dream of getting as far as I have without their support and guidance. I would like to issue a special thanks to my grandmother, Marie, for her sacrifice in providing me with loving home and ensuring that I could grow up to be the person that I am today. Additional thanks to the committee members Dr. Messina and Dr. Brown for your guidance and patience and thanks to Marie, Kelly, Brandon, James, and DJ for participating in my interviews.

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### Abstract

This is a personal reflection piece which serves to summarize my growth and development as a professional in the field of counseling and also as a person. The paper will start with background information which includes topics such as my history, family, relationships, culture, health, hobbies, and personal strengths. Also included are interviews with family and friends where topics of my personality, strengths, weaknesses, family culture, and coping techniques will be discussed. Assessments relating to my personality and theoretical orientation such as the Myers-Briggs, Strong Interest Inventory, and Selective Theory Sorter-Revised will also be featured. Then I continue on with a conceptualization of myself through the perspective of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. The impact of this analysis and plans for my continued development will also be included next to conclude the paper. Through reflecting on these topics, I hope to gain a greater insight on myself, my journey, and my future both professionally and personally.

## Reflection of Self

In this reflection of self, I hope to accomplish a better understanding of myself: my strengths, weaknesses, biases, and relevant experiences. By exploring these topics, I can hopefully gain greater insight of myself which will likely help me to be a better counselor and person. In this reflection of self I will be looking at background information, sharing interviews with friends and family, presenting results from assessments, and applying theory as well as discussing the impact on me as a counselor. I will conclude with a plan for my continued development after graduation and throughout my career.

### **Background Information**

Background information includes relationships, physical health, mental health, chemical health, coping and stress management, culture, hobbies, and strengths. The relationships portion includes a summary of family, social, and romantic relationships, and is combined with work and school related events, which are sorted chronologically by Childhood, Elementary, Middle, and High school, College Undergraduate, Post-Undergrad and Graduate school.

### **Childhood and Elementary School**

I did not grow up in a traditional family with a mother and father. In the majority of my childhood my primary caregiver was my grandmother, who also received help from my uncles. My parents were troubled people who struggled with mental illness and disabilities, which ultimately made them ill-suited to raise children. Despite these limitations, they had five children: Justin, Brandon, me, Kelly, and Alissa. My siblings and I spent time in foster care for months of our childhood, I was two years old when I lived with a foster family.

Eventually my Grandmother was granted guardianship of her grandchildren with the exception of Justin who had been adopted years before and also Kevin and Jill who were born later and able to remain with my mother. After a few years of raising all of us, two of her sons decided they would adopt one child each. For whatever reason, my two brothers were chosen by my uncles and my sister and I stayed with my grandmother.

As for relationships with peers, a reoccurring theme was that I was characterized as “shy”. However, in elementary school I do not recall being nervous around my peers, but I did tend to keep a small group of friends and focus on those people rather than trying to meet as many people as possible. I had a best friend in elementary school who I played with during every recess, often times it was just the two of us being entertained by our imaginations. While I was not making an effort to meet new people, I think I was comfortable with the way things were.

As a child, I idolized romantic relationships from television shows and movies that I had grown up on. I recall being drawn to the emotional pull that I experienced from these fictional depictions, such as Disney movies, which often had a strong romance plot. While I did remember having interest and curiosity in girls as romantic partners as a kid, there was a great deal of confusion as to how to start the process. I felt little pressure to peruse this part of my life because the expectation seemed to be that most others were not dating and that I had plenty of time before I would have to worry about this aspect.

At some point during my childhood, I had the experience of losing a family member when my Great Grandmother died. Thankfully, this is the only real experience of grief that I have experienced so far in my life. I remember that everyone around me was pretty sad, especially my Grandma and my sister. I knew my Great Grandmother relatively well since

she lived with my Grandma until her passing. I did not react as strongly as many around me and I did not feel sad until a week later. This experience taught me the about grief and that grieves differently. Looking back, I do not think there was anything wrong with how I grieved, it but at the time, my family was concerned.

### **Middle and High School**

Upon entering middle school, I recall starting to feel different. We had three elementary schools in the area and those students would all move on to attend the same middle school, this was the first time I remember feeling anxious about social interactions and I recall often questioning myself. My anxiety in social situations seemed to get worse when I started getting acne and began to feel self-conscious about how I looked. In this period, my best friend moved and I did not have any close friends. Before getting acne, there seemed to be interest from girls, but I had often found myself unprepared to respond to their interest. At one point, a girl from my class asked me to go to a dance with her, to which I responded, “Um... Um... Um...” She then said to me “If you say ‘um’ one more time then the answer is no.” The word “um” seemed uncontrollable as it came out of my mouth, and before I knew it, the moment was over and the bell to start class had rung.

High school felt as though it was a slight improvement. My acne had gotten better and I had befriended some of the other people in my neighborhood. I had people I could talk to and spend time with afterschool, although many of the conversations and interactions lacked depth. While I had friends in my neighborhood I did still struggle to meet new friends at school, and overall, felt as though I lacked the confidence to let others get to know who I was as a person. Even with the people I did consider friends, I often rarely felt I had openings to express more personal thoughts or emotions. I basically felt as though nobody really knew



me, outside of some of my family members. Over time, I felt as though I had a reputation as a quiet and shy kid and it felt tough to show people that there was more to me than that. Getting my first job helped me make a few new friends and in many ways, I felt that those people knew me better due to not being exposed to what my established role was within my school.

### **College Undergraduate**

I decided to attend a university because a friend of mine from my neighborhood had talked me into being his roommate. We both applied to Minnesota State University Mankato and had been accepted. When attending orientation, I think both of us were filled with excitement for the new opportunities and experiences that were ahead of us. The night we stayed in the dorm room I talked with my high school friend and mentioned that I was excited to start over in a place where nobody knew me so that I could try to be the person I want to be. Attending the university was a welcome fresh start for me. The people there had no knowledge of my past and no expectations for who I was, which felt freeing.

In college, I was able to meet new friends that were on my floor and we quickly became close. I spent time with friends, on a nearly daily basis which was new for me. Back in high school I would spend a handful of hours outside with friends every other day. Looking back this was great practice in socializing with others, forming connections, and learning who I was around other people and within groups. About half way through the semester, my friend from high school had dropped out. However, I still felt comfortable with the friends I had made since coming to college.

The second year I still maintained some of my connections from the first, but would also meet plenty of new people who would be friends of mine for many years to come. This is where I met my longtime friend and current roommate, James. In my second year of college I had my first girlfriend and romantic relationship. While this relationship only lasted about three months, and had its fair share of problems, it was a learning experience for me and helped me better understand what I might be looking for in a partner. While my intentions were good, I still had a lot of maturing to do in this area and I would often reflect on the mistakes I had made. Another important takeaway from this was the experience of going through a breakup. I remember how emotional the experience felt for me, I would go through my day with only this on my mind. I can also recall that my focus on school and other important things wavered. What made me feel better in this experience was reconnecting with old friends I had distanced myself from when my relationship was starting. I think that talking with supportive people can be a good solution when going through tough times.

By my third year, I began to get ambitious about gaining more experiences, growing my strengths, and challenging myself. One example was that I had interest in getting a job as a Residential Advisor (RA). Initially, I was not successful in getting a job but I kept applying when there were openings. When I got the job I was excited, proud, and nervous all at once. The job of an RA is to facilitate the growth of a community on the floor in which they are assigned. I was known for being quiet, shy, and reserved. This position was one that would require me to go out of my way to meet all of my residents (there were about forty of them), lead meetings, and confront residents who violated policy. I knew this would be a challenge but I was hoping it was an opportunity for growth. I was optimistic about the new

connections I could make. Overall, the rest of the year played out as I had hoped: I felt more confident in myself after being forced to interact with others as a part of my job and had made new and long lasting friendships that I otherwise would not have if I did not pursue this job.

In my fourth year, I continued to work as an RA while making more friends and acquiring more valuable experience. Applying and taking the job to be an RA was a chance that I took, it is possible I could have taken the job and anxiety could have gotten the better of me. I could have neglected my responsibilities because they felt too hard. However, I took the chance and embraced that challenging times lead to growth. In my fifth year, I was no longer an RA and made a choice to try to refocus on school. I did enter into a relationship with a classmate I knew for a few years. Once again, despite there being some good moments early on, I encountered problems, this time related to her mental health. I grew unhappy with the relationship and felt the burden of constantly helping to pick herself back up. Overall, the relationship started to feel taxing and I had made the decision to break it off. One takeaway from the experience was that I got a good look at what some of the difficulties are regarding being in a relationship with someone who has mental health issues. It was a tough decision but ultimately I felt as though I was not happy and that she would be better off working on herself than being in a relationship.

### **Post-Undergrad and Graduate School**

After graduating with my Bachelor's in Psychology, I applied for the School Counseling program at Minnesota State University Mankato and was not successful in getting selected. I was pretty upset and uncertain about what I would do after that and was concerned that my application was too weak to get accepted into graduate schools. I had a

choice of working at a Subway or at a group home called Harry Meyering Center (HMC). I went back and forth about which job I should take. I almost took the job with Subway until I was reminded by a friend that I should challenge myself with the job at HMC. It would be relevant experience for someone hopeful to work in a psychology-related job. I took the job at HMC as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) and worked in a house with four clients who had cognitive, physical, and psychological disabilities. I felt anxious and uncertain at times, but eventually I got more comfortable and learned how to be a positive contributor. There were many valuable experiences I had at this job including helping with behavior plans, administering medication, planning outings, and facilitating conflict resolution when tension grew between the residents.

While working I had some time to re-think the direction I wanted to take in my career and had consulted with my undergraduate advisor before deciding that I wanted to continue to go for counseling. This time I had a much better understanding of what I brought to the table and why pursuing this path was important to me. I applied once again for Minnesota State University Mankato and also applied for Minnesota State University Moorhead. I was accepted to the counseling program in Moorhead and was happy, as it was my first choice after visiting for my interview.

My journey in shaping myself as a counselor did not end once I arrived in Moorhead, as initially I was in the school counseling track. When I attended orientation, one of the speakers mentioned that students may change their path as they take classes and figure out what is best for them. I took that to heart. I was passionate about being a counselor but was unsure about working with children. I believe I initially picked school counseling because it was the option that I best understood and felt it would be a decent fit. After interviewing a

local school counselor and talking to faculty members, I decided that I wanted to work with adults, more specifically working with college students. After a while, I chose the Clinical Mental Health track. I had previously enjoyed working with college students as an RA and enjoyed learning about different techniques and theories that I could use in a counseling setting. When I started my practicum at NDSU, I had a great opportunity, it was eye-opening to connect with them in counseling sessions. I enjoyed listening to their concerns, highlighting their strengths, and helping them come up with solutions.

During this time I also tried my hand at dating people in the area and began seeing my current girlfriend, Jenna. She was a fellow graduate student from another nearby university and we have continued our relationship to this day. My time with her has been enjoyable and she is an intelligent person who challenge me. While the relationship has been enjoyable there also has been many challenges as this is the longest relationship I have been in in my life. Within this relationship I feel as though I have learned a lot about the importance of open and honest communication and working through tough challenges. I have also had experience in being a supportive partner while to staying ethical and leaving my counseling self at my internship site. This is something that I think will be a lifelong challenge not just for my relationship with her but also friends and family.

Starting my internship felt different than practicum, which was surprising to me since it was at the same site. In hindsight, it makes sense since the expectations and objectives of someone in their internship are different than that of someone in their practicum. The fall that my internship started seemed intense, I had a few clients in which I felt I had no idea what I could do for them. I remember the stress I felt and at times feeling overwhelmed by the challenges in front of me. Additionally, I had begun to question whether I was good enough

to be at my site and became somewhat paranoid that I was not living up to expectations. However, during this time I would meet and have honest talks with my supervisor, read about the concerns my clients were experiencing, and researched treatments. This hard work paid off. While some of the earliest clients I saw did not come back for treatment the next clients I saw seemed to improve throughout the semester and learned a lot from our meetings. Over the course of the semester, I worked with all sorts of client concerns including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, relationship issues, academic concerns, and much more. The work I did at NDSU was some of the most satisfying work I have ever done in my life, despite the fact that I did not get paid for my time.

### **Physical Health**

My physical health is something that has been good for most of my life. Despite spending plenty of days indoors, I would often find reasons to go outside and get exercise as a kid and teenager. As a child, I would often play with my brothers and friends while using our imagination to play games and in high school I played a year of football. I also frequently played football and basketball after school in our neighborhood. In middle school, I also helped my family by working on their paper route for a number of years. In this job we would deliver hundreds of papers to people's doorstep. I would often run in order to finish the job as quickly as possible. In school, fully participated in gym class and often looked forward to that part of the day. I also used the gym after school to stay in shape.

Since graduating from high school, I have generally done a good job of going to the gym to lift weights and run, however, in the last few years this has started to slip. The biggest drop in my gym attendance occurred once I started my internship for graduate school. I often

felt too busy and too tired to work out. Internship has been over since the spring of 2018 and I have not yet gotten back into the habit of going to the gym.

I have not had any serious medical health issues however, my family has a history of cardiovascular diseases. On a related note, I do tend to enjoy some foods and drinks that could put me at increased risk for developing some medical issues. However, I have done a good job of cutting back on these over the years. For example I used to drink a lot of soda but four years ago I started getting caffeine in a healthier way by switching to coffee.

### **Mental Health**

Around the fourth or fifth grade, some of my teachers had concerns that I had ADHD due to some problems paying attention in class. I do not recall if I was formally diagnosed but I was put into classes that were smaller and went at a slower pace. Around the end of middle school and beginning of high school, I became more motivated to do my best in class and eventually was taken out of those classes and my IEP was discontinued.

During the years of middle school and high school, I dealt with some symptoms of anxiety and depression but I was never seen, tested, or had them diagnosed. Regarding anxiety, I experienced symptoms of social anxiety, as those were the circumstances that I recall feeling it most intensely. In my case, getting more exposure and experience in those settings with support from friends and family allowed me to improve and get more comfortable with those issues.

### **Chemical Health**

There likely is not much to talk about here, in my life I have never been a frequent user of drugs, alcohol, or other chemical substances. I have mostly only used alcohol

socially, when there is gatherings or outings with friends. Within the last few years, I have started to have interest in beer and wine in a sort of artistic manner; meaning drinking them and combining them with food combinations and exploring them for their taste and complexity.

### **Coping and Stress Management**

I believe that for the most part I have good strategies for coping and managing my stress. The main thing that I have found to be best for dealing with stress is to start planning and working on the task that may be causing stress. This applies as well to school when I had big projects with deadlines approaching. I have found that mapping out how much work I want to get done by certain dates and designating space in my schedule to do these tasks, is generally something that makes me feel better. If there are multiple things on my plate, then I will list them out before deciding which one I will start on first.

One thing that I had done in the past to cope with stress was working out. Working out helps me manage stress. While I have unfortunately gotten out of the habit of working out, I do feel as though I have a good understanding of how exercise can be great for helping people with mental health concerns. Mindfulness and mindful breathing are newer coping techniques for myself that I have used on occasion for the last year or so. I had not really heard of mindfulness until I was in the counseling program at MSUM. I learned how to apply it in my internship aided clients in doing the same. I was able to find that it has many benefits for myself such as increasing self-awareness, relaxation, and helping to relieve symptoms of anxiety.



## **Culture**

My identity is that of a Caucasian, heterosexual man, who was born and raised in Minnesota. More specifically, I have heard that my ethnicity includes Swedish, Irish, Norwegian, Italian, French, and German backgrounds. However, I was raised almost exclusively by my father's side of my family, which is heavily Scandinavian. I do tend to see some of the stoic values that are classically associated with this culture.

I grew up in a lower-middle class family in a trailer park in a medium-sized town called Farmington, Minnesota. Despite the name, the town was mostly suburban but was filled with mostly middle-class Caucasian people. In my high school class there were only a small portion of students with non-white ethnicities. Many of the friends I associated with in high school were African-American or Latino including my roommate from when I first came to college.

I was raised in a Catholic family but I did not start attending church until late middle school, because my grandmother found out my siblings and I had never been baptized. Despite being raised Catholic, I do not find myself to be especially passionate about religion and hardly think about it. At this point I do not consider myself to be religious but I am hesitant to put a label on it like "agnostic". Truthfully it is just something I do not care much about and do not think about.

The adults in my family are mostly pretty conservative, mainly my uncles. My three uncles and father are more conservative. However, my grandmother who raised these uncles is surprisingly more progressive than her sons. I am not quite sure how long she has had

these views she generally declined to share specifics in the past but talks openly about it currently.

## **Hobbies**

Some of the hobbies I have developed over the years include cooking, craft beer, role-playing games, creative writing, movies, sports, swing dancing, video games, and politics. Some of these hobbies I have held for most of my life while others I have developed within the last few years. I have been playing video games as young as six years old and I became interested in sports in high school. Movies became an interest of mine when I started college. I began to develop an appreciation for some of the more award nominated and artistic movies. Some movies and television shows did a good job at nurturing my empathetic side and helping me to understand the perspective of others. For example, *The Wire* helped me to have a better understanding of what it is like to grow up in tough neighborhoods that are affected by the war on drugs and some of the issues that African-Americans deal with in the United States.

Some hobbies such as swing dancing, I developed in college, specifically the later years when I was an RA. Swing dancing was something that my younger self would have never imagined that I would someday enjoy. My younger self would have probably been too shy and nervous to give it a try and would have felt that it is too feminine. However, part of what made it appealing was that it was a great way to meet new people and it was a fun activity in which I could challenge myself.

**Strengths**

One strength I have as a counselor is being good at critical thinking. I often spend time thinking in depth about topics, people, and problems that occur and I take pride in myself for coming up with creative, different, and interesting ways of doing things. I love engaging people in thoughtful discussion and bouncing ideas back and forth, this can be enjoyable for me but is also beneficial for problem solving.

Another strength that I believe I possess is having the ability to empathize with others. This has been to me as a counselor in trying to understand the perspective of clients and figure out the best way to work with them. Often times, when working with someone who is different than myself I find that I have a healthy curiosity that aids in finding out more about their presenting issues. I genuinely have fun exploring the lives of others and having conversations about the human condition.

One thing that became apparent to my supervisor at my internship site at NDSU was that I had a tendency for being prepared. She occasionally expressed that I would often take notes during our supervision meetings and that I often liked to have my meetings with clients planned out which was different than many students. In many ways I think planning out the direction of a session can be good in order to have a strong idea of what to work on and to be prepared to do so. When working with clients, I have found that things do not always go as planned. I have since become more adaptive.

## **Interviews**

I chose to interview five people for this portion of this reflective paper: My grandmother, two brothers, and a few friends who have known for at least five years each. While all of these interviews shared the majority of questions I did replace out one question for the interviews I had with friends; the question replaced was about my family culture and instead friends were asked how they would describe me to a stranger.

### **Family Culture**

One's culture can be hard to pin down and articulate at times. It is often said that describing the culture that you belong to is hard perhaps because that is just what is normal to you. I had trouble thinking about my own family culture so I thought I would ask my family members how they would describe it. My brother, Kelly, described our family as having a "different makeup," this is alluding to our untraditional structure since my grandmother is raising two of her grandsons and two uncles were raising two more children from the same parents. Kelly also noted how close our family seems and fondly remembered when he lived in Minneapolis that he would still get frequent visits from me. He also notes that our family is "semi-religious" in that there seems to be religious values and belief in god by many but inconsistency in many ways such as church attendance. Kelly also shared that he noticed alcoholism to be a problem for certain members of the family such as a few uncles and our deceased grandfather.

My Grandmother tended to talk a lot about the older times of our family such as when she was growing up or back when she was married and lived on the farm. She mentioned that they dressed "appropriately", had respect for elders, were on time, did their job and valued

honesty. I asked if she felt that these were still values that the younger generation shared and she agreed that they also apply to her children and grandchildren. My Grandmother expressed that our family is generally religious but was unsure if the newer generations shared that value. She also shared that her origins were mostly Swedish with some Norwegian heritage. She mentioned that her husband was Irish, Norwegian, and German – however he had prejudices against German people and often denied that he had German heritage. My Grandfather apparently harbored many racist beliefs for minorities and was upset when one of his sons befriended a kid who was African-American.

My older brother, Brandon, described our family as one that likes to spend time with each other. He said that our family puts each other as a priority and likes to have many get-togethers at people's houses. He also said that our family has a good sense of humor and likes to joke around with each other often. Brandon also mentioned that our family likes to go on vacations, fish, enjoy the outdoors, and play video games with each other. He said that some of our family values are honesty and working hard. Brandon also mentioned that there have been a few members of our family who have had troubles in using alcohol responsibly but that most are fine with it.

Some common themes between the interviews seems to be religion and alcoholism. Both Kelly and my Grandmother had talked some about religion in our family but as Kelly had expressed, we do not tend to attend organized events very often. Alcoholism seems to be an issue that several members of our family have had trouble with and that is something that my family members and I should look out for and be aware of since there is generally a genetic component to those problems. Kelly seemed to emphasize togetherness and warmth of our family culture while my grandmother seemed to emphasize values such as hard work

and traditions such as religion. Brandon also mentioned some of the values that my grandmother had mentioned such as honesty and working hard. I think that I personally would agree with both of these themes and have noticed them myself. I myself do not take religion as seriously as my grandmother but also I have noticed that alcohol has been a problem for a few of my uncles as well as my grandfather.

### **Describing Myself**

I asked some of my friends to describe myself to me as if I were someone who did not know me. My friend and longtime roommate, James, said that I am sarcastic yet that I care about people. He also said that I can be set in my ways sometimes and that it can be hard to sway me on some small things such as whether it is worth buy whole coffee beans. He also said that I am goofy, hardworking, and that I know what I want. I was also told that I can be pretentious, especially about my taste in movies or music. I was told that I can sometimes be judgmental of others.

My friend, DJ, described me as introspective and that I generally have things well thought out. He said that I was genuine and honest with people, perhaps even in moments when they may not want me to be – he said that I had not had problems calling people out such as when people say things that are insensitive. He also mentioned that I am not one to filter myself and that I am opinionated but generally come off as kind and humorous when I first meet people.

James' answers seem to describe a person who very clearly knows what they want and are vocal about those things, sometimes perhaps in a way that could come off as judgmental or pretentious. He did also describe me as hardworking and humorous which are

both attributes that are positive. DJ on the other hand seems to emphasize a side of me which is brave, outspoken, willing to confront, and is introspective yet honest. DJ seems to almost seem me as a sort of leader yet also did mention my use of humor which is similar to something that James had said. I think I would tend to agree with the idea that I have been or even now can sometimes be pretentious or judgmental but think that it is something that I had done more in the past. I also think I agree with DJ's assessment on confronting people or issues when they arise – it is not always comfortable but I see the value in it and I think when I feel it is necessary I tend to be able to make myself go through with it.

### **Changing Over the Years**

This question was about how I have changed over the years to how I am today. This was a question answered by family members as well as friends but one difference is that family members have known me my whole life and most friends that I interview have known me since my early years of undergraduate. My Grandmother answered this question by saying that I have gotten more confident and outgoing and talked about how much quieter I was as a child and teenager. She also talked about when my biological mother would shame me when I asked for things and that it took some time for me to feel comfortable in doing that. She remembered I became more motivated and placed a higher importance on education; when I was younger I did not care much about getting homework done but later I decided that I wanted to change that and turned my grades around high school. She also noted that I have overall become more responsible now compared to my younger years when I lived with her.

Kelly shared that I used to be more critical of others, specifically when it comes to movies or music, but also shared that it helped him branch out more. He talked about how we

had basically always gotten along really well but as we have gotten older our relationship has become deeper and more personal. He also said that when I was younger I was playful but sometimes quick to anger, as I got older going into high school I started taking school more seriously, worked harder, and became more vocal about my opinions. In undergraduate he said that I took relationships more seriously, was less critical of others, and would be more open to trying new things. Now in graduate school, he described me as someone who pays more attention to feelings and as someone who is much more accepting of others.

Brandon mentioned that I have become more responsible and better at dealing with stress, problems that he says were present when I was in High School. He also mentioned that I do not let things bother me like they used to, an example being someone making fun of me. James shared that I am not as sarcastic as I was in the past and also less judgmental. He also said that I have more confidence in myself and more open to trying new things. He talked about how I used to be much more into gaming but now have a wider range of activities and more realistic about things. He noticed that I am more politically aware and also more open to enjoying alcohol and less judgment of others using marijuana.

DJ said that I have grown more intellectually and overall gotten smarter in my knowledge of things. He described me as being more cognizant and inquisitive about people as well as a variety of other subjects such as politics, history, and social sciences. He had noticed that I have become more sympathetic with people and that I care more about the people around me. DJ also said that I was more set in my ways and arrogant in the past but not as much now.

Multiple people who were interviewed had described that I have become more outgoing and confident as I have gotten older which is also something that I have felt to be



true and talked about in my recollection of my history. Another theme that had occurred was the idea that I was previously at least somewhat judgmental and that I have learned to be more accepting of other perspectives or at least keep it to myself. I think I would agree that I have in the past been pretty critical of people, sometimes this still occurs but I think through my education and training I have been able to let some of that go. Both family members had also talked about my change in taking school more seriously as well which I also remember.

### **Strengths as a Counselor**

For the next question, I asked interviewees to imagine me as a mental health counselor and that tell me what they think I would be good at in that role. My grandmother said that I am good at talking to people and getting them to open up. She said that I “look friendly” and that I have a way of coming off as caring and non-judgmental. She also said that I am understanding of different cultures and ways of life, would always make an effort to help, and make safety a priority.

I was also told by Kelly that I would take ethics in counseling seriously and do what is morally acceptable. He also said that I am good at listening to others and that I tend to hold off on giving my opinion about things until I feel sure about it. I was told that I am also conscious of the impact that I have on others and that I seem interested in learning new methods and theories to use in working with others. I was also told that I enjoy having “educated” talks and would work well with individuals who struggle with stress and “bad habits”.

Brandon said that I am a good listener and have good mental stability. He also mentioned that I am punctual, focused, and good at planning things. James, someone who has

taken several classes in counseling, said that I would be good at sticking to ethical guidelines of practice in the field. He also expressed that I would likely be non-judgmental towards clients and keep my biases in check. He thinks that I am funny and could find a way to use my humor appropriately in session. James also said that I am good at reflecting meaning of thoughts and generally am good at showing appropriate reactions to the things I hear. Lastly, he said that I would likely do a good job of making clients feel comfortable and heard.

My friend DJ said that he felt my approachableness and ability to appear non-judgmental would be good assets to me in the field of counseling. He added that it feels natural to talk about sensitive things with me. He said that I generally am good at asking the right questions and am particularly good at focusing on people's thoughts; an example that he provided from before I was in the counseling program was me asking "why do you think that?"

One reoccurring theme seems to be that people think that I am approachable and a good listener. These are things that I value and was constantly trying to improve on during my internship. Another theme seemed to be me not being judgmental of others which is interesting since I was described by some others as being critical at times. I suppose my grandmother and DJ have had different experiences with me but I also think the people who identified me being judgmental, Kelly and James, also agree that I have become less judgmental as I have grown older. Other themes that I have seen are that I am good at approaching problems in a very concrete, logical, and objective manner.

**Weaknesses as a Counselor**

This question was looking at the other side of the last question, what are some areas of counseling they could envision that I may struggle with? My Grandmother was really only able to come up with one answer but it is a good one; she stated that she could see me having a hard time if I had family members that were struggling and I was not able to help them. She went on to talk about some family members that have concerns and that it could be tempting to use my expertise there despite it being inappropriate ethically.

Kelly shared that he felt that there could be times where I may be too cautious in working with others. He was not sure if I would be comfortable in working with things that I was not overly familiar with. He went on to say that I do not seem to approach things from an emotional perspective and that I might find it hard to empathize if I am unable to think about their emotions. Kelly also shared that I am less comfortable in working with kids and that could be a challenge for me. Brandon added that since I do not have a vehicle currently that transportation could be a concern. He also thinks that seeing people struggle and stressing about client's safety could be a concern.

James said that I might have trouble in working with clients who have vastly different political beliefs as myself. He mentioned that I have a fairly far left leaning ideology and that I could find it challenging to work with someone who is on the other side of the political spectrum. James also said he could envision that it might be difficult for me to work with clients that are offenders or court-mandated. My other friend who was interviewed, DJ, said that I could occasionally struggle with empathy and that I tend to think about thoughts first before feelings. He expressed that I could possibly be too analytical at times when a client may be looking for something else from me.

I thought that my grandmother raised an interesting concern of having people in my personal life who are experiencing problems but not being able to use my knowledge and skills to help them. This is something that I have occasionally run into and I have generally tried to be cautious not to go into “counseling mode” while also being supportive and encouraging. If I feel they may need professional help I would generally suggest it or point them in the right direction but I also think there may be times when I know someone is struggling but I avoid them or avoid bring up the topic so as not to be put into a situation where I feel pressured to help. Another interesting thought by Kelly and DJ is that I tend to put an emphasis on thoughts before emotions which I think could be a fair criticism at times. I think that I am aware of this tendency and do seem the value in talking about emotions after my work using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Brandon had mentioned transportation as a concern and I think there is some merit to that; having an easy way to quickly get to work could reduce stress that I have for a job. During internship I utilized the bus system which could take me almost anywhere I needed to be but it does take longer and require more planning which could take away some mental energy and add to stress.

### **Coping Skills**

This last question was about the interviewee’s perspective on how well I cope with stress, anxiety, depression, or other hardships. My grandmother mentioned that I have not been very vocal about tough situations in my life and that she felt as though I probably went to my friends more often. Kelly said that I do not often talk about my stress and that he felt like I opt to try to solve problems on my own. He also shared the sentiment that I do not tend to share as much with family and that I talk more with friends. From Kelly’s perspective, I tend to get frustrated, think about solutions, and then try to have a productive reaction when

faced with problems. My other brother, Brandon, mentioned that he did not often see me sad or deal with stress much like other family members had mentioned.

James commented that I do not tend to use alcohol to cope unlike some others within our friend's groups in college. He also said that I used to play video games as a coping strategy but not as much later in my life since I had replaced it with more active activities such as swing dancing. He also mentioned that I might watch movies to cope or talk to my girlfriend, Jenna. He said that in the past I had worked out as a way to cope but acknowledged that it has not been common lately. James did notice when I was in internship that I did happen to take naps more and that sometimes I would keep to myself when stressed. DJ expressed that I am open and honest about problems and that I seem to have good ways of coping. He noted that although I seem to cope well now, I might have had a tendency to internalize things too much in the past.

The biggest theme for this section I think is not something that anyone said but rather what they did not say. I think that many family members struggled to come up with much on this subject since I do have a tendency to keep things to myself. Kelly had pointed to the fact that I try to solve problems on my own and James had pointed out that I sometimes keep to myself more when distressed. I think that the idea that I keep my stress and problems to myself too much is incredibly valid and I think that this is something that I should do better on.

### **Assessments**

The assessments I chose to talk about are the Join the DOTS worksheet, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Strong Interest Inventory, and the Selective Theory Sorter-

Revised. These assessments were selected because I felt that they covered a wide variety of aspects such as my personality, career interests, theoretical fit, and level of burnout.

### **Join the DOTS**

This worksheet is included in the *ACT Made Simple* book by Russ Harris and is a way of listing the different strategies that one uses to “get rid of, avoid, suppress, escape, or distract yourself” from problematic thoughts and feelings (2009). DOTS stands for Distraction, Opting Out, Thinking, and Substances, Self-Harm, Other Strategies; this worksheet asks people to identify these strategies and then ask yourself if they have led to long-term positive change (Harris, 2009).

The main sources of distress for me currently that I was able to identify would be anxieties that I have about my future as a professional and “not being good enough”. Under ‘Distraction’ I have watching television or movies, while this could be fine if a problem is something that is out of my control it has at times been used as a distraction from a problem or to procrastinate from something stressful. Under ‘Opting Out’ I listed that I tend to sometimes withdraw from other people. Withdrawing from people to avoid talking about problems or stressful things is also generally not helpful and it is safe to say that it also does nothing to address the problem or create a better future in the long-term.

The next part is the ‘Thinking’ portion of the worksheet, some examples that I came up with are blaming others and fantasizing about things when faced with something distressful. For example last year I struggled taking an exam in one of my classes and did indeed blame the instructor for designing a test that was too difficult while also fantasizing what a better class would look like. Additionally I identified thinking about ‘what ifs’, ‘if

only', 'why me?', and saying something is 'not fair'. None of these are helpful, work towards solving the issue at hand, and will likely not lead to a better or happier life if I am overly fused with them. Finally the last one is 'Substances, Self-harm, other Strategies'; for this one I identified eating junk food when stressed and excessive sleeping. One example of this might be last fall when I was stressed out from my internship; at that time I would sometimes eat junk food and took long naps when I got home. The junk food is of course unhealthy and the long naps throw off my sleep schedule and as I have learned from my readings both nutrition and sleep have an impact on someone's mental health.

## **MBTI**

The MBTI personality code that I tested as is INTP. My introversion score was an eight, which is considered a moderate preference. To me this was a category that I could have easily guessed that I would belong to and I have pretty much always known that I was more of an introvert. An interesting thing that I have noticed within the counseling field is that most of my peers tend to fall in the extroversion category. I think that a preference towards introversion can bring a lot of value to this field as well because a strength of introverted people is often that they are good listeners who are quite thoughtful. I think that this is something that I can use to be a good counselor in a different way than many of my peers.

My MBTI assessment also had me with a score of one with a preference towards sensing; you may have noticed that earlier I declared myself to be INTP, emphasis on the 'N' here. In my careers class we were basically told that this assessment is not necessarily entirely conclusive and that our own opinions on where we stand also matter. I was not personally invested in myself being on either side of this one so initially I assumed that my 'S' was probably correct, however later in the class we were paired off into groups based on

these letters. The Sensing vs Intuition activity had us looking at a painting and describing it. The people in my group seemed to obsess with small details within the painting such as hair color or the number of birds in the sky and I found myself frustrated by this; “Who cares how many birds are in the sky?” is something I was thinking to myself. On the other hand, I was looking at what the overall meaning of what this painting was trying to say – I think this makes much more sense to me so I think of myself as having a preference towards Intuition. A preference for Intuition can manifest itself in a counselor who sees patterns and is able to look at the full picture of the client’s life and their problems. I think someone with a preference for intuition can see some things that people with a sensing preference might miss – the same goes for the other way around.

The next preference that I have in my MBTI was another moderate preference towards Thinking, this score was my highest with twelve. This preference towards thinking means that I tend to try to look at things from a more logical and objective way and to make my decisions based on that. This can obviously be valuable in counseling for problem solving and using objectivity. Often times I had noticed that I would find myself asking clients questions such as “when this was happening, what were you thinking at the time” – even before entering this counseling program I remember talking with friends about deeper subjects and asking them about the content of their thoughts. This tendency however, is something that I believe I have balanced out over time; I think if I took this MBTI back in 2014 I probably would have had a higher tendency towards Thinking. Throughout my internship experience at NDSU I was challenged to engage with client’s feelings more and over time I began to see the value in label, expressing, and discussing one’s feelings.



The last part of my MBTI label is the P stands for Perceiving. Perceiving means being flexible in your approach and keeping one's options open, this contrasts with Judging which would be having a highly planned and organized approach to things. My score for Perceiving was considered moderate with a score of nine. Perceiving can be valuable for a counselor to be spontaneous in session and be ready for anything that may occur; as I have heard often in this field, you can plan as much as you want but sometimes the session will go in a direction that you could not have expected. With those sessions that go in unpredictable ways I would expect that those counselors with a preference for perceiving to feel more comfortable than those who have a preference for Judging. I find it interesting though that, as I talked about in my coping section, I tend to gravitate towards planning and organization at times that I find myself feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

### **Strong Interest Inventory**

After taking my Strong Interest Inventory I found that I received my theme code as ASR which would stand for Artistic, Social, and Realistic. My highest score was in the category of Artistic, this score was considered "very high" and had a score of 67 out of 70. I think I could have guessed that Artistic would have either been my first or second highest score because of the wide variety of artistic interests that I have. Artistic people tend to have interest in self-expression and culture and these are interests that I have. Some of the occupational suggestions that I was given are Arts or Entertainment Manager, Editor, Musician, Reporter, and Public Relations Director. I was surprised that some of these suggestions were considered to be in the Artistic occupations. While I am interested in the Arts I think I was always hesitant to consider a career in them because I often thought of them as impractical or that getting a job in that field would be a long shot. Because of this I

think that I have always liked the idea of artistic interests being more of hobbies or side projects that I can do to relieve stress.

My second highest score for the Strong Interest Inventory was in the category of Social. This is likely the category that most people in the counseling profession will score highest on. The Social theme lists interests such as people, teamwork, helping, and community service. I think that all of these are interests that I do possess as I find people to be interesting, enjoy having to work with others, helping others, and believe that community service is valuable. This theme also suggests jobs such as occupational therapist, social worker, instructional coordinator, recreation therapist, and community service director. While I think I would be a decent fit for many of these jobs I think that I am a better fit for a College, Mental Health, or Career Counseling job since I also have much interest in talk therapy, counseling skills, and theory.

Finally, my third highest category for the Strong is Realistic. This theme lists interests such as machines, computer networks, athletics, and working outdoors. While I do enjoy athletics such as sports and exercise, many of these other interests are not necessarily things that I consider to be strong interest of mine. Some of the jobs that are listed under the Realistic theme are management analyst, technical support specialist, computer systems management, computer programmer, and law enforcement officer. To be honest of the jobs listed, most of them would not be of interest to me.

### **Selective Theory Sorter-Revised**

The selective Theory Sorter-Revised is an assessment within the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of a book called *Developing Your Theoretical Orientation in Counseling and Psychotherapy* by Halbur

& Halbur (2015). The test's purpose is to help new counselors or students to determine what values and beliefs they have and what theories may be a good match for them. I took the test during my theories class in the spring of 2018 and thought that this would be a good chance to share my theoretical perspective on people and counseling. My top three theories or schools of thought in order of highest or lowest are Person-Centered, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, and Existentialism.

Person-centered therapy has many ideas which I think are a great foundation for any new counselor; as Rogers has said three attributes of a therapist that foster a climate for growth are genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and using accurate empathy (Corey, 2017). I also believe that those three attributes are necessary and would be surprised to see an effective counselor or therapist who does not have those traits. Another aspect of person-centered therapy which I think is important to my idea of counseling is the idea of building independence of the client and teaching them to solve problems for themselves (Corey, 2017). If a client becomes too reliant on a counselor to solve problems for them, then when they eventually break off from that client-counselor relationship they may be unable to resolve issues without relying on others. The idea is to give someone the fishing pole and teach them how to fish rather than simply giving them a fish whenever they ask. This way the client can learn to look to themselves for their strength.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) was tied for my second highest score from the theory sorter quiz. CBT is something that I became familiar with during my internship when I found that I needed more than just person-centered or solution-focused therapy when working with clients who had severe symptoms of depression or anxiety. Many of the clients who I saw during my first internship semester seemed to want skills and coping techniques to

turn to and I also think that I benefitted from having a theory with a fairly straight-forward way of discussing these topics. I found that helping clients identify their thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and physical symptoms surrounding an event of anxiety, depression, or otherwise gave us a good foundation for having a discussion of these as individual components and as a whole process. Additionally, I appreciated the list of cognitive distortions that clients can point to and label their intrusive thoughts as and I liked the emphasis the theory seemed to place on reality and logic. I would often tell clients that the conclusions we come to when analyzing their thoughts and labeling them (for example, catastrophizing or black and white thinking) are not us simply thinking positive, we are thinking realistically and objectively. Most of all with CBT I was pleased by the results I saw and the fact that I could teach clients to use these skills so that they could learn to resolve these concerns for themselves.

Finally, the last of my top three theories according to this quiz was existentialism. I remember first learning about existential theory in my group counseling class and being fascinated seeing the influence that it had on us in our group. I felt that the things we discussed that day were quite profound and deep, and I find that conversations like that are something I actively try to seek out. Initially I began reading Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* but felt as though I needed something more concrete and easier to apply. In talking with my supervisor she mentioned Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) which has components of cognitive and mindfulness interventions as well as some ideas of existentialism. ACT's existential components mostly come in the form of identifying values and taking committed action in living a "happy, full, and meaningful life" (Harris, 2009). Not only did this theory include many elements of existentialism but it also had clear interventions and an interesting manner of discussing ideas about anxiety, depression, and

living a happy life which I felt was closer to my values and beliefs than any other theory I had come into contact with so far. While I continued to use CBT when I felt it was appropriate, ACT taught me about the usefulness of mindfulness and about Cognitive Defusion, a way of letting go of distressing thoughts (Harris, 2009). Additionally, I felt that ACT's focus on workability, or how helpful a thought is rather than truthful, can be very useful for clients that might want to argue with me about the truth of a thought or have concerns about more existential ideas (such as the eventuality of death).

### **Conceptualization of Self**

For this section I decided to conceptualize myself primarily from the perspective of ACT. I will spend some time conceptualizing my current self in a holistic sense including values, instances of fusion and experimental avoidance, coping mechanisms, and committed action. The content of this section will primarily come from the background information, interviews, and assessments sections.

### **Values**

Values are one of the six core processes in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and could simply be defined as "what matters most to you in the big picture" (Harris, 2009). Some values that I have been able to identify are altruism, fairness, pursuit of knowledge, and working towards a healthy life. Altruism for me could be defined as doing what I can to improve the world and the lives of people around me. I see this as something that does not necessarily have to take a ton of effort; this could be something as simple as being kind to others and trying to be a net positive as far as my impact on people's lives.

Another value of mine is the pursuit of knowledge and truth. I try to strive to look for answers and look at things from a scientific and objective manner – this value, like all others, would be generalized towards nearly all situations and not be exclusive to my ideas of counseling. I value intellectualism and remaining open and curious towards ideas as long as there is good evidence for them. Fairness is another value I listed earlier and what that is talking about is the idea that people ought to get the same treatments and rights that everyone gets. This idea would manifest itself if I or someone else is mistreated and generally I would try to act to correct this if it is within my power. The last value is working towards a healthy life. This could be physical, mental, or psychological health.

These values can be referenced with people to remind them about what is important in their lives and how they are missing out on living life to the fullest that they can. For example, I can look at a negative thought like “I am worthless” and ask myself if focusing on this thought will lead me towards living a value-driven life. Will I be able to live by my value of a healthy life if I am constantly stuck on the thought of being worthless? Will I be able to be an altruistic person and give to others if I am focusing on this idea? Would an intellectually curious person let themselves be pushed around by this thought? Instead of focusing on this thought, I can live my life in a way that is meaningful to me.

### **Fusion and Experiential Avoidance**

Fusion is a term used in ACT and would be the opposite of Defusion; this can be defined as getting caught up in your thoughts or allowing them to dominate your behavior (Harris, 2009). Experiential Avoidance on the other hand would be “trying to avoid, get rid of, suppress, or escape from unwanted ‘private experiences’” (Harris, 2009). Most people have instances of fusing with unhelpful thoughts or practicing experiential avoidance in their

life and here I will talk about some of the ones that came to mind. Some thoughts that I've had which I may have some fusion with are that "I am not good enough", being shy or socially awkward, and that I will make a mistake or fail in my practice as a counselor.

The first thought that I listed is sort of a relatively common and I believe many individuals have an "I am not good enough" story. For me, it was in my internship experience. The other interns around me seemed to be thriving and were all very intelligent people who seemed to constantly impress the counseling professionals around them; in contrast I was starting to struggle and had a few interactions with staff which started my thinking that my performance was not up to par. I thankfully got past this moment and feel as though I can look back at it objectively but it is possible that old voice of doubt could show up for me again. This type of fusion could lead to experiential avoidance in the form of avoiding interactions with others such as my supervisor or perhaps even the peers that I perceive to be better than myself.

Another instance of fusion that I have identified is the idea that I will make a mistake of some kind, a mistake that might be considered irredeemable such as mishandling a crisis situation. I think this also could apply to some less serious mistakes such as trying to learn a new theory or technique and being fused with the idea that I may fail, embarrass myself, or that I need to have fully learned every aspect of the theory before I use it. An example of this is when I was first learning ACT; I had already put in dozens of hours reading about the theory and techniques during the fall semester but put off using until spring semester. I think that story is also a good example of experiential avoidance since I was avoiding trying out a new technique due to the fear that I might fail or embarrass myself.

Finally, for much of my life I had been fused to the idea that I was a quiet, shy, and even timid person. In this case I am letting the idea that I am a timid person stop myself from going places and doing things that I might otherwise enjoy. Experiential avoidance could play out in that I will avoid social interactions due to the anxiety and embarrassment that I might feel if I put myself out there. Consequently, we may also look at how rewarding it feels to remove myself from those situations and experience a sense of relief.

### **Defusion, Mindfulness, and Committed Action**

Defusion is the process of separating and distancing from thoughts, we practice letting them come and go instead of being caught up in them (Harris, 2009). The goal here is to see our thoughts for what they truly are, just thoughts. Additionally instead of worrying about whether a thought is true we can focus on whether or not the thought is workable; workability is looking at how helpful a thought is or where it might take us if we hold onto it tightly.

If I experience some of the unwanted thoughts previously mentioned I could practice defusion in order to avoid getting caught up in them and let them affect my life too much. One way to do this is to take the thought and think it to myself: “I am not good enough.” Then, after sitting with that thought for a short while I can reframe the thought a bit: “I am having the thought that I am not good enough.” Next I can take it a step further: “I notice I am having the thought that I am not good enough.” The difference between the first thought and the last one is quite different, there is a sense of distance from the thought and I am treating the thought for what it is – a thought, not reality.



ACT also contains components of mindfulness and as you may have guessed, defusion works very well alongside it as they both focus on improving our awareness. Mindfulness to me has valuable not only to get a better awareness of the present moment and also to more accurately perceive myself as well as the world around me. Of course, mindfulness can also be utilized when doing something to gain a fuller appreciation of it, an example for me could be mindfully enjoying a nice craft beer: I can slowly sip it and appreciate the different flavors and notes, aroma, and the feel of it inside my mouth. Mindfulness is not only a way to relax and calm down but it also helps me better enjoy myself when I want to.

One thing I can do in addition to practicing defusing from unhelpful thoughts and living mindfully is to use committed action in order to better live my life according to my values. By doing this, I can make my life feel as though it has more of a sense of purpose and generally that will lead to a more satisfying and happier life. An example of this could be if I take my value of altruism and decide that each day I want to commit to doing a selfless act for someone. I could satisfy my value of pursuing knowledge by having myself read non-fiction books on subjects of interest or importance. The value of living a healthier life could include regular exercise and practicing daily mindfulness. I can live up to the values of fairness and respect by treating people with justice and dignity in mind and standing up for those principles when the time calls for it.

### **Impact of Analysis of Self**

I feel as though my professional identity starts as a mental health counselor. As a counselor I think that my job as a professional is to help clients towards growth and to find their way to overcome their issues and circumstances. Within my role I think that being open,

genuine, and accepting are important to building rapport with individuals but also can serve to facilitate more honest conversations about why they are there. I think as a professional it is also important to be professional; this would include punctuality as well as using professional language when appropriate.

Another core element to my perceived professional identity relates to something that I have discussed in the paper previously: using scientifically-backed evidence. I think as a professional it is important to stay updated and to use techniques, information, and theory that have some basis to be used because they are backed by evidence. I have generally had a policy that if I am asked about something that I do not know or that I am unsure of that I will be honest with them and ask if I can get back to them on whatever they are asking for. Alternatively, I think it is important for professional counselors to know their limits and not work with problems that are beyond their expertise. Some examples of this could be treatment of eating disorders or trauma. In these cases it is important to understand that your training is not adequate for them and to refer them to a professional known to be qualified.

Perhaps the most important aspect of my professional identity is a value which I mentioned earlier: the pursuit of knowledge. I want to constantly be challenging myself professionally and personally to continue to improve and remain curious. I do not wish to ever become a counselor who feels as though they have all of the answers and has nothing left to learn. When I think about people who bother me or people who I do not consider to be smart one type of person that comes to mind is someone who thinks they already “made it.” I hope that I will forever be curious, eager to learn, and hungry for knowledge.

### **Plan for Continued Development**

As I had mentioned earlier, the constant and never-ending pursuit knowledge is important to me. I think that this principle can apply not only as a professional but also in my personal life. The ideas of intellectual curiosity, openness, and not getting complacent are things that can be generalized to nearly any facet of life.

#### **As a Professional**

As a professional I hope to continue to remain curious and open to learning new ideas. As of now, I have a significant interest in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy but I remain open to the idea that there are many other methods and ways of doing things that I may very well be open to trying as well. I hope to continue to learn about other perspectives such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy or even some of the family-based theories. Besides theories, I want to continue to develop my competence with various multicultural groups such as people who are LGBTQ+ or from different ethnic cultures from my own. Being able to work with a wide range of people is essential in order to be a counselor in the melting pot that is the United States. Most of all I want to make sure to remember that mistakes will be made, this is inevitable – what truly matters is what I do going forward.

#### **As a Person**

I think that a lot of the lessons one learns through the counseling perspective and theories are not just for our clients, we can take these and apply them to our lives as well. I would say it would be a bit arrogant to take in all of this information and assume that none of it could be beneficial for us too. I need to learn counseling perspectives, theories, and

techniques so that I can teach the information to clients and help them to be their own strength but it would be wasteful to not apply it towards myself. Additionally, I plan remember an old lesson that has proved to be true time after time: In order to get better, stronger, or more comfortable I need to seek out new challenges. This idea worked when I first took that job as an RA, when I took that job as a DSP, and it worked at times during my stressful but rewarding internship experience.

I have learned a lot about myself in the last few years and feel like I really appreciate who I am, this includes the strengths as well as the flaws. An area of my life that I have gained more insight on and that I want to work more on is being more open about sharing my emotions, especially when I am experiencing stress, anxiety, or sadness. One idea from ACT that really sticks with me is knowing what is important in my life and attempting to live and take action according to those values. The experiences I have had in this field have given me an appreciation for myself, my loved ones, clients, and the journey that is the human experience.

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