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Plan B Analysis of Self

Desirae Ganje
desirae.ganje@go.mnstate.edu

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Plan B: Analysis of Self

Believing in Me

A Project Presented to

The Graduate Faculty of

Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

Desirae Sue Ganje

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in

Clinical Mental Health Counseling

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Introduction

I chose to do the Analysis of Self because I feel this is essential to my growth professionally and personally. The title of Believing in Me was chosen for many reasons in how others and I have believed in me over my lifetime. One thing I do not enjoy is talking about myself so needless to say this was a difficult task to write an analysis of self. This analysis of self goes into many different areas in my life and tends to have some overlap in each area which is to be expected and will tie everything together.

Chapter I - Relevant Background Information

Culture

My culture can be defined in various ways. I am an American Mid-Westerner who was raised in a Dual Earner family that values high socioeconomic status, independence, initiative, large families and self-reliance. I was raised in a society of mostly Caucasian people of whom had very little diversity and/or acceptance of diversity. I initially thought everyone should be treated the same and thought that being treated that way was being accepting of everyone. I have learned that being treated the same doesn't necessarily mean you are culturally accepting or competent. Part of understanding culture is understanding differences and those differences is what makes us all unique in our own way. To accept others for their values, respecting those values and to not judge them but encourage is to be competent.

Relationships - Family

The most impactful relationships in my life are my familial ones. Currently it is a toss up between my sisters and my daughter and I only say this because my sisters have been a huge impact because they have been there all of my life of course otherwise I would say my daughter is my first. Most people who know me know that my daughter is my life because most everything I talk about includes my daughter in it. My daughter just recently turned three and is so much fun at this age, full of learning, growth and love. I never knew for sure if I wanted to have children because of my upbringing but I am so thankful for her she encourages me to be a better person every day.

I am the youngest of five girls and although I was born in a small town in North Dakota we moved to a home in Colorado shortly after I was born until we moved back to North Dakota 5 years later for a job opportunity to my step-dad and being closer to family.

Backing up further; my mom met a man when she was in high school and married him; Ronald Metzger, at the age of 19 and started having children shortly there after. Ronald cheated on my mom through out their marriage and would often brag about it to her and to his friends, being Catholic at that time divorce was not recognized as an option. I knew have always seen Catholicism as strict and I don't understand why there would be a blind eye to adultery. My mom strayed as well and had an affair with her boss who is now titled as my stepfather. The reason I say, 'titled' is because my mom had intimate relations with him and Ronald on the same evening. Her boss' name is Rick and she had intimate relations with him and then went home to her then husband Ronald and as a dutiful wife she answered to his request and had intimate relations with her husband and I am pretty sure to not make him suspicious if she turned him down and 9 months later I was born. To this day I do not know who my biological father is and have decided at this time it best not to know. The reason I have decided to not get a test to determine who my biological father is because of the hurt it may cause for others, not just relatives but both fathers and myself. Believe me when I found out at 23 I was in utter shock and instantly wanted to find out but I didn't know what at the time what was stopping me. Maybe it was just the financial aspect or the drama that would become of it. When it comes to health issues and determining the rate I would pass anything on is minimal as there is no reported diseases on either side and both Ronald and Rick are alcoholics and have a history of alcoholism in their family. Ronald Metzger is on my birth certificate and according to him I am his biological daughter. When I found this all out we were having a family meeting with my mom and sisters at the request of my mom and she told us this story. I still remember everyone's face turning to look at mine as though it were yesterday and even though I was 23 I was still at a loss of how to process it all. I just kind of froze and didn't know what to say as did everyone else and no one really spoke of it again. My

stepfather has always known this and I at first felt angry with the both of them for not telling me and not telling me alone without my sisters being there. I still wish to this day that they would've told me alone at first so that I didn't have all of those eyes staring at me waiting for a reaction.

My stepfather I would have to say is the one who raised me and most influential on me. My stepfather was a loving, loyal and hardworking man but was an alcoholic and still is an alcoholic. Not until I became a grad student did I realize his alcoholism had an impact on me in several ways including my peer relationships, romantic relationships and at times my professional relationships. I wanted to learn more about this and how this has impacted me so I decided to seek counseling for my relationship and commitment issues with men. I was given some guidance on books to delve into from my counselor. There is much literature to support the effects parent alcoholics has on children into their adulthood more commonly known as Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA).

Common Characteristics of Adult Children of Alcoholics

- Fear of trusting
- Debilitating guilt
- Loyalty to a fault
- Hyper responsible or chronic irresponsibility
- Need to be perfect
- Counter dependent / Fear of Dependency
- Need to be in control / difficulty in spontaneity
- Guess at what normal is
- Difficulty hearing positives and difficulty with criticism
- Please or defy others
- Overachievement or underachievement
- Poor self work or shame
- Compulsive behaviors
- Continual trigger responses
- Addictions

- Living in anxiety and fear
 - Need to be right
 - Denial
 - Fear of conflict and normal anger
 - Chaos junkies
 - Fear of feeling
 - Frequent periods of depression
 - Fear of intimacy
 - Repetitive relationship patterns
 - Fear of incompetence
 - Hypersensitive to the needs of others
 - Fatalistic outlook
 - Difficulty relaxing or having fun
 - Discounting and minimizing pain
 - Resiliency strengths
- (Middelton-Moz & Dwinell, 1986)

After noting these characteristics it is important to note that not all thirty characteristics are required for a person to have been effected by Adult Children of Alcoholics. These characteristics are used in childhood to save the child's emotional life (Middelton-Moz & Dwinell, 1986). I can relate to many of these characteristics not only as a child but they have matriculated into my adult relationships. I depended on myself rather than others as a child because of the inconsistency and lack of predictableness, which contributes to my lack of trust in others and myself.

I have been to counseling a few times for various reasons and have had various reactions to each experience. I would say the experiences have mostly been informative and helpful. Once I described my childhood to a therapist and with her meticulously placed questions it was realized that my childhood was very chaotic with very little guidance mostly because my mom and dad were gone a lot and my sisters and I pretty much raised ourselves. My mom worked a lot and finished her degree when I was around 10 years old and my dad would often be at the local bar after he was done with work. I was recommended by my therapist a few books to read; *After*

the Tears: Helping Adult Children of Alcoholics Heal their Childhood Trauma and *Running on Empty: Overcome Your Childhood Emotional Neglect*. These books have helped me not only personally but also professionally with my clients. They have helped me to better understand why I have had trouble in certain areas in my life and to be more aware of these idiosyncrasies. I learned that because of my childhood emotional neglect I often falter in the path or criticism and second guess myself and my decisions because I was unable to establish my sense of self through feedback from my parents. I have been guilty of this aspect for so long but I feel I have gotten better over the few years in graduate school. Overcoming this has been difficult and will be an ongoing process.

I have a particularly interesting relationship with each one of my sisters. I will start with my sister Kari of whom I shared a bedroom with growing up. She kind of took my under her wing in a sense that she always tried to be my mother. I very much resent her for various reasons mostly being that I looked up to her so much and she did manipulate me in several ways. I would diagnose this sister as textbook narcissist. She is never wrong and you are always to do it her way or face the wrath of Kari. I try to block out the instances that I have had that wrath of Kari so it is hard to explain what they are like but she definitely explodes on you with every mean thing she can say about you for something she thinks you may have done big or small. I have often contemplated suicide after she has unleashed her wrath and I am not the only sister that has stated this. Each one of us sisters has felt the same way when Kari has unleashed on us. It is like she finds our weaknesses and feeds into it. When I was 16 there was one night when all of us sisters got together and played drinking games at her boyfriend's house and yes this was one of the few times that I had drank in high school. What a great influence my sisters had on me growing up! The last thing I remember from that night was hardly making it to the bathroom to

throw up and then passing out in the bathroom until I woke up on a strange bed in my own vomit with my pants at my knees, I don't know how I got onto that bed but I woke up with a man's hand violating me in a sexual manner. I felt nauseous but was able to get out the words, 'who are you?' I heard him laugh slightly at my words and realized it was my sister's boyfriend. I did as best I could to get out of the bed and pull my pants up. I was still at Kari's boyfriend's house and this man followed me up the stairs and hung his head when he saw me. At that point I darted out of the house and walked home in the middle of winter in my t-shirt and jeans. So many thoughts had jumbled through my head that night. Did he think I was Kari? Why did he do this to me? Did I do something to make him want to do this? Where was my sister at during all this? Where did everyone go? The next time I spoke to my sister was months later and she said, 'Why haven't you talked to me, did (her boyfriend's name) do something to you?' I burst into tears. She broke up with him for different reasons prior to that conversation but had gotten back together with him after that conversation and has now denied it ever happened. She is now married to him with three children. A few members of my family know what he has done yet my sister still denies it so it often makes me feel as though her anger is also stemming from this incident. I have honestly forgiven him for the incident but I have not forgotten it and I haven't forgiven my sister for the denial and blaming she had done to me.

I have a stepsister who is Rick's daughter and her name is Lisa. All of us sisters would always be so excited when she came to visit because mom would buy the good food for her and it was like having a new friend. She moved to our house when I was 15 to do her first year of college at that point my mom was working out of town and my dad was still drinking every night. My stepsister was given my room and I was told to share my room with my sister Kari but at that point my sister and her narcissistic tendencies decided she deserved her own room

because our stepsister had her own room. What this all meant was I didn't have a bedroom for that year she was living with us. With my mom working long hours and my dad coming home drunk late at night there was no one for me to turn to. I slept on the couches and my clothes were in baskets in the laundry room. I wasn't allowed to use my sister's bathroom so I waited for my parents to leave from work and I would use their bathroom. I would clean up the bathroom as best I could after I was done so that my parents wouldn't find out I was using their bathroom. For as little time that I was able to see my parents and all they had to deal with when it came to my siblings I didn't want to worry them with my selfish needs of having a bed to sleep in. I am honestly not being sarcastic saying this because that is what I was thinking at the time. All I wanted was to be happy when my parents were home and to enjoy the time I did have with them. Which leads me into my Childhood Emotional Neglect. Childhood Emotional Neglect was a new concept to me but makes a lot of sense with what I was raised upon. Yet again another back story; my mom's dad died of cancer when she was two so she had never really known him and her mother was an alcoholic who spent most of her days at the local bar while her sons and two daughters tended to the farm and my her mom died when my mom was 28 years old. As behaviors or familial upbringings can be passed from generation to generation it was in my mothers case and mine. My mom was raised neglected and didn't view how she raised us as neglecting us. Even though it was a different way of neglecting it was still neglectful. My mom never did have any substance use issues and actually went on to become a Respiratory Therapist.

Relationships - Peers

Peers have always felt to be a difficult avenue for me. I would say I have varying degrees of friendships from friends I have had for several years to friends I make in passing or at my daughter's classes. One note to mention is that my high school friends, if you want to call it that,

did not make it into my post high school life. I had a social life and was in several sports and went to a few parties here and there but there was never really anyone that I really connected with. I had a group of friends but often they would do things that I did not prefer to do which was mostly just marijuana and drinking alcohol a lot. I probably drank a total of 3 times through ought high school and each time it was a pretty terrible experience in that I would drink way too much and would get very sick. I made friends easily once I made it to college and there after and I feel as though a lot of the friendships I have made people have moved away or have families now so that it is very difficult to reconnect. I have made a lot of my lasting relationships in college. College was and is a breath of fresh air for me as you do not have the stressors of high school and what clothes look cool and if you have enough money to show off. College to me has given me the avenue to find myself as they say and learn more about differences of opinion and that it is ok to have differences and that having those differences it what makes people unique and interesting.

Relationships - Romantic

At the young age of 14 I met my first crush and stayed interested in him all through ought high school even though I dated or shall I say had other boyfriend's in high school. My crush knew I existed but never really pursued me and I feel as though I may have been too boring because my friends that would drink a lot or go out more often he dated them all. I wouldn't totally blame my friends, as I never really told anyone my feelings toward him although I thought it was obvious. After high school as I mentioned in my peer relationships I made friends easily I also made male friends easily which is something I am not particularly proud of but as I reflect back now I realize a lot of things about how I pursued men and that was mostly for a physical connection and just expected the rest to fall into place. When those relationships failed

miserably I was always very heart broken. I would put my all my effort into the relationship.

Looking back now I see that those relationships failed because I was only searching based off of a physical connection because I honestly did not have a strong sense of self. I did not realize connecting meant in many ways and not just physical.

Marriage to Divorce

I met my current ex husband Tom when I was 23 he was very attractive, tall and handsome. My family liked him and everyone around him liked him and said he was a great man who was always giving and funny. He gave me attention and I was in utter shock that someone like him would give me the attention that he did. Early on I saw his tendency to drink a lot of alcohol. Being our age of 23 I didn't see this to be too big of a red flag at the time and growing up with an alcoholic father who drank himself to pass out every night I didn't think Tom was that bad. Looking back now we didn't live together so how was I to know how much he drank. There were a few red flags like seeing him drink in the morning was weird or how often he would bring beer to my place. At the time I thought he was just being nice and stocking my fridge so I didn't have to. We dated and were engaged at the age of 29 I moved in after getting engaged and realized some more red flags but thought that maybe it was still just a stage that he would grow out of. I was starting to get scared of how often and much he drank and made a plan to leave him so this was causing me to close him off and we would fight often. One night he did not come home and I became very scared. I drove around all night looking for him and called his friends and family I was about to call the police when his mom called me and told me not to and that is all she said. A few hours later Tom came home and kicked me out of the house without giving me a reason why. I was left in shock. Although I thought of leaving him because of his drinking and planned to do it I didn't know what to think. After a few weeks he confessed to me that he

had slept with another woman, yet again I was shocked. Everyone talked about how great and wonderful this man and mostly how much he loved me. I don't know what brought me back, maybe the sound of him sobbing when he told me I don't know but I forgave him.

I was in Mexico and it was the night before we were to be married and I was reading my vows I had spent months working on our vows. I took a peek at his vows and his were considerably shorter than mine and I couldn't handle the temptation so I read them. I bawled my eyes out because in that moment I realized I was making a huge mistake. This man did not know me I was only marrying him because of the safety net he provided and that everyone approved of him. What was I to do when all of my family and his family traveled to another country to celebrate our wedding? We were married and I tried my best to make the best of it and try really hard to make it work. His alcoholism turned to violence mostly emotional towards me. He was physically aggressive and often in a sexual manner. Rather than arguing with him I would let him have sex with me. He had to know from my tears and resistance that I did not want to but often he would not care or the alcohol made him oblivious to it.

I was told many times that it would be very difficult for me to get pregnant as I have low to minimal levels of progesterone to produce a pregnancy. My daughter was a blessing and the strength I needed to get out. I didn't want my daughter to be treated the same way I was being treated and feel that it was acceptable because that is the way her dad treated her mom. Sawyer was a little over 1 when I left. It was the scariest thing I ever did. For the first few months I really was alone. Tom did not want to have anything to do with his daughter. I understand not wanting to be around me but I felt guilty when he would not speak with her. It has been two years now and things are better, not ideal but they are better. Tom was able to get a lawyer that somehow finagled \$40/month in child support to me with 50/50 custody. Tom only sees Sawyer every

other weekend. It's hard because I do want Sawyer to have a good relationship with her father but I fear his drinking so much, maybe the every other weekend thing is enough. Tom grew up in a family where the mom was reserved and quiet and did not have much of the say. His father was a Marine and he describe a very strict upbringing from his father. Tom told me repeatedly through our relationship that he would not see a therapist and did not believe in them, even when I was going to school to be one. I often thought, "wow who did I marry?" I learned that with all the factors at play with Tom; strict upbringing, multi generational substance use and his stubbornness this was an uphill battle that would not be resolved and its impact on myself and Sawyer would be detrimental. I have grown so much since I left him 2 years ago and have been able to see myself again and not live in fear like I was. The process is still ongoing and was not an easy start but I do not regret it.

Chapter II - Academics, Career and Work

I always enjoyed school and found the positive feedback from my efforts that I would get from teachers and my parents would be very fulfilling. I was never afraid to speak up in class or talk to my teachers and classmates if I had questions unless it was Chemistry or Physics those classes went right over my head and out the window. I do not have too many memories about elementary school except that I was always shy. As I reflect I do know that it wasn't realized that I needed glasses until about 2nd grade so I was a little behind from the start. I also remember getting positive attention from teachers and my parents when I did well academically and I very much enjoyed that attention so I always tried hard at my schooling. All throughout junior high and high school I also worked at my dad's grocery store as a checker some evenings and every weekend. I ran into the obstacle of being treated differently because my dad was the manager and if I was given a day off or allowed to leave early or come in late or any accommodation for that matter it was looked at as favoritism so I figured it would be better to try another entry level job so that I would be able to feel a sense of independence and not have a predisposed idea of who people think I am so I worked at a fast food restaurant my senior year as well as my first two years of college.

I was tall, slender and enjoyed athletics in high school and was often told I should be a model because of my height. I didn't have a lot of direction in college so I started at NDSU with a major in Apparel and Textiles and my first year thinking I would be able to move to New York and become a major fashion model. When I woke up and realized this was a very unrealistic dream because I was terrible at fashion and being creative in that aspect and the most awkward and clumsy person you will ever meet. I tried my second year away from home to pursue Cosmetology and worked in that profession for three years. I felt very unfulfilled in this

profession and didn't like the family time that I would miss working nights and weekends so I took a Monday thru Friday job working in health insurance. I had no interest in health insurance and to be honest I didn't know I was working in health insurance until after I was hired and I did a little more research. This job was quite the awakening and was difficult at first but it was nice to have weekends, evening and holidays off for once so I stuck to it and really dedicated myself to this job. I was able to be with my family and friends on the weekends and at that point that is all I was striving for. This started to wear thin when health insurance particularly Blue Cross Blue Shield came under scrutiny for spending member's dollars on extravagant trips for its employees. I did not see these trips but far up executives did and it changed the perspective of providers and members had on health insurance and as I was in customer service the job became a lot more stressful and I would often have panic attacks. One day I was brought by ambulance to the hospital and a scan of my heart was done and nothing was wrong but my doctor gave me a prescription for Xanax and at that time I didn't realize what Xanax was and never filled the prescription and just decided to maybe take on a different part time job to distress. A friend of mine called herself a 'big kid baby sitter' and said she worked at the Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch Treatment Center. She made the job sound super easy and fun so I applied and my first day a girl was in seclusion and screaming and yelling obscenities at staff. I actually felt like I was back home and enjoyed the job. It felt like second nature to calm others as I did at home and in customer service but this time it was children and quite fulfilling. This is when I decided to go back to schooling for Psychology; I finished my degree in Human Development & Family Science with a Minor in Psychology. I continued my career at Luther Hall, which is also a Residential Treatment Center for at risk youth. I never thought of graduate school until I met one of the Counselors at Luther Hall and admired her ambition and mostly the respect and admiration

she gave back to me. I was asked in my undergrad to interview someone I admired in my field and I interviewed her and I was hooked and given the motivation that I needed. I applied to NDSU and was told I was a shoe in with my grades and my references but I was crushed when I did not get in. I did mull it over for a short time and seriously thought about changing careers but it would break my heart all over again at even the thought of it. I went back to work with my head hung low and my coworkers asked about my acceptance and found out that all 7 people that worked at Luther Hall that applied at NDSU only one of my coworkers was accepted and that coworker could hardly speak English. I wondered if I was too plain and didn't stand out enough because I knew my references were great and my academics were a 3.8 GPA, not perfect but I thought pretty good. My coworkers asked me why I hadn't considered MSUM's program because they had already started their program for that year and I honestly didn't know they had a Clinical Mental Health Program. I spoke with Dr. Lisa Karch and she was so warm and inviting and she told me even though I missed the application deadline to register for some classes to see if I would enjoy the program and I did! My plan was to try to have children after ending the program at MSUM and as my sister had struggles getting pregnant for several years I was told I would have struggles as well. This was very far from the truth and I got pregnant right away. The pregnancy was a rough one but successful nonetheless. Up until I had my daughter I had always put my academics, career and work as priority one. These areas have faltered a bit now with having my daughter but this is an area that I do not regret or feel shameful about. I may not graduate with a perfect 4.0 and I may not be able to put in those extra hours like my mom always did but that is ok with me because I know my daughter is thriving with the attention, love and guidance she is getting from me.

My experiences at MSUM has been that of many; some good, some not so good but mostly impactful and has provided me with a great amount of growth. I struggle being able to adapt to the changes the program has endured since I started. Although difficult at times change is essential to growth in any area. I am thankful that I started when I did though or it may have been a lot more challenging had I started after Sawyer was born. The classes were great and I enjoyed every minute of them even when I was giving a final presentation in front of my entire classes two days before my due date. I even got the opportunity to go to National ACA Conference in San Francisco with several of my classmates paid by MSUM. That was an experience in of itself being that we had a very diverse group of individuals on this trip. I suppose it is a good thing that I appear young but not in this case on this trip because many of my classmates gave me grief for not going out each night to the bars. First of all I came on this trip to learn and enjoy a new experience but I can go to bars in my hometown. I didn't want to go out and drink because like I had stated I am not as young as I look and recovery for me even after a little intake of alcohol is substantial. Plus I was a new mom and in a different stage in my life than a few of the others. All in all the entire trip was definitely well worth it and a wonderful experience and I feel so grateful that I was given the opportunity to represent my school. In the back of my mind I was always worried about internship and where I would find a placement. There are so many students and so little placements in our area. Practicum and Internship have been a rough road for me. During the entire process I have found it difficult to find sites that can accommodate to the schedule of a fulltime working single mother. I didn't plan on having the mother title or the single part. I was planning to not be working during internship and letting my husband take the reigns while I finished. I suppose that title is a lot for sites to take when they have so many different and capable students to choose from. My practicum was required to be in

the Counseling Outreach Center which I very much liked because of the accessibility to the age group of college students I aspire to work with as well as the community but found it very difficult to get hours, so much so that I had to use my first 16 hours of internship and apply it to my practicum. My placements were all very different and I have learned a lot from each of them. What I have found to be most difficult is trying to adapt so quickly to each of the sites and how differently they operate their businesses. I enjoyed working at MSUM's Hendrix Clinic and Counseling Center. I learned a lot from my supervisor there and at times I think she may have put a little too much faith in me by including me in a lot of the business aspect of the clinic. Hendrix had never taken on an intern before and most of the people that work at Hendrix have been there over 10 years so the change of having an intern I think may have been a little too much for them. I was one of the first new people they had had in quite some time except for the new director that hired me. I had a little trouble learning how they operated their clinic and I told one of the employees that I was getting all of the employees and their titles mixed up. The employee went to human resources and stated that I said, 'I get all you brown people with dark hair mixed up'. I will never forget that phone call from human resources and those words will forever ring in my head because I did not say those words and to have someone say such a false accusation against me was traumatizing. I instantly called CNSA Faculty and they had me removed immediately to protect me from any other false accusations from that employee. I was informed of the investigative process against that employee but I am not allowed to speak of that employee just that I was cleared and believed when proclaiming I did not make that statement. I was heartbroken to have left the clinic as I had really developed a group of clients that I was definitely learning from. Having to abandon those clients with of course no explanation was very difficult. Finishing my hours at the Counseling Outreach Center, which I am grateful for yet,

still worried about getting the hours I need. Prairie St. Johns had also accepted me to complete my hours as needed in their facility.

I currently work at Southeast Human Service Center, which is Department of Human Services for Southeastern counties in ND. I work with adults who have developmental disabilities. I am often mistaken for a Social Worker but that I am not. My title is a Developmental Disabilities Program Manager. I help my clients become connected in the community with providers, jobs, employment job coaches and a case manager. I oversee my clients and their team. I often do referrals for behavior analysts to join their team. This job has given me a lot of opportunity to get to know the resources in my community. Overall my experiences with my work history and internships I feel I do want to stay at Southeast but as an LPC of course. I would like to continue with obtaining my LAC Licensure as well at MSUM. Being from the Midwest and the experiences I have had with my internships I feel it is very common to have dual diagnoses and I do not want to limit myself in helping others by only having my LPC. I want to learn more how to help others with addiction and understanding it.

Chapter III - Activities, Hobbies and Health

Activities and Hobbies

My activities and hobbies have changed over the years but mostly I would say the one that has always stayed would be my athleticism. I have always been athletic and into sports with that being said that doesn't mean I was always talented at them I just enjoyed doing them. I enjoyed the feeling of having a group that I belonged to and enjoyed spending time with teammates and the time I had with my coaches. One area I have done lately is running marathons. My body doesn't withhold what it used to and it is rough on my joints but I find it very cathartic when I have the time to run.

I learned to crochet from my mom and enjoy this still as it is something I find relaxing as did my mother and she would take the time to sit down with me and teach me how and was always very patient. Mostly I enjoyed this because I got the one on one time that I so very much needed.

Mental Health

My mental health I believe began to go slightly off course once puberty hit in high school. My sisters were slowly leaving the home and my parents were falling apart as they didn't have as much to focus on but me often referred to as the Empty Nest Syndrome. My stepdad's alcoholism became worse as he was going to the bar after work almost every night. I went through my first break up and my mom was never home as she worked 60 miles from home and worked long shifts. This was when my first suicide attempt came about. I honestly feel that I was copying my sister as she had attempted it a few years prior and had gotten quite a bit of attention from my parents because of it. I was crying out for attention in the only way that I knew worked. In turn I did get the attention but only for a short time. A few of my sisters got into trouble from

drinking or trying marijuana and skipping school but the kind of attention they received was negative. I tried being active in sports and doing good in school but I was still being ignored and to little surprise I was given immediate love and attention from both of my parents. I tried my first round of counseling but the lady was older than my mom and it was quite strange talking to someone I felt was my grandma's age. I was put on several different medications and none of which worked so I ultimately went off the medications and never told my parents about it. My parents were never really concerned about it either. I went to college and being given so much freedom and so much attention from new people I essentially partied my first semester and only occasionally looked at my books and attended classes. I do not regret this experience even though it was an expensive way to start to find myself I still learned a lot about me and other people. I feel I was quite sheltered by my upbringing to my home and family life only. I wasn't given a lot of rules but I did learn from my sisters what not to do because they pretty much did it all and I was able to witness their consequences.

Physical Health

Finally an area that I feel I can brag about because I am in control of this area and have always taken pride in this area. I have always been into trying new physical challenges. Usually my sister would try a sport and then drop out after a week so someone had to fill the spot otherwise we wouldn't get our enrollment fee back, Yay for me! I wouldn't say I was an over achiever or broke any records but I definitely tried my hardest and had fun doing it. When I was roughly 16 or 17 I would sometimes have breathing problems and be short of breath. My mom would almost never bring us in to the doctor but this time she brought me in and she took me to a different doctor in a bigger town close by. I learned that I had Marfan's Syndrome. Marfan's Syndrome is a connective tissue disorder where people are often tall and slender and effects all

tissues in that there is high risk of aortic aneurysm, retinal detachment, and extensive, prolonged exercise is usually discouraged. This was tough for me because I was active in sports but as long as I didn't overdo it or become a professional athlete I didn't have to work too much. In my mid 20s I picked up long distance running and found it to be very cathartic and very time consuming which was ok when I was single.

Health Coping, Maladaptive Coping, and Stress Management

I did not fully grasp the term coping until I started my job working with children in residential treatment centers at about 22 years old. Coping was a highly used word in the world of treatment as we know. Many of my coping mechanisms were not brought to light until I started to learn what the residents were using for their coping skills. I would definitely classify my coping skills through ought my upbringing to be maladaptive. My sister was a freshman in high school when I first heard from my classmates that she had overdosed on Tylenol. I was not only shocked to find out from my classmates but also shocked because we were in different schools all together and I was in elementary school. I did not understand suicide at that time or even knew that this was something people do. I came home from school and my parents told me my sister would be gone for a couple weeks and not to worry. At the end of those couple weeks we drove to the big town of Fargo and I got to see where my sister was. My sister was at an inpatient psychiatric facility better known today as Prairie St Johns. I still didn't understand I thought my sister was just away at a camp that didn't allow them to have shoelaces or wear makeup. I didn't ask questions as I never did and my parents never offered any information I just kind of tagged along. We ended up having family therapy and it just seemed like a meeting where some strange person kept talking about my sister and my sister would get mad and my parents would get mad at my sister. To reflect I guess you could say my coping was to just not

talk about it and it will go away. My sister came home and my parents took her on a shopping spree and pretty much gave her whatever she wanted for the next couple of months. I was jealous but didn't know what to do.

Strengths and Resilience

My resilience would be my persistence to learn more and more about not only other people but myself as well. I may be an older than average student because of my not so ideal upbringing but I will not give up. I will not stop finding ways to help others and myself by being aware of why I may do the things I do. I feel my strengths are that I am a very good listener and always have been. My listening skills were embedded at a young age mostly because I was never given the opportunity to speak in most situations because my older sisters always out spoke me. I didn't mind all I cared was that everyone was happy. I always do my best to think positively of others. I work hard for what I believe in and think things through ahead of time. People often say that I plan too far in advance but I look at that as a strength in that I like to set goals and I like to help others in obtaining goals. I am very giving to those I care about.

Deficits

My deficits may be that I can be too trusting of others and not myself. I often feel guilty if I ask for help and I don't want to make other peoples lives difficult by taking up their time. These feelings are due to my early implanted notions from my family that you are a 'good person' if you do not need help. After a my academic probation at MSUM I learned a valuable lesson into trusting my gut and focusing on the bigger picture not only for my clients but for the profession as a whole. My dreams were almost shattered because of my lack of confidence and value in myself. Thinking in an ethical manner helps to guide me in the career of counseling and not to put it in a personal manner.

Chapter IV - Assessment

Myers Briggs Type Indicator

When taking the Myers Briggs Personality Assessment I am identified as the Defender Personality Type; ISFJ Introverted, Observant, Feeling and Judging. Strength characteristics of this personality type include; supportive, reliable, patient, imaginative, observant, enthusiastic, loyal, hard-working, and good practical skills. Weaknesses of this personality type are; humble, shy, take things too personally, repress their feelings, overload themselves, reluctant to change and too altruistic. I can relate to a lot of these characteristics on both weaknesses and strengths but some that would stick out to me are; hard-working, observant, and pretty much all of the weaknesses I can relate to. The added charts also do a good job of describing me in that I strive to keep harmony not only in the workplace but at home as well. Sometimes this can be overwhelming when it comes to the workplace for me because harmony at the workplace can be almost impossible depending on the workplace. Work places have a variety of people they serve and with that need a variety of people to help those people including the personalities being varied. Being an introvert I like to take my time to answer questions, which can sometimes get me into trouble with the extroverts that like an answer right away.

I make decisions on how I feel and how others may react to what I have said and take things way to personally. My only disagreement would probably be that last category of J and P. I feel I have characteristics of both. I like to be creative and spontaneous in my personal life but at work I like things to be orderly and preplanned.

Readiness for Change Assessment

After taking this assessment I was a bit confused because I scored high and similar in three of the categories. When this assessment is explained if you have two similar scores than you are in transition between the two. If I had to compare the two that I am in transition with I guess I would assess it as transition between Season of New Growth and Season of Significance. I can relate to the fact that I have made baby steps of change but I feel I am also very active in changing to impact in the life of others. I am the first in my family to go to college and even go beyond that fact into graduate school. Areas where I would benefit from more change would be to share what I have learned in a confident manner in which my family would benefit from. The activities that I have volunteered in to improve the process of living would be going to graduate school and pushing myself further and to stand up for what I know that I am capable of.

I feel change is important to embrace through ought life and to always be open to change in personal and work life and that change is synonymous with learning.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

I first learned of ACE's from my Trauma Informed Class at MSUM. ACE's are adverse childhood experiences that have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. These adverse childhood experiences can be linked to risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential and early death. I scored a 6 out of 10 on the ACE's test, which means I answered yes to having 6 adverse childhood experiences, which include;

- Did an adult at least 5 years old than you touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?

- Did you often or very often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special or your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
- Did you often or very often feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you or your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
- Was a biological parent ever lost to you through divorce, abandonment or other reason?
- Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?
- Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?

When I first conducted this test I just assumed others had around the same number I had but after discussing in class that the average was about 1-3 on the ACE's score. I am not saying I am the only one in my cohort that had a score like mine but I know I was one of few. I am glad I took this assessment to find out that my experiences definitely affected me into my adult life and that I needed to explore and process these adverse experiences before I could move on to help others. One step of my healing process would be doing this analysis of self and learning more about myself in a very in depth manner such as this project.

RIASEC

John Holland developed the RIASEC code for career personality types including; Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Entrepreneurial, and Conventional. After taking the RIASEC Career Assessment it shows that I am SIE; Social Investigative and Entrepreneurial. I included what each of these categories that I feel expresses me.

Investigative (Thinkers)

- Likes to study; generally avoids leading, selling, or persuading people;
- Is good at understanding and solving science and math problems;
- Values science; and
- Sees self as precise, scientific, and intellectual.

Social (Helpers)

- Likes to do things to help people -- like, teaching, nursing, or giving first aid, providing information; generally avoids using machines, tools, or animals to achieve a goal;
- Is good at teaching, counseling, nursing, or giving information;
- Values helping people and solving social problems; and
- Sees self as helpful, friendly, and trustworthy.

Enterprising (Persuaders)

- Likes to lead and persuade people, and to sell things and ideas; generally avoids activities that require careful observation and scientific, analytical thinking;
- Is good at leading people and selling things or ideas;
- Values success in politics, leadership, or business; and
- Sees self as energetic, ambitious, and sociable.

Another term used for enterprising is entrepreneurial and that term surprised me in that I am usually a follower but when explains as a category that likes to persuade people that may be

true. I do enjoy analytical thinking but can sometimes get lost in my thoughts because I usually think of too many things at once and exhaust myself.

Spitzberg and Cupach's Interpersonal Communication Competence

I chose this assessment because I often look at myself as awkward when it comes to interpersonal relationships. I feel the awkwardness helped me to work with children and adolescents which first sparked my interest in the field of help and counseling others. Growing up with a house full of women that always over powered me I felt it difficult to speak up and never really got the chance to speak up and essentially learn how to effectively communicate my thoughts, opinions and ideas. I scored the highest in adaptability, empathy, and appropriateness. I was not surprised by empathy or adaptability but was surprised by appropriateness because I would often be inappropriate just to make others laugh. Maybe I have taken something out of graduate school and learned how to become more appropriate in my conversational skills.

Chapter V - Interviews with Significant Others

Who I Plan to Interview and Why

I chose my Mom for obvious reasons as to the fact that most women have the closest relationship to their mother. At times I do see myself as just like my mother but I also want to learn from her unintentional mistakes and not recreate them myself. I feel my mother was neglected and abused by her family members because of what she has reflected to me in her stories. Learning her outlook on me or how I have progressed can be beneficial.

I chose Sister #1 because she is very different from Sister #2. Sister #1 is very outwardly known as the sister that is the boss of the family and if it doesn't go her way then it doesn't go, plain and simple. Her perspective still gets me riled up sometimes even though I know better to be aware of her brash thoughts but it is always interesting to hear what she will argue about next. She had no problem letting you know what you are doing wrong in any situation. It took me a lot of courage to interview her but I know I needed to as part of this process.

Choosing Sister #2 is a tough one because of our history and I wonder if she will tell the whole truth. To elaborate on our history we were both victims of sister #1's bullying and my mom tried to have our biological dad take Sister #1 for a summer or more to provide us with reprieve but he wouldn't do it so my mom thought to send one of us victims so that we could have a break from her and she sent Sister #2. Ultimately it caused Sister #2 a lot of pain and feelings of abandonment that has very much affected her still to this day. She is often not involved in family functions because of her anxiety surrounding this. It may be tough but I feel it to be absolutely necessary to not only see her perspective but to see if it matches mine and if it doesn't then I can reflect to see why it doesn't.

My friend of 15+ years is important to this project because she has known me for a long time but she has also known me in a few different stages in my life from the partying college freshman to the single mother graduate student. I could rephrase that into the lost college freshman to the ambitious, striving to learn graduate student.

Lastly I am newly divorced and have been seeing a man who is 10 years younger than me. It is nothing serious at my request even though he would desire it to be more. I know parts of my weak areas in life are in my romantic relationships no thanks to my alcoholic father(s). I chose him because he has been very helpful in pushing me to try harder at many things and namely to open up more by being persistent with questions about myself.

Interview Questions & Answers

1. What was your impression of me when you first met me vs. now?

Mom - "My little baby and I loved that you followed me everywhere. And that I am so proud of you."

Sister #1 - "Growing up a people pleaser and always ready to go along with the flow and could make anything fun and now the same thing except more independent. Now you like to add your own choices rather than just being passive."

Sister #2 - "Growing up my first memories you were definitely a snuggle bug and loved a little extra attention and you were attached to my leg. I think you have developed a range

of independence when it comes to that but you still love a extra a little attention but not too far off from how you have always been. “

Longtime Friend - Oh my god that was yup 16 years , you were a party girl because you like to go out and have and my impression has changed because you have applied yourself as a school and as an equal mature adult. I first thought of you as a little sister.

Boyfriend - I thought you were vulnerable and now your more confident in whom you are.

2. What is one thing you would change about me and why?

Mom - “Take away the pogo stick!” “Just kidding I wouldn’t change anything”

Sister #1 - “ I would change how you discipline your daughter and I think she should have time outs and you should start now. Your just like mom and you want to have a friend and you want her to love you and that gets tied into discipline, you still love your daughter very much but it breaks your heart but your teaching the respect aspect (my husband) cant discipline either but mom did the same thing to you she wasn’t as hard on you because there was four and she was going through a divorce and you were parented more than us. And you

turned out great but you were parented great the first 15 years of your life but I think you're too nice. "

Sister #2 - "Be more open to different walks of life. "

Longtime Friend - I don't know that is a hard question and I don't know that there is and we are all so individually unique and if we are all than that is no fun.

Boyfriend - You need to have more self-confidence.

3. What did you think when I chose you to be part of my thesis project?

Mom - "I was apprehensive about it but once you explained it to me I felt better about it."

Sister #1 - 'You have no one else to interview and it will help you grow as a person and it is a good opportunity you to grow and learn about your family.'

Sister #2 - "Thank you for getting me away from (Sister #1), Just kidding I thought sounds like fun lets go"

Longtime Friend - Probably because we have been friends so long and we have an understanding that we both love each other like family even though we aren't.

Boyfriend - You want my input?

4. Use three words to describe me?

Mom - Tall, Self-Sufficient, and Good Mother

Sister #1 - Out going, Life of the party, Beautiful

Sister #2 - Productive, Intuitive, Moody

Longtime Friend - Tall, Goofy, Genuine

Boyfriend - Smart, beautiful, sexy

5. When you first met me did you think I would be a therapist?

Mom - “No, because you went for cosmetology but I was glad you did because I wasn’t satisfied with you going for cosmetology.”

Sister #1 - “When you went for fashion I didn’t think you would finish because there is nothing here but I didn’t think you would go for psychology either and I knew you would go into a field of helping people but not psychology.”

Sister #2 - “No, because I think it might be a big sister thing like when you ever really came to me for a heart to heart you came for guidance yourself I always thought you

would pursue modeling or cosmetology but once you started it made sense from where you were at in life.”

Longtime Friend - No I did not because when I first met you, you were so into fashion and wearing fancy clothes and living in New York.

Boyfriend - No because when I met you and you weren't at your highest point in your life and had just gotten a divorce.

6. How can I be a better therapist?

Mom - “Draw from your own experiences but don't be biased when your helping others.”

Sister #1 - “This is something I know I need to work on more is to listen more on other peoples problems and not compare them to my own. As a nurse I think you need to do A, B and C but it so different for every person. Listen to what they are saying and give them more options to fit them even though it may not be the option you like.”

Sister #2 - Open-mindedness

Longtime Friend - Last couple times I have talked to you I felt like I was in therapy. You tend to remember a lot of random little details that I forget. This is something that I have always appreciated and you are going to be such a kick ass therapist.

Boyfriend - Helping people the way you want and not someone else's opinion and trust in yourself.

Assessment of my Interviewees

My mom and I are very similar and after interviewing her I feel as though I probably shouldn't have because I didn't really get anything out of interviewing her but that realizing her answers were as predictable as I thought they would be. It did help my anxiety to interview her first because she of course complimented me and told me how proud she was of me.

Interviewing my sisters was more difficult and caused my anxiety to be pretty high. The toughest question was taking their feedback from the question of changing one thing about me. Most notable with this question was my sister that stated she would change my parenting. After watching our video a few times I felt better about her statement because I feel like she contradicted herself many times. She said I parent my daughter like my mom did to me and that I turned out fine. She would then say if I continue to parent her the way that I am my

daughter would have a lot of troubles. I do see that I can be somewhat passive with my parenting when she sees me at our family gatherings but at home my daughter and I have a pretty good system and I feel my daughter is not as needy when she is more familiar with her surroundings. When I am around family or a bigger group my daughter may be clingier but I feel that can be because it is different than she is used to. Sister #2 was a bit vague in her answers and I was hopeful that she would be more extensive in her answer. I did learn that of my family interviewees they all see me as less dependent on others. I can look at that in a few different ways. Firstly I can look at this as a positive that I am more independent but I guess my opinion of myself 10 years or even 5 years ago would be not a dependent person but a person that would always help others and mostly my family. I feel I have separated myself more and more as the years have gone on in an attempt to find myself and to not let my family take advantage of me as much.

My long time friend Aria, I met in college in 2001, we were suitemates in the dorms and we were totally different people when we met. She was a homeschooled sophomore in college who didn't really care about how she looked towards others and only cared in her academics. I would say our relationship was more to start as probably someone who was

like a sister to me but in a good way in that she was a friend but wouldn't be afraid to tell me the truth if she didn't like me. I felt sometimes she was a bit harsh but I grew to appreciate it over the years. My favorite response from her was saying that she wouldn't change a thing about me because to her I am very unique and then life would be boring if everyone was the same. It was nice to have someone look at me without any predispositions like my family tends to do and I feel Aria can do that for not only me but for a lot of people she meets.

Lastly the boyfriend Brandon, I still feel weird having a boyfriend being that I have been married before and I guess that would also explain a bit into my relationship with him. I feel weird sometimes and still getting used to dating someone that is 10 years younger than me. I feel he is more of what I used to date before I married my ex husband. I loved my ex husband but I feel I loved him for the wrong reasons. I married him because my family was all in approval and he fit well into the family. Brandon is different in that he isn't a people pleaser as much as Tom was and Brandon only wants to please me and has very in depth conversations with me. To interlude to the questions I would say I was surprised by his answers but more surprised in the time it took him to answer my

questions. I had to argue with him to get him to be interviewed and he wanted to write the answers to me but I stuck to the code of interviewing so I could do follow up questions. I think this may all stem from him having a lack of confidence but I did learn that people do find me smart and interesting as he has shown me this in his dedication and persistence to push me everyday in my academics even though I can be a bit salty towards his persistence. I have also learned over the past few months with Brandon that Tom was definitely an alcoholic and unfortunately still is. I have learned that alcohol isn't a staple in life as I thought it was growing up with my dad. Seeing Tom drink as much as he did initially did not phase me because my father did the same.

Chapter VI - Theory

I would definitely have to use the Family Systems Theory to explain my life through a theory. Murray Bowen and focuses on the patterns that develop in families in order to diffuse anxiety developed this theory. A key generator of anxiety in families is the perception of either too much closeness or too great a distance in a relationship. The degree of anxiety in any one family will be determined by the current levels of external stress and the sensitivities to particular themes that have been transmitted down the generations. If family members do not have the capacity to think through their responses to relationship dilemmas, but rather react anxiously to perceived emotional demands, a state of chronic anxiety or reactivity may be set in place (Brown, 1999). This theory has eight interlocking concepts including; Emotional Fusion and Differentiation of Self, Triangles, Nuclear Family Emotional System, Family Projection Process, Emotional Cutoff, Multi-generational Transmission Process, Sibling Positions and Societal Emotional Process. I will go over a few that apply to myself and my family.

Emotional Fusion and Differentiation of Self

My differentiation of self has grown slowly but most extensively in graduate school. People with a higher differentiation have less emotional reactivity, have the ability to calm their emotions, can make more thoughtful and intentional decisions, don't give in to pressure from

others, are less vulnerable to stress, are independent, are less prone to triangulation, have the ability to extricate themselves from emotional entanglements, have fewer physical problems emotional problems and social problems, can have closeness with others without getting lost in the relationship and have more fulfilling relationships. People on the lower side of differentiation have more reactive relationships, difficulty saying no to people, are more critical and judgmental and are overly concerned about approval from others, are more prone to triangulation, disengagement conflict, have difficulty communicating directly, and repeat problematic relationships rather than learning. I feel I have raised my differentiation of self by managing my emotional reactivity and de-triangulating myself from my family.

Triangles

When researching theories the triangles is what first caught me in that I feel my mom and step dad often put me in the middle of their triangle. Bowen believed that when two people experience relationship tension they tend to pull in a third member to dissipate the tension. I myself triangulated in my marriage by switching our focus from our unfulfilling marriage by focusing on my ability or lack thereof of having children. I thought this would then encourage or give more validation to a divorce until I actually got pregnant. My parents divorcing when I was 18 they both considered me an adult or person competent enough to understand the concept of marriage and divorce in a way that I could take sides and they still do this today. I have learned to not take sides and to no become as emotional to the situation and not taking sides and seeing each parent as their own therefore differentiating myself.

Nuclear Family Emotional Process

The nuclear family emotional system or process conveys relationship patterns that govern where problems develop in the family. Tension levels depend on the stress encountered in a

family and how that family responds. My sister Kari was often the stressor brought about in our family as she was in and out of treatment centers due to suicide attempts, alcohol use, and skipping school. The focus was on Kari and her functioning and how we adapted to her and help her through her struggles.

Emotional Cutoff

My sister Marcy Jo fits this description as she was sent to live with our biological dad in Minnesota while we were teenagers due to Kari bullying her and my dad not willing to take Kari. Marcy Jo often does not come to family events and she makes it known that it is because she is the child my mom did not want no matter how many times my mom has explained the situation to her. We do often get mad at Marcy Jo for not showing up to family events because it upsets our mom. Marcy Jo also often calls her coworkers her family as well and if times are not well at her job she will say she has no one to turn to and that she has no family that support her when in turn she never reaches out to anyone.

Theoretical Conceptualization

Desirae's history would suggest that she did not have the opportunity to for adequate attachment to her mother and father as described father was an alcoholic and mother was absent due to working long hours and in a different town. With the lack of adult supervision in the home Desirae experienced minimal structure and guidance in several aspects including, peer relationships, academic support, and daily structured living. She often seeks the approval of others due to her negative sense of self. She disconnected from her emotions from the lack of support in the family of origin and bringing this into adulthood has made it difficult for her to connect with others and develop meaningful intimate relationships. To compensate for her negative sense of self she felt she needed to be married and with someone who was accepted by

everyone and left little regard to her own ideals as hers were limited due a low differentiation of self at this stage in her life. Goals for Desirae would be to continue on the path to differentiate self from others by being less emotionally reactive and de-triangulating from her family of origin.

Chapter VII - Impact of Self-Analysis on Myself as a Therapist

If I could say it in a word I would say anxiety. Codependency attributes to my inability to focus on myself and only on others making it quite difficult to focus my attention on me. Having the ability to understand myself in a more in depth manner and from different perspectives has helped me to not have anxieties about helping others with similar obstacles as myself. I can often compare myself to almost everyone and I think that may have been why I initially came into the counseling field because I have compassion for others. Not working through your own obstacles can create road bumps in the counseling process for your clients because these can create biases against how you develop your approach in treatment of that client. I read a lot of books to complete this project and I feel that has made me more competent for obvious reasons. As I had listed my books in the references section these books helped me to understand not only myself but a lot of the clients I have helped in the past and clients I am currently helping. In the book *Running on Empty* 12 parenting types were talked about and I didn't relate to every single one of them but I learned from each style and learned techniques on how to better understand a client that may have the same attributes.

Plan for Continued Development as a Person and a Professional

I plan to further develop myself as a person by continuing to challenge myself to try new things and to be open and nice to others and most importantly to continue to establish my self-concept. Professionally I hope to continue to go to conferences but I also hope to learn as many treatment modalities as I can of which that peak my interests are; Dialectical Behavioral Therapy Skills Training, Trauma Focused -Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Certified and Parent Child Interaction Training. Becoming more familiar with the need in the current demographic you are in is important as well. USA Today voted North Dakota as the, 'Most Drunkest State' which

leads me to understand the need of ND residents would be substance abuse counselors or commonly known in the field as Addictions Counselors. I would like to investigate what it would include to be licensed in this area and/or just more education in treating individuals with Substance Use Disorder.

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