COUNSELOR EDUCATION DOCTORAL STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES AS DEVELOPING GATEKEEPERS

by

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This phenomenological study sought to understand and describe the gatekeeping experiences of counselor education doctoral students and enumerate key influences in their learning and development. A national sample of 75 doctoral students responded to the descriptive pre-screening survey, and a sub-sample of 15 completed semi-structured interviews. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, two overarching or meta-themes and five main themes were identified pertaining to how doctoral students view their role as gatekeeper and how they learn and experience gatekeeping. Meta-themes included doctoral students feeling “in the middle”, especially between faculty and master’s students, and how they are working to address these uncertainties, called Navigating the Grey Spaces of Gatekeeper Development. Major themes were Perceptions of the Gatekeeper Role, Professional Relationships, Gatekeeper Contexts, Assessing Professional Competence, and Ways of Learning. Perceptions of the Gatekeeper Role revealed differences between how participants viewed gatekeeping as doctoral students and gatekeeping as future faculty for the profession. Professional Relationships described the influence of multiple roles, cultural contexts, and power dynamics doctoral students encounter as developing gatekeepers, and Gatekeeper Contexts described supervision and teaching environments where gatekeeping occurred. Assessing Professional Competence enumerates the various theoretical and practical influences in working with trainees, such as
developmental approaches and informal and formal assessments. Ways of Learning identified that role models and experience with gatekeeping were most helpful for developing gatekeepers but revealed concerns about who is gatekeeping the gatekeepers. Implications for counselor education programs, faculty, students, and other stakeholders are discussed, such as the need for increased use and involvement of doctoral students as gatekeepers, clearer expectations and supports for doctoral gatekeepers, and increased conversations around gatekeeping in content courses. Directions for future research are also discussed; there is a need for studies addressing cultural dynamics in gatekeeping and gatekeeper development and the gatekeeper development of neophyte faculty.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Background of the Problem

Ethical Foundations of Gatekeeping

To observe guiding ethical principles and program accreditation standards, counselor education doctoral students should receive the training and experience necessary to guide the development of master’s students to certain standards of professional competence, but little is understood about doctoral student development as gatekeepers (Rapp, Moody, & Stewart, 2018). As defined by the American Counseling Association (ACA), gatekeeping is “the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate” (2014, p. 20). Conversely, gate slippage refers to “a phenomenon when a supervisor does not instigate remediation with a supervisee after recognizing potential gatekeeping issues” (Dediego & Burgin, 2016, p. 180).

Gatekeeping is an important responsibility for counselor educators as enumerated in relevant professional and ethical codes, and doctoral students must also be prepared to protect clients and the profession by limiting access to a degree or licensure if students do not meet training standards (ACA, 2014).

The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) outlines gatekeeping protocols in general, denoting that gatekeeping is an ongoing process of evaluation of potential limitations of those under one’s charge and creating a plan and securing means for remediation, which could include dismissal or loss of credentials or licenses. Though the code refers to supervisors as those responsible for gatekeeping, other areas of the code denote that those serving in the role of counselor educator are expected to uphold this standard as well (ACA, 2014). The Code of Ethics (2014) further defines supervisors as trained counselors who oversee counselors’ and counselors-in-training’s
clinical work and counselor educators as counselors who are predominantly engaged in developing, implementing, and supervising professional counselors’ education and preparation. Program faculty and counselors who serve as off-site clinical supervisors are the most common examples of counselor educators and supervisors, respectively.

Remediation

In their 2016 standards, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) requires that all counselor education programs must have a policy in place for retention, remediation, and dismissal from a program, and this policy must be consistent with both institutional policies and ACA ethical codes and standards of practice (CACREP, 2016). Remediation is a process addressing and documenting observable deficiencies in student performance and providing a specific plan or means to remedy the observed deficiency. The two major outcomes of remediation can either be retention or dismissal, depending on the context and student’s performance. This portion of the gatekeeping process often falls to faculty and departmental personnel. Common areas requiring remediation, according to students who have undergone a remediation process, include willingness to self-reflect and receptiveness to feedback, counseling skills, and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries (Henderson & Dufrene, 2013). Typically, there are several stages or “gates” in the process to identify and remediate concerns, beginning with admission. However, up to half of programs may not have sufficient gates throughout the process, which may contribute to gate slippage (Bryant, Druyos, & Strabavy, 2013).

Gate Slippage

Despite CACREP requirements for minimal competencies and remediation plans, gate slippage still occurs (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). Many students may be unaware of gatekeeping
processes, despite having concerns about peers, leading to a lack of reporting of deficiencies among peers (Foster, Leppma, & Hutchinson, 2014). Combined gatekeeping intervention rates reported from both faculty and students indicate that approximately 21% of master’s students could be professionally deficient and, therefore, complete their program without remediation or intervention (Gaubatz & Vera, 2006). Additionally, only 35% of field site clinical supervisors of master’s students report gatekeeping concerns to counselor education faculty (Freeman, Garner, Fairgrieve, & Pitts, 2016).

These studies reveal deficits in both gatekeeping reporting and response within counselor training programs, thus suggesting potential deficits in gatekeeping training and application within the counselor education doctoral programs which prepare faculty, supervisors, and clinicians. In 2019 in Michigan, there were 22 noted sanctions as reported by Michigan’s Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA), primarily citing breaches in confidentiality, sexual misconduct, lack of good moral character, and negligence (LARA, 2020). As of June 2020, LARA reported six sanctions reported for counselor licenses. Counselor education doctoral students interact with master’s students in many capacities (e.g., mentor, supervisor, classmate) and could provide additional perspectives on gatekeeping of master’s students, as they may be easier to identify as professionally deficient through non-academic or peer interactions. Gatekeeping concerns may be identified from multiple sources, including doctoral students, and greater training and awareness of gatekeeping policies and procedures may increase the likelihood that these concerns are reported and addressed by both doctoral students and doctoral-trained faculty in counseling programs.
The Role of Doctoral Students in Gatekeeping

Though gatekeeping primarily falls to counselor education faculty and clinical supervisors, the 2014 Code of Ethics states that counselor education doctoral students also serve as gatekeepers, with the same ethical obligations as faculty, when they function in the role of counselor educators or supervisors. Doctoral students’ training and education requires that they function in the role of both a counselor educator and clinical supervisor, thus they are specifically charged with screening, remediation, and gatekeeping relevant to both teaching and supervision functions (CACREP, 2016). In addition to these ethical and accreditation requirements, doctoral students must also be aware of local institutional policies for gatekeeping.

Much of the research concerning training and experiences related to gatekeeping focuses primarily on doctoral students’ role as a supervisor and their supervision training (Falender, Shafranske, & Ofek, 2014; Freeman, Garner, Fairgrieve, & Pitts, 2016; Trepal & Hammer, 2014), rather than exploring the gatekeeper role and training with counselor educator or supervisor as the mechanisms for the practice of gatekeeping responsibilities. Additionally, doctoral students’ opportunities to serve in a gatekeeper role may be influenced by different experiences in a program, such as having a teaching assistantship. As a result, little is known about gatekeeping preparedness among doctoral students. Areas identified through existing studies indicate that further instruction in student evaluation and remediation (Dediego & Burgin, 2016), learning to evaluate dispositional qualities and characteristics necessary to the profession (Foster, Leppma, & Hutchinson, 2014; McCaughan & Hill, 2015), balancing multiple processes simultaneously (Gazzola, De Stefano, Thériault, & Audet, 2013), and making students aware of and helping them manage gatekeeping processes (Foster, Leppma, & Hutchinson, 2014; Gazzola, De Stefano, Thériault, & Audet, 2013); all of which may be important components of
gatekeeping training for doctoral students. Additional aspects for training could include formal instruction regarding departmental and university policies for gatekeeping and remediation, providing case examples from different roles (i.e., both teaching and supervision gatekeeping scenarios), and making students aware of methods of reporting and receiving consultation regarding gatekeeping concerns.

Given doctoral students’ unique positions and their opportunities to interact with master’s students in several professional and academic capacities, it is especially important that doctoral students be aware of, and exercise, ethical, educational, and program mandates to report deficiencies. Greater training and awareness of gatekeeping policies and procedures may increase the probability that concerns are reported and will better prepare them to serve in these roles as future counselor educators and supervisors. Despite ethical mandates to gatekeep in counselor education programs, very little is known about how counselor education doctoral students learn about and apply gatekeeping during their graduate training. Students appear to develop relevant gatekeeping experiences through academic and experiential learning in roles such as supervisor or through faculty mentorship, rather than learning to gatekeep via specific training (Dediego & Burgin, 2016; Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002; Majcher & Daniluk, 2009; Nelson, Oliver, & Capps, 2006; Trepal & Hammer, 2014). Such complexities associated with gatekeeping and training may partially explain the dearth of literature in the area of gatekeeping preparedness and gatekeeping training efficacy in doctoral programs (Rapp, Moody, & Stewart, 2018).

**Statement of the Problem**

Gatekeeping, though clearly defined in professional and ethical codes, is more complex than these definitions imply. In counselor education, gatekeeping is defined as “the initial and
ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate” in the ACA 2014 Code of Ethics (p. 20). Counselor educators and supervisors are identified as gatekeepers for the profession, and gatekeeping roles and responsibilities extend to doctoral students as counselor educators and supervisors in training (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016). It is reasonable to believe that a lack of knowledge about the content and efficacy of gatekeeping training for doctoral students who are current and future gatekeepers results in underprepared gatekeepers; and as a result, insufficient gatekeeping could then lead to gate slippage, where incompetent counseling trainees are not identified by gatekeepers and potentially go on to harm clients (Bryant, Druyos, & Strabavy, 2013; Rapp, Moody, & Stewart, 2018).

**Purpose Statement**

The objective of this study is to investigate and understand the gatekeeping training experiences of counselor education doctoral students in order to enumerate and describe their development process as gatekeepers for the profession and provide useful insights that could potentially improve gatekeeping training for doctoral students.

**Methods Summary**

This study will use a phenomenological approach to address the purpose and research questions. A pre-screening survey will be used to identify participants which meet criteria for semi-structured interviews. The sample will consist of a minimum of six current doctoral students in CACREP-accredited traditional counselor education programs with on-site clinics in the United States of America. The pre-screening survey will discern if participants meet the following criteria for the interview: completion of at least two experiences, assistantships, or courses in which participants have provided direct supervision or instruction to master’s-level
counselors-in-training. Semi-structured interviews will occur via Skype or phone and last approximately 60 minutes and will be analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

**Research Questions**

To accomplish the study objectives, the following focal questions will be addressed:

1. What are the gatekeeper experiences of Counselor Education Ph.D. students in CACREP-accredited programs?

2. How do Counselor Education Ph.D. students learn to gatekeep?
   a. What formal learning teaches Counselor Education Ph.D. students to gatekeep?
   b. What informal learning teaches Counselor Education Ph.D. students to gatekeep?

3. How do Counselor Education Ph.D. students understand their role as gatekeepers to the profession?
   a. How do Counselor Education Ph.D. students perceive their role in preventing gate slippage as gatekeepers?
   b. How do Counselor Education Ph.D. students identify when to gatekeep counselors-in-training to prevent client harm?

**Significance of the Problem**

Counselor education doctoral students’ preparedness for becoming effective gatekeepers as future faculty is an important yet insufficiently investigated subject within the counselor education literature (Rapp, Moody, & Stewart, 2018). As such, there is a knowledge gap concerning the gatekeeping training received by doctoral students. Such research could provide insights for improving the efficacy of gatekeeping training for doctoral students, improving program compliance with ethical and accreditation competencies for gatekeeping. Additionally, many doctoral students who become faculty members in counselor training programs may
benefit from increased training in gatekeeping and, ultimately, to prevent gate slippage in training programs.

**Terminology**

The definitions below represent how important terminology is conceptually used throughout this dissertation:

Gatekeeping: “the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate” (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014, p. 20).

Gates: stages in the process where gatekeeping is most likely to occur.

Gate slippage: “a phenomenon when a supervisor does not instigate remediation with a supervisee after recognizing potential gatekeeping issues” (Dediego & Burgin, 2016, p. 180).

Remediation: a process addressing and documenting observable deficiencies in student performance and providing a specific plan or means to remedy the deficiency.

Retention: when a student satisfies competencies and progresses through their training and development as a result.

Dismissal: when a student does not satisfy competencies, despite a remediation plan and intervention, and is counseled out of a program.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional Gatekeeping in Health Professions

Definitions and History of Gatekeeping

Etymologically, the term ‘gatekeeping’ or ‘gatekeeper’ has numerous formal and colloquial meanings, including the role one serves when they identify early signs of suicidality (i.e., Osteen, 2018), workers associated with access to health care in managed care systems (i.e., Krentz, 1995), or those who guard access to potential research populations (i.e., Walker & Read, 2011). Even so, gatekeeping as used throughout this dissertation refers to “the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate” (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014, p. 20). Although the origins of professional gatekeeping are unclear, parts of the Hippocratic Oath in 400 BC demand competent practitioners to deliver quality services for patients (North, 2002), sociological concepts of when an entity in power puts “certain individuals or groups in certain positions from which they can control access to goods, services, or information” (Scott, 2014, p. 270), or, more recently, licensure laws and ethical codes in various professions.

The development of what is known today as the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP) Standards began as far back as the 1960’s and went through many revisions and input by various specialties within the counseling profession, with formal accreditation processes occurring for programs as early as 1973 (Sweeney, 1995). Program specialties included in CACREP-accredited programs include clinical mental health/mental health/community counseling, rehabilitation counseling, school counseling, and college counseling, with other areas such as marriage, couple, and family counseling and counseling
psychology programs being mentioned as currently or historically relevant to counseling program accreditation (Sweeney, 1995). The formation of accreditation standards and the profession’s advocacy for licensure recognition has been fruitful, and Sweeney (1995) notes that the unification of these sub-areas of counseling during the 1991 Professionalization Directorate was critical in the recognition and professionalization of counseling as a unique mental health-providing discipline. Though national portability of licensure is still an unresolved issue in 2019, with states setting their own varied licensure requirements, all states now recognize licensed professional counselors (Sweeney, 1995; American Counseling Association, 2011). The development of accreditation standards, professionalization, and licensure for the counseling profession highlight the progress in standards and licensure within the profession, but its unresolved issues indicate room for growth, especially in the area of gatekeeping. Professional gatekeeping in other professions also helps to contextualize current gatekeeping practices within counseling and counselor education.

Medical Professional Training Programs

Prior to becoming licensed doctors, medical students go through an education, with progressively more practical components (i.e., rotations), culminating in their residency in which they function semi-independently in their intended specialty. Throughout this training progression, there are several areas where students may not meet academic, practical, or dispositional standards for the profession. A scoping review of 80 articles published in the last 10 years reveals that entrustable professional activities, that is the activities medical students are allowed and expected to gain competence performing under supervision, are important tools for gauging competency. However, further research is needed on specific sub-groups of medical students across multiple regions (Shorey et al., 2019). A study of 23 medical students during
their first two years of education found that participants felt pressured to appear competent due to expectations of patients, doctors, friends, and family, which could culminate in reduced patient safety (Stubbing, Helmich, & Cleland, 2019). For programs to gauge this competency, they should have sufficient methods and procedures in place, such as multiple types of exams and examiners and emphasize interrater reliability, to evaluate the effectiveness of medical education curricula (Green, 2001). One solution to ethically evaluate medical students’ clinical skills competence is the rise of simulation-based technology, in which students perform procedures which would otherwise be dangerous or invasive on real, live patients (Scalese, Obeso, & Issenberg, 2007).

Additionally, there is renewed debate in the field regarding competency-based medical education, which focuses on outcomes, ability, and learner-centeredness but de-emphasizes time-based curriculum (Frank et al., 2010). This shift in medical education has required paradigm shifts for medical education faculty, but proports to better gauge competence of students (Iobst et al., 2010). Long (2000) calls for its application in residency as well, indicating that current practice is a fixed-time period of learning in a specialty with ambiguous competence standards, whereas he believes competency-based residency would give students time to acquire and demonstrate that they have the knowledge to progress, perhaps even more quickly than within the current fixed-term system. However, the competency-based model is not without its problems, such as assessing competence in procedural versus nonprocedural fields (Long, 2000).

Holmboe et al. (2010) also acknowledge that there is room for growth in the application of this model, as competence-based assessment requires quantitative and qualitative measures, continuous developmental re-assessment, multi-contextual, and instructor experience with best practices; with any element lacking in the instructor’s assessment, the method becomes less
efficacious for teaching and evaluating students. Debate surrounds the lack of clarity around learning outcomes and concerns that competency-based curriculums overemphasize procedural knowledge and skills, but not other skills like communication or flexibility (Frank et al., 2010). Talbot (2004) criticizes this model as minimalist to the point of reductionism, and he asserts that the model does not allow for evaluating higher-order competence, as medical practitioner competence should be evaluated in nuanced degrees as opposed to a binary decision of present or not present. Jarvis-Selinger, Pratt, and Regehr (2012) echo these concerns about oversimplifying competence in the effort to more accurately measure it and call for more focus on role modeling and connectedness in the form of greater professional development. Overall, there is no consensus on what the approach entails in practice and, ironically, it has proven difficult to create competence evaluation criteria which are consistently implemented and directly observable (Leung, 2002).

There is similar debate in nursing, and training programs and supervisors are searching for better ways to evaluate nursing professional and clinical competence. Both nursing education faculty and site supervisors, referred to as preceptors, are the primary professionals responsible for evaluating nursing student competence. All nurses and nursing students must uphold the Nursing and Midwifery Council’s code of ethics and standards (Vinales, 2015). Vinales (2015) asserts the importance of protecting the nursing profession from students who do not meet the demands of their program or practical experience, but also notes that it can be a difficult and messy process for faculty and preceptors. Preceptors provide varied reasons regarding their decision to fail or not fail students; for instance, protecting patient safety or public welfare, safeguarding the nursing profession’s reputation, feeling responsible for the student, and wanting the student to have the opportunity for reevaluation (Dudek, Marks, & Regehr, 2005). Paganini
and Yoshikawa Egry (2011) also note that the aspirational ethical standards of nursing are often at odds with the realities of practice, and caution that many of the ethical standards referenced in the article (i.e., World Health Organization Global Competency Model) may be applied differently relative to the sociocultural context in which nurses practice.

After completion of academic coursework, nursing students proceed to clinical experiences with preceptors, which plays an important role in the application of knowledge and skills learned in the training program. Nursing student competency development is directly impacted by their independence in seeking out supervision from preceptors or supervisors (Moked & Drach-Zahavy, 2016). A 2016 study of 269 nursing students in their clinical experiences revealed that while clear communication, self-reflection, working with other students, and providing continuous care to one patient were helpful aspects provided by preceptors, students felt that too heavy of a workload, being supervised by too many preceptors or staff, and lack of a developmental approach to skills-building were detrimental qualities in a preceptorship (Jansson & Ene, 2016). These studies highlight the importance of the role and style of preceptors as supervisors and describe students’ experiences with successful and unsuccessful strategies for developing competence during their clinical experience.

Given the burden which falls to supervisors in the medical setting, in addition to their own medical caretaking duties, there have been several studies which have attempted to create objective assessment criteria for professional and clinical competence development. Some assessments have focused on teaching, learning, and knowledge acquisition (i.e., Hsu et al., 2014), whereas others have focused on the use of standardized patients to more objectively evaluate clinical, dispositional, and procedural skills (i.e., Kurz et al., 2009). Still more have focused on whether or not training programs are meeting competencies expected at the national
and international level, such as the Nurse Professional Competence Scale, which assesses 88 different competencies via self-report (Gardulf et al., 2019).

Evaluation of health professional trainees’ competence is a well-researched topic and has been given careful consideration across specialties within the medical field. An interdisciplinary allied health professions study of 189 students across two universities’ undergraduate athletic training and physical therapy and graduate physician assistant, physical therapy, and occupational therapy programs replicated results indicating that professional values and attitudes are not predictive of professional behaviors in practice (Harris, Kelley, Apke, Cleary, Varekojis, & White, 2018). The study also used the Professionalism Assessment Tool, producing similar conclusions with pharmacology students (Harris et al., 2018). Medical professions are in different stages of establishing, revising, or modifying their respective standards. For example, athletic training education programs are still developing standards to evaluate students, whereas previously discussed, medical doctor programs are debating which models are most preferable in practice (Colston, Seat, & Wilkerson, 2011). The evaluation of competence and the standards upon which to attach these competencies are ongoing conversations within and across the spectrum of health professionals.

**Mental Health Professional Training Programs**

Mental health professionals, while not likely to directly and physically harm clients, are still at risk of causing harm to the public if improperly trained. Forrest et al. (1999) comprehensively describe psychology training programs’ struggle with gatekeeping, using the term impairment to include diminished or incompetent performance or unethical behaviors, but state that definitions of impairment or problematic behavior vary within the literature and across programs, causing confusion about appropriate implementation of gatekeeping. Additionally,
Forrest et al. (1999) cite faculty misgivings to serve in what they perceive as a harsh, evaluative role as opposed to nurturing or supportive roles as psychologist trainers; the authors also identify relevant remediation, dismissal, and legal considerations for training programs. Similarly, internship site supervisors of psychology trainees are aware of problematic trainees but uncertain of how to intervene. Site supervisors report that they are uncomfortable intervening because of the emotional demands of the process, uncertainty of administrative and program support, and feel underprepared to evaluate supervisees with impairments (Gizara & Forrest, 2004).

Simultaneously, psychology training programs are identifying areas in which training is insufficient or in which there are higher levels of gatekeeping concerns, such as multicultural competence. A study of 259 graduate psychology trainees found that less than half of participants reported exposure to minority racial groups or minority sexual orientations with clinical work or program faculty representation, despite reporting over 95% confidence about working with both European Americans and cis-women (Allison, Crawford, Echemendia, Robinson, & Knepp, 1999). A 2004 study by Vacha-Haase, Davenport, and Kerewsky identified that more than half of professional psychology training programs did not have gatekeeping policies for evaluating student competence, despite the survey of program training directors finding that over half of programs had also dismissed at least one student in the past 3 years to due to inadequate clinical skills. Psychologist training programs are governed by American Psychological Association (APA) standards and ethical codes, which stipulate gatekeeping as an essential duty of programs (APA, 2012). More recently, Larkin and Morris (2015) still note that, although competencies expected of graduate-level trainees are more well-defined, practices for evaluating psychology trainee competence lag behind the current needs of training programs. For
the history of competency development and the delineation of the competencies expected from psychology trainees, see Fouad et al. (2009).

Despite APA training standards and clearly defined competencies for trainee evaluation, gate slippage was still an issue for psychology training programs. Research has since identified students as untapped resources in identifying and referring students with problems of professional competence to program faculty for remediation. Rosenberg et al. (2005) explored problematic trainees from the perspective of peers of problematic students and found that other students are aware of their problematic peers and are negatively impacted by them, but believe it is the faculty’s role to intervene and were uncertain of gatekeeping policies or procedures in their department. A phenomenological study of students who experienced remediation found that clarity of expectations is critical to the success of a remediation plan and that, without the perception of support from faculty and supervisors, students feel helpless and struggle to remediate (Kallaugher & Mollen, 2017). Additionally, a meta-synthesis of supervision in psychology found that supervisees feel uncomfortable disclosing mistakes to supervisors for fear of negative evaluation and that supervisors are unaware of the power differential in such relationships could harm supervisee development, making them less likely to disclose problems of professional competence (Wilson, Davies, & Weatherhead, 2016).

In social work, there is also ongoing debate about how best to define and evaluate competency. A study of practicing social workers identified that basic knowledge of social work and health care systems, strong interpersonal skills to navigate power dynamics and interdisciplinary work, the ability to work hard and independently with limited supervision, and a focus on self-awareness and professional and organizational development are the key competencies to be successful in the field (Nicholas et al., 2019). Additionally, Sowbel and
Miller (2015) recommend the inclusion of personality traits or dispositional qualities, gathered from social work students, faculty, and supervisors; traits such as agreeableness, moderate levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experiences correlated with site supervisors’ evaluations and grade point average.

The social work profession has also expressed concerns about the responsibility for gatekeeping within their profession, and Miller and Koerin (2001) suggest that site supervisors, sometimes referred to as field instructors, have the most responsibility for fulfilling this role. Gibbs and Blakely (2000) have published an “all-in-one” resource on the history, common problems, models, and legal considerations of gatekeeping in social work and even propose sample gatekeeping questions for program admissions and give templates for gatekeeping and remediation policies for training programs. However, Sowbel (2012) states that despite the available resources for gatekeeping, the quality of bachelor-level social work programs (BSW) is declining as the number of programs increases; Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, licensure test pass rates, and low starting wages in combination with increased program enrollment indicate that BSW programs are increasingly less selective in gatekeeping.

Marriage, couple, and family training programs have also weighed in on the issue of gatekeeping and professional competence. Storm et al. (2001) expressed concern about the effectiveness of family therapy supervisors as gatekeepers and indicated that a lack of formal and widely endorsed criteria for evaluating students and supervisees contributes to this issue in family therapy. Branson, Cardona, and Thomas (2015) use a case study to illustrate how to differentiate between normal developmental difficulties and gatekeeping concerns about competence, indicating that many marriage, couple, and family therapy (MFT) programs must satisfy both CACREP and American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT)
standards for competency. More research is still needed to better understand how MFT supervisors and trainees evaluate and view offenses warranting dismissal or remediation and how they identify whether or not a behavior is remediable (Demyan, Abraham, & Bui, 2018; Sampson et al., 2013).

Related mental health and education disciplines have also published on several of the gatekeeping concerns discussed previously. Almost 94% of music therapy programs (n = 32) report having recently had students with professional competence problems such as lack of music or interpersonal skill, lack of self-awareness, defensiveness to feedback or supervision, or emotional issues (Hsiao, 2014). Schmidt, Ybañez-Llorente, and Lamb (2013) proposed the Supervisor Evaluation of the Professional and Ethical Competence of Substance Abuse Counselors (SPEC-SAC) instrument to assist supervisors in using best practices to avoid gate slippage and continued ethical violations with addictions counselors. Counseling psychologist Oluwatoyin (2016) identifies the ten traits supported by empirical research for the ideal counseling psychologist: good listening, adherence to confidentiality, empathy, curiosity, self-awareness, openness to working with diverse people, general emotional and mental stability, tolerance, analytical, and creativity/flexibility. Finally, teacher educators describe competent teachers as “social, professional, communicative, informative, and educational” (Marfuga et al., 2013, p. 906), but have found that teachers are not being adequately prepared to fulfill these roles competently (Dewhirst et al., 2013).

Health professional training programs are all striving to better clarify what competent practitioners in their field need to be or do, regardless of a physical or mental health focus. Each field has its own unique challenges with defining competence and creating or maintaining updated standards for the evaluation of competence. Though some literature exists on best
practices for education or supervision, ethical decision-making models, or gatekeeping and remediation policy and process suggestions, little is understood about the actual process of how gatekeepers identify problems of professional competence, evaluate competence, and implement an intervention or remediation plan (or not). Additionally, students who witness or experience remediation indicate myriad areas for improvement throughout the gatekeeping process. Administrative support and collegial collaboration are not perceived as a surety for faculty or supervisors and students are not often clear on retention and dismissal policies and procedures. Gatekeeping is a longstanding and complex phenomenon in professional training programs in health and higher education and continues to merit further study and exploration in counselor education.

**Gatekeeping and Competency in Counselor Education**

Gatekeeping has many definitions, making it challenging to conceptually and operationally define and, thus, difficult to have a mutual and open discussion about it (Brear, Dorrian, & Luscri, 2008). One way of conceptualizing gatekeeping is through various competency standards (e.g., CACREP) that have been officially endorsed by professional organizations, such as the American Counseling Association (ACA). Literature and professional standards within counseling and counselor education often divide competency into three domains: (1) academic- or knowledge-based competency, (2) practical or skills-based competency, and (3) dispositional-based competence. For example, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) standards divide competencies into attitudes/beliefs, knowledge, and skills (Arredondo et al., 1996). Other competency standards use language indicating these subsets of knowledge, skills, or dispositional qualities and awareness (i.e., Burnes et al., 2009; Harper et al., 2009). Based on this conceptualization, gatekeeping can
be viewed as an assessment by a counselor educator or supervisor that a student is not meeting certain knowledge, skills, or dispositional competencies. The most prolific example of this type occurs via student evaluations as enumerated by the ACA Code of Ethics and the CACREP Program Standards.

**Ethics and Credentialing**

The ACA 2014 Code of Ethics mentions the importance of gatekeeping throughout. Gatekeeping is defined as “the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate” in the ACA 2014 Code of Ethics (p. 20). The Code of Ethics outlines gatekeeping protocol explicitly in section F code 6.b, where it denotes that gatekeeping is an ongoing process of evaluation of potential limitations of those under one’s charge and creating a plan and securing means for remediation, which could include dismissal or loss of credentials or licenses (ACA, 2014). This part of the ethics code references supervisors as those responsible for gatekeeping, but other areas of the code denote that those serving in the role of counselor educator are expected to uphold this gatekeeping standard as well. The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) further defines supervisors as trained counselors who oversee counselors’ and counselors-in-training’s clinical work and counselor educators as counselors who are predominantly engaged in developing, implementing, and supervising professional counselors’ education and preparation.

The Council for Accreditation and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) was founded in 1981, as the United States does not have a centralized, national authority for overseeing institutions of higher education (CACREP, 2019). Though state licensing boards or individual institutions may impose their own evaluation criteria, CACREP’s purpose is to
describe and promote quality of training and thus service in the profession of counseling, and it sets educational standards for all accredited counseling training programs. There are currently over 850 CACREP-accredited counseling programs across the United States and Canada, including both master’s and doctoral programs, and CACREP has about 165 core standards and sub-standards and over 60 standards and sub-standards per specialty area, which are updated and revised every seven years (CACREP, 2018). Although graduation from a CACREP-accredited program is currently only required by Ohio for licensure, CACREP is specifically mentioned in 27 state licensing guidelines and CACREP core curriculum areas are mentioned by 15 more states (Urofsky, 2013). Graduation from a CACREP-accredited program automatically meets the educational requirements for licensure in over 50% of the states (CACREP, 2013). The revision of the 2009 CACREP standards saw a shift from evaluation via institutional outcomes (i.e., graduation rates, employment rates) to evaluation via student learning outcomes (i.e., content knowledge, skill mastery) and the requirement for programs to include a comprehensive assessment plan for evaluating these outcomes (Urofsky & Bobby, 2012).

CACREP has advanced the profession in terms of educational quality and standards and in national recognition (Stanard, 2013). According to Baggerly and Osborn (2013) CACREP-accredited programs are more likely to require graduates to pass comprehensive exams than non-accredited programs; accredited programs are also more likely to dismiss students who consecutively fail comprehensive exams. CACREP aspires to heighten the quality of counseling services delivered by the profession and sets the educational standard for the majority of counseling training programs, which makes it integral to gatekeeping practices in educational and licensing environments.
Fully licensed graduates of CACREP-accredited programs are not sanctioned for ethical violations as frequently as those who graduated from non-accredited programs (Even & Robinson, 2013). However, Teixeira (2017) revealed that no significant differences in gatekeeping practices were found between CACREP-accredited and non-accredited programs. These findings indicate that, though more egregious ethical violations may be caught by accredited programs, other gatekeeping concerns (i.e., skill competence, disposition) may go unaddressed. It is concerning for the profession’s implementation of standards if similar practices are occurring across programs with different results.

**Gates and Gate Slippage**

Gate slippage refers to “a phenomenon when a supervisor does not instigate remediation with a supervisee after recognizing potential gatekeeping issues” (Dediego & Burgin, 2016, p. 180). Gatekeeping is an individual process for each student that can concern sensitive topics for students (i.e., mental health concerns, personal value conflicts), making it difficult to discuss and address due to both the private and personal nature of what it often entails and in broad terms due to most cases being unique and specific to the student (de Vries & Valadez, 2006; Mazza, 2015). Homrich, DeLorenzi, Bloom, and Godbee (2014) add that gatekeepers must make judgements about whether a trainee’s behavior is incompetent or an expected part of their professional development. As a result of the delicate and complex nature of gatekeeping, a great deal of gate slippage may occur as a result of students of concern not being identified as they or their peers may fail to come forward about such concerns (Gaubatz & Vera, 2006). Despite ethical mandates and CACREP requirements, gate slippage appears to be an ongoing challenge.

As many as 10% of counselors-in-training may have problems of professional competence and, because many faculty hesitate to intervene, these students may go on to
complete their program without remediation (Brear, Dorrian, & Luscri, 2008; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). A study of 213 mental health professionals, predominantly counselors, revealed that 69% reported at least one colleague with problems of professional competence, with 11% indicating they had five or more colleagues with problems of professional competence (Olson, Brown-Rice, & Keller, 2016). In a study which administered several personality assessments and an inventory about attitudes towards counseling, 5.8-22.1% of students scored outside the “normal” range on at least one scale, indicating possible impairment or negative attitudes about counseling (de Vries & Valadez, 2006). Gaubatz and Vera (2006) found that master’s students (n= 62) reported greater rates of professional deficiency amongst their peers than counselor education faculty (n= 45), and they suggest that up to 21% of students in the sample had problematic behavior and had not received the needed remediation or intervention. Brown-Rice and Furr (2013) found similar results with a sample of 389 master’s-level counseling students, also noting participants’ frustration with faculty for not addressing their peers’ problems with professional competence. From the faculty’s perspective, 19 of 28 CACREP-accredited programs responded that faculty had indicated concerns about graduating students who they believed to be unprepared or problematic, with program responses about how many of their students these concerns applied to ranging from .5% to 40% (Dean, Stewart-Spencer, Cabanilla, Wayman, & Heher, 2018).

These studies reveal deficits in gatekeeping in educational programs, thus indicating potential deficits in gatekeeping training and application. Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) discovered that knowledge of students with problems of professional competence increases the stress of both counselor educators and other students, and that faculty expressed concern about appearing culturally insensitive or struggling to balance gatekeeping with empathetic responses. Goodrich and Shin (2013) propose a culturally responsive approach for addressing professional
competence, which focuses on faculty self-reflection, considerations of culture and intersectionality, and a group system intervention. Additionally, faculty who have participated in a gatekeeping process have experienced significant psychological and emotional impact as a result of fulfilling ethical obligations (Kerl & Eichler, 2005). Chang (2017) also found that counselor educators reported emotional and practical struggles with gatekeeping and proposed the Faculty Microsystem model, which stresses engaging and collaborating with other faculty to address gatekeeping concerns instead of the typical response to work independently or avoid concerns.

Another layer to addressing gatekeeping concerns may occurs in religiously affiliated practitioner programs, as religious doctrine may contradict certain ethical standards of practice (i.e., LGBTQ clients, abortion). Common concerns of faculty at Christian institutions regarding acting on a gatekeeping issue include institutional pressures, fear of lawsuits, negative teaching evaluations, enrollment quotas, lack of support from administration, and possible negative personal impacts for students (Palmer, White, & Chung, 2008). Bidell (2014) found that as religious conservatism increased, counseling competence with LGBT clients decreased. Given rates of deficiency among students compared to rates of reporting and addressing concerns, it is likely that students who are professionally deficient are not addressed by gatekeepers and thus harm clients and the profession.

Though much of the literature addresses gatekeeping and remediation in training programs as reactive, some also recommend a preemptive approach, with suggestions to put more efforts into screening procedures (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Several have specifically called for stronger gates and clearer standards as part of the admissions process (McCaughan & Hill, 2015; Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014). Hatchett, Lawrence, and Coaston
(2017) report that undergraduate GPA and GRE scores, including the analytic writing score, are statistically significant predictors of graduate GPA ($p = .015$), comprehensive exam scores ($p < .001$), and program retention and completion ($p = .04$), which supports previous findings. Smaby et al. (2005) found similar results about comprehensive exams, but they cautioned that no significant relationship was found between these academic predictors and skill development. In addition to academic variables, admissions processes may use additional methods to screen applicants and preemptively gatekeep.

Though 17 states require applicants to pass a criminal background check to become licensed, only 26.5% of the 83 master’s-level CACREP-accredited programs surveyed used criminal background checks despite 41% of surveyed faculty reporting they feel criminal background checks are an ethical part of the admissions process (Jorgensen & Brown-Rice, 2016). A qualitative study of nine counselor educators from four different programs indicates that selection interviews, in which the criteria were similar across participants, are not applied similarly in the decision-making process; interviews were predominantly used to screen out unsuitable applicants as opposed to identifying the most qualified applicants (Nagpal & Ritchie, 2002). These studies indicate that while criminal background checks may be underutilized in gatekeeping, selection interviews may only be beneficial as a gatekeeping mechanism with their current application. As McCaughan and Hill (2015) state, improved admissions gatekeeping would reduce the need for faculty and site supervisors to implement remediation plans later. In order to structure gates throughout the process, Wilkerson (2006) proposed a model similar to the counseling process including informed consent, intake, assessment, evaluation, treatment planning, and termination, but conducted with students’ professional competence as the focus. In
the informed consent phase, it is important that students understanding the expectations and policies, including CACREP and ethical standards (Wilkerson, 2006).

In addition to faculty in training programs, on-site supervisors for practicum and internship students also serve as gatekeepers. Practicum tends to be the primary setting where problems of professional competence are identified by faculty and highlights the importance of continued evaluation, monitoring, and gatekeeping with clinical field placements (Olkin & Gaughen, 1991). Both on-site supervisors (n= 158) and their supervisees (n= 171) indicated that they believe a mentor’s professional traits to be the most important in a successful field supervision experience (Lazovsky & Shimoni, 2007). Another study of 103 clinical supervisors of master’s students at internship field sites found that only 35% of the supervisors reported gatekeeping concerns to counselor education faculty, indicating that over 1 in 3 concerns may not be addressed in supervision settings in addition to academic settings (Freeman, Garner, Fairgrieve, & Pitts, 2016). Counselor education faculty have asserted the need for open communication and consultation with on-site supervisors to improve gatekeeping and remediation implementation with trainees and minimize gate slippage (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

Dean et al. (2018) reported that 60.7% (n= 17) of programs surveyed reported having had students terminated from clinical site placements in the past year, indicating that gatekeeping and gate slippage impact clinical sites and site supervisors as well. Their survey of 28 CACREP-accredited mental health counseling programs revealed difficulties with site supervisors, as less than half of programs (42.9%, n= 12) required agreements from site supervisors about providing written documentation of student concerns and four programs (14.3%) indicated that site supervisors often declined to provide written documentation when students were terminated or
removed from a site (Dean et al., 2018). When written documentation of student removal from a site was provided to the program, 22 programs (78.6%) indicated it was sufficient to support remediation and three programs (10.7%) indicated it was not (Dean et al., 2018). Communication between on-site supervisors and program faculty is clearly important to prevent gate slippage.

Once trainees have graduated and moved on to the licensure process, gate slippage is still an issue, but may be even more difficult to address at that point. Gatekeeping may be more difficult for those supervising counselors pursuing licensure due to lack of institutional support, vague licensure standards, concerns about legal consequences over claims of subjective or inaccurate judgments of competence when attempting remediation or intervention, and assumptions that trainees have met minimum standards of professional competence during their academic training (Homrich, 2009; Hutchens, Block, & Young, 2013; McCutcheon, 2008). Cases of legal reprisal as a result of gatekeeping intervention have given supervisors and counselor educators pause, and some have argued that allowing case law to determine standards of conduct for trainees undermines the gatekeeping responsibilities of the profession (McAdams & Foster, 2007). However, courts have typically ruled in favor of university and program’s decision to dismiss students based on violations of professional ethics codes, as seen with Ward v. Wilbanks (2009) and Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley (2010). In fact, these cases significantly contributed to the most recent revision of the ACA 2014 Code of Ethics, indicating the importance of gatekeepers clarifying expectations about professional competency for the profession at-large and their trainees.

Clear policies about how to address problematic student behavior when it occurs during the training process is important, and there are typically several gates in the process to catch and remediate concerns, beginning with admission (Bryant, Druys, & Strabavy, 2013). Ziomek-
Daigle and Christensen (2010) outline gatekeeping as a progressive process with four phases: preadmission screening, postadmission screening, remediation plan, and remediation outcome. Though there may be more ‘gates,’ depending on the program, these four events or periods during a trainee’s educational experience are typical and expected safeguards for most programs. Differences may arise within or between programs with respect to the strength or efficacy of these gates, especially as predictors of program dismissal or withdrawal (Hatchett, Lawrence, & Coaston, 2017).

**Remediation, Retention, and Dismissal**

Henderson and Dufrene (2012) identified 34 remediable behaviors from the literature, and a subsequent 2013 study listed the five most common behaviors requiring remediation as issues with: feedback receptivity, basic clinical skill, professional boundaries, self-awareness and reflection, and advanced clinical skill. Additionally, 51.1% of participants indicated that they saw these problematic behaviors emerge in entry-level counseling skill courses (Henderson & Dufrene, 2013). A cluster analysis of 86 cases from CACREP-accredited master’s programs identified interpersonal issues, resistance, and unethical behaviors as the overall cluster areas (Li, Lampe, Trusty, & Lin, 2009). Among the first cluster of 28 cases, 86% lacked interpersonal skills, 64% poor boundaries, and 61% were not receptive to supervision, cluster two had 94% with problematic interpersonal skills and 81% demonstrated inappropriate boundaries, and cluster three’s 22 cases had 50% with poor boundaries and academic dishonesty (Li et al., 2009). Li et al. (2009) also found that in cluster two 69% lied and in cluster three 50% lied, and that 67% in cluster two misrepresented their skill level and training and refused counseling when referred. To remediate, or assist a student in bringing a behavior to the expected developmental level, a specific behavior plan is needed (Hylton, Manit, & Messick-Svare, 2017).
CACREP requires in their 2016 accreditation standards that “Counselor education programs have and follow a policy for student retention, remediation, and dismissal from the program consistent with institutional due process policies and with the counseling profession’s ethical codes and standards of practice” (CACREP, 2016, p. 5). Gaubatz and Vera’s 2002 survey of 118 faculty at 79 different training programs found that CACREP-accredited programs and programs with formal remediation and retention policies are more effective at addressing gatekeeping concerns with students. Lamb et al. (1987) defined a remediation process as explaining the evaluation criteria to the student, giving the student a chance to appeal, and then implementing the decision, which may still apply to severe problems of professional competence (i.e., sexual relationship with client). The severity of the competence issue may impact the margin of opportunity for the student to remediate.

Though remediation plans are tailored to individual students, a typical remediation process for mild or moderate concerns involves speaking first with the student about the concern, then based on that meeting, crafting a suitable formal plan with the program to address the deficiency (see McAdams, Foster, & Ward, 2007 for case example of such remediation processes). Examples could include pursuing personal counseling to address personal distress or unresolved mental health concerns (Drew, Stauffer, & Barkley, 2017), retaking a specific course (Dean et al., 2018), or mandating additional specialized training, supervision, or study in a specific area (Rapisarda & Britton, 2007). See Table 1 for a table of common remediation options and outcomes as well as their frequencies as seen in Dean et al. (2018).
### Table 1

**Common Remediation Outcomes and Frequencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course of action</th>
<th>Happens often</th>
<th>Has happened</th>
<th>Never happened</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n (percentage)</td>
<td>n (percentage)</td>
<td>n (percentage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fails the course</td>
<td>3 (10.7%)</td>
<td>16 (57.1%)</td>
<td>7 (25.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goes through a faculty review committee</td>
<td>10 (35.7%)</td>
<td>11 (39.3%)</td>
<td>5 (17.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives remediation</td>
<td>16 (57.1%)</td>
<td>9 (32.1%)</td>
<td>1 (3.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option to withdraw and retake the course</td>
<td>5 (17.9%)</td>
<td>13 (46.4%)</td>
<td>7 (25.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives counseling and/or completes psychological evaluation</td>
<td>4 (14.3%)</td>
<td>18 (64.3%)</td>
<td>3 (10.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed from program</td>
<td>2 (7.1%)</td>
<td>19 (67.9%)</td>
<td>4 (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required to write letter of apology</td>
<td>8 (28.6%)</td>
<td>17 (60.7%)</td>
<td>4 (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required to present to a committee</td>
<td>11 (39.3%)</td>
<td>14 (50.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required to write paper on ethics</td>
<td>2 (7.1%)</td>
<td>13 (46.4%)</td>
<td>9 (32.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No action taken</td>
<td>1 (3.6%)</td>
<td>19 (67.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* (Dean, Stewart-Spencer, Cabanilla, Wayman, & Heher, 2018, p. 11-12).

Additionally, students may deal with a more specific gatekeeping issue; a common issue addressed in remediation is reconciling value conflicts, such as resolving religious or personal views regarding LGBTQ clients and working ethically with them as counselors and advocates (Singh & Burnes, 2010). This example is also expanded upon further in discussions of *Ward v. Wilbanks.*
There are several resources available in the literature to programs desiring to strengthen their existing remediation and retention policies based on research and legal precedent. The Professional Performance Review Policy (PPRP) has 10 professional performance assessment criteria and the standards and process for students’ evaluation outlined, so that the process is transparent prior to students beginning their studies (McAdams, Foster, & Ward, 2007). Also stressing transparency, Kress and Protivnak (2009) proposed the Professional Development Plan (PDP) for remediation in which faculty’s expectations of the student, required student behaviors, tasks to be completed, and consequences for non-completion of said tasks are documented and addressed.

Regardless of the remediation policy and procedure chosen, Hutchens, Block, and Young (2013) denote that documentation of consistent implementation of this program is critical, especially in the event a decision is challenged in court. For department remediation protocol, Foster and McAdams (2009) make recommendations for both the substantive due process including relevance to deficiency, comparability of severity and scope, and corrective intentions of the remediation action, and for the procedural due process considerations of clarity of expectations, support and supervision, regular evaluation of progress, and thorough documentation of the remediation process. When considering the durability of a policy in practice and in the view of the courts, the policy should address fairness in its accessibility, adaptability, and consistency of application to students and situations (McAdams & Foster, 2007).

Accessibility, adaptability, and consistency are especially important when considering the possible intersection of students with both problems of professional competence and a disability. Standard remediation options may be limited and require additional consideration or
accommodations to better serve students with disabilities, and students with disabilities also receive certain educational protections under the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (Crawford & Gilroy, 2012). In a similar vein, cultural considerations are also an additional factor to consider in policy creation and implementation (Rust, Raskin, & Hills, 2013).

Despite the CACREP mandate and several models for remediation policy, inconsistencies in the implementation of addressing a gatekeeping concern are pervasive in the literature (McCaughan & Hill, 2015; Swank & Smith-Adock, 2014; Wilkerson, 2006). Dismissal procedures tend to be unclear and have been historically inconsistent across programs; even with attempts to introduce standardized instruments for gauging competence, these measures are not utilized consistently by programs (Bradley & Post, 1991; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). Baggerly and Osborn (2013) recommend formally written descriptions of remediation policies and plans to improve clarity and reduce excess strain for programs created by appeals. In addition to the creation and implementation of remediation policy, there is a lack of clarity regarding what might be included as part of the remediation intervention and how that should be executed. Sanctioned supervision is a common intervention in remediation supported by theory and research; it is used when trainees do not develop along the expected continuum of growth and are disciplined via mandated supervision on one or more identified areas for rehabilitation (Cobia & Pipes, 2002). However, the structure and details of what sanctioned supervision should be remains contested and unclear (Foster, Leppma, & Hutchinson, 2014; Rapisarda & Britton, 2007).

Specifying standards and expectations in greater detail for both program faculty and students with problems of professional competence would likely increase consistency of implementation. Dean et al. (2018) found some programs address this issue by requiring formal
documentation of remediation efforts and rationale for dismissal from clinical field placements. Additionally, detailed policies and documentation of following such procedures are critical in the event a program decision is informally or legally challenged by a student (Hutchens, Block, & Young, 2013; Kerl, Garcia, McCullough & Maxwell, 2002).

An infamous example of the importance of clear remediation policies and documentation of each phase of the process is the 2009 case of Julea Ward and Eastern Michigan University. Ward was a master’s-level counseling student in practicum who refused to see an LGBTQ client on religious grounds and was eventually expelled after refusing to comply with remediation options (Ward v. Wilbanks, 2009). This student then sought legal reprisal by suing the university in Ward v. Wilbanks for violating her rights to freedom of speech and religion, and the ACA became involved filing an amicus brief on behalf of the university, with the court ruling in favor of the university and both parties settling outside of court (Ward v. Wilbanks, 2009; Ward v. Wilbanks, 2011).

This case is one of the most well-known and influential cases on the application of the gatekeeping functions of the ACA Code of Ethics, and it directly influenced the most recent version of the ethical code, including clear language regarding values imposition, ethical referral, and retention and remediation processes (Kaplan, 2014). Burkholder and Hall’s and Burkholder, Hall, and Burkholder’s 2014 studies of counseling students and counselor educators respectively replicated similar results of previous surveys on the Ward case; both groups described the results of Ward v. Wilbanks as polarizing and many reported mixed messages from program faculty regarding the ethics of referrals based on personal values. This case is also an example of the ambiguity of gatekeeping practice, which Ward’s lawyers sought to exploit to the benefit of their
client, and it illustrates the dangers of ambiguous retention and remediation policy and enforcement at professional and program levels.

The Ward case example illustrates the fears and difficulties associated with making the decision to dismiss versus retain a student who has not been successful at remediation. McAdams, Foster, & Ward (2007) note that programs face an impossible choice of dismissing the student and risking legal action as described in the Ward case, or retaining the student, which is in direct violation of professional ethical codes. The first decision puts the dismissal decision and the program at risk of legal reprisal if it is overturned by the court, but the second puts clients at risk by allowing the student to continue in the profession. Legal decisions typically explore whether the decision to dismiss the student was reasonable under the circumstances and whether the student can prove measurable harm as a result of the decision, thus ethically questionable behavior may fail to receive legal sanction (Beresford, 2013). These types of decisions are particularly difficult to defend, especially in court, as students often make claims that the judgment was too subjective and thus unfair, making the importance of documentation clear (Dean et al., 2018). Additionally, gatekeeping and remediation decisions could be strengthened by greater clarity in the profession regarding what professional competence is and what gatekeepers are expected to look for.

**Defining Professional Competence**

Professional competence appears to be a vaguely defined and intuitively applied concept in the counseling profession. It may be defined via ethical codes, accreditation standards, or state licensing requirements, but the application of these standards in judging professional competence or incompetence is less clear. There are two primary duties for gatekeepers: protect the counseling profession and prevent harm to clients by incompetent counselors (Brear, Dorrian, &
Both duties are concerned with professional competence. Though professional competence guidelines exist (i.e., ACA Code of Ethics, CACREP accreditation standards), the justification of their implementation on a case-by-case basis is difficult for many gatekeepers and more specific standards of conduct have been called for (Homrich et al., 2014; Kaslow et al., 2018).

A review of the literature yields several terms and alternatives to professional competence. Some examples include unsatisfactory, deficient, inadequate and problem students; the variety of terminology contributes to confusion and possibly also to gate slippage within the field and legal implications (Wilkerson, 2006). Though Wilkerson (2006) suggests problematic behaviors and impairment as preferred terms, the term problematic is preferred to the term impairment to avoid legal challenges associated with similar language used to describe students with disabilities (Rosenberg, Getzelman, Arcinue, & Oren, 2005; Kress & Protivnak, 2009). Additionally, the term incompetent implies that the student has never reached competence and may yet reach competence with remediation, whereas impairment connotes a decreased level of functioning (Gizara & Forrest, 2004; Kress & Protivnak, 2009). Another increasingly popular term in the literature is trainees with problems of professional competence (PPC) (Rust et al., 2013).

Rust and colleagues (2013) describe PPC as “…consistent maladaptive behaviors (not associated with normal developmental training deficits) related to the trainee’s physical, cognitive, mental emotional, and interpersonal functioning that interfere with the ability to adequately provide services” (p. 31). According to Kaslow et al. (2007), PPC include issues with clinical skill competency, personal functioning, and ethical or professional standards adherence.
Perhaps one of the older and more heavily referenced definitions of problematic students or problems of professional competence is:

- an interference in professional functioning that is reflected in one or more of the following ways: (a) an inability and/or unwillingness to acquire and integrate professional standards into one's repertoire of professional behavior, (b) an inability to acquire professional skills in order to reach an acceptable level of competency, and (c) an inability to control personal stress, psychological dysfunction, and/or excessive emotional reactions that interfere with professional functioning. (Lamb et al., 1987, p. 598).

This definition encompasses professional and ethical adherence, skill proficiency, and personal characteristics, and was one of the first definitions to identify dispositional qualities in addition to academic- and skill-based competence as part of overall professional competence.

Though academic achievements and clinical skills are typically identified as the two primary sub-components of professional competence, personal characteristics must also be considered (Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). Other terms such as “behavior, conduct, professional, nonacademic, personal attributes, characteristics, and competencies” were included in the literature and both personal and professional behaviors not associated with clinical skills were described as additional expectations for competent trainees (Homrich et al., 2014, p. 130). High rates of professional competence concerns originate with issues of professionalism, including concerns with appropriate attire, timeliness, reliability, self-awareness, ethical conduct, empathy, collegiality, and collaboration (Kaslow et al., 2018).

**Assessment and Evaluation of Professional Competence in Practice**

To better clarify expectations when evaluating professional competence in trainees, researchers have sought to create assessments, design models, or adapt tools from other
professions to standardize evaluation (Bhat, 2005). In a review of literature and study of 82 CACREP-accredited counseling program faculty, Homrich et al. (2014) found that most qualities that faculty look for in competent trainees could be classified as professional, interpersonal, or intrapersonal. Professional behaviors involved expectations for those entering a profession with defined qualifications for performance and training, interpersonal qualities related to relationships with others, and intrapersonal characteristics apply to internal qualities or functions within oneself (Homrich et al., 2014). Though the study found high importance and agreement in the valuation of similar professional and interpersonal behaviors, there was less consensus regarding intrapersonal characteristics expected, which Homrich and colleagues (2014) indicate may be attributable to both the subjectivity of evaluating intrapersonal traits and the lack of literature or professional standards specifically addressing this topic. This study is unique in that it reveals specific types of behavioral expectations upon which trainees are being practically assessed on across the U.S., and 16 participants were faculty at institutions with doctoral programs in counselor education and supervision, indicating that it may be possible that doctoral gatekeepers at these institutions may evaluate trainees on similar standards. These three categories expand on the dichotomy of academic and clinical performance requirements addressed by ethical, accreditation, and licensing standards and build additional dispositional qualities and behavioral expectations into the framework for professional competence assessment.

Christensen, Dickerman, and Dorn-Medeiros (2018) completed a content analysis of 224 CACREP-accredited master’s programs’ student retention policies, evaluations, and rubrics and identified the most common dispositional traits as openness to growth, awareness of self and others, emotional stability, integrity, flexibility, compassion, and personal style. Several attempts
have been made to construct instruments or rubrics to assess various aspects of professional competence in counseling trainees. These results replicate the characteristics of one of the best-known performance assessment models in counselor education, which include openness to new concepts, flexibility, cooperation, acceptance and use of feedback, self-awareness and impact on others, conflict resolution, sense of personal responsibility, appropriate expression of feelings, and adherence to ethical and legal codes (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995). For example, Lumadue and Duffey (1999) developed the Professional Performance Fitness Evaluation (PPFE) based on the most recent iteration of ACA Code of Ethics at the time. The PPFE rates behaviors on a four-point scale ranging from 0 (does not meet program and developmental standards) to 2 (consistently meets program and developmental standards), including an option for no observation (Lumadue & Duffey, 1999).

A more contemporary example is the Counseling Competency Scale (CCS) which measures a student’s counseling skills, dispositions, and behaviors and was developed by Swank, Lambie, and Witta in 2012. The first section of the CCS contains 12 items to assess counseling performance based on a single session with scores ranging from zero (harmful) to eight (exceeds expectations), and the second and third sections assess counseling dispositions across the semester using the same scoring (Swank, Lambie, & Witta, 2012). This instrument is unique in that it sought to provide operationalized definitions for the items being assessed and descriptors for each score level. The internal consistency for the scale with a four- or five-factor model was over .9 and demonstrated a moderate correlation (r = .407, p < .01) between CCS score and final grade (Swank, Lambie, & Witta, 2012). The CCS has been found to be a credible instrument in providing clear and consistent expectations and feedback within the supervisory relationship, and potential benefits for reducing supervisor bias in evaluation were identified as part of the
gatekeeping theme of a qualitative study (Lambie & Ascher, 2016). The validation study of the CCS (n= 1,070) revealed a 2-factor model with counseling skills and therapeutic conditions (IRR= .91) and counseling dispositions and behaviors (IRR .56) with an overall interrater reliability of .84 and 61.5% of the variance explained, indicating practical applications for the CCS to aid gatekeepers in completing more consistent and comprehensive evaluations of students across both factors (Lambie et al., 2018). The CCS has also used by its original creators in several further studies on gatekeeping in counseling programs (i.e., Depue & Lambie, 2014; Swank & Lambie, 2012; Swank, 2014). It stands out as being one of the more researched scales which includes dispositional qualities. Another notable mention is Flynn and Hays (2015) Comprehensive Counseling Skills Rubric, which assesses the clinical skills of counselors-in-training, with a Fleiss’ k of .70 and a content validity index of .81. For a thorough description of 41 psychometric instruments which have been found to be affective at assessing professional competence for counselor training programs, see Tate, Bloom, Tassara, and Caperton (2014).

A different approach some have taken to address the ambiguity of gatekeeping decision is to create general decision-making models or recommendations for the gatekeeper to follow. For example, once a gatekeeping concern with professionalism has been identified, Kaslow and colleagues (2018) recommend identifying mild, moderate, or severe intensity of the concern and proceeding accordingly. Interventions for mild concerns involve informal conversations, positive feedback, and formal education, whereas moderate and severe concerns warrant interventions such as formal feedback sessions, remediation plans, communication of the concern to the program faculty, formal review of fit in program, probation, or dismissal from the program (Kaslow et al., 2018). It is important to note that additional measures may be taken by
organizations outside the program when relevant, including legal action or complaints filed with ethical or licensing boards.

Students’ perceptions of a gatekeeping policy or performance assessment framework are important to the success of the implementation and students’ trust in counselor educators (Foster & McAdams, 2009). Letourneau’s (2016) collaborative decision-making model considers problematic behaviors from multiple perspectives and infuses multicultural perspectives from other prominent ethical decision-making models. There are seven steps that may occur at various levels of collaboration (i.e., intrapersonal, supragroup), which are recognizing a problem, defining the problem, determining potential courses of action, choosing a course of action, reviewing process, implementation and evaluation, and continuing reflection (Letourneau, 2016). Letourneau also acknowledges the limitations of current literature on gatekeeping practices across programs and demographics of students who are dismissed or withdraw from counseling programs after intervention for problematic behaviors (2016).

Despite the growing literature on assessments and interventions available to gatekeepers, it appears that there is still room for improvement in identifying problems of professional competence on both ends. Swank’s (2014) study of 61 supervision dyads found that practicum supervisees rated their counseling competence significantly higher than their supervisors did at midterm and final evaluations using the Counseling Competencies Scale. Another study of 10 master’s-level students’ perceptions of gatekeeping found that most students were unaware of gatekeeping processes despite having concerns about peers (Foster, Leppma, & Hutchinson, 2014). Brown-Rice and Furr (2013) revealed that between 39 to 68 percent of master’s students felt negatively impacted simply by their awareness of other students they perceived as deficient in their program, indicating that perceptions about professional competence do impact the
experiences of other competent students. When students did report peers with problematic behaviors, a grounded theory studied indicated most did so verbally initially and felt it constituted an official report, but were often frustrated when they were told to address it on their own or asked to play a role in the remediation process (Parker et al., 2014). Those students who felt most supported said that faculty thanked them for their report and reassured them that faculty would address the concern (Parker et al., 2014). Students who see peers they perceive as having problematic professional competence may feel distressed but be unaware of how to report such concerns, which in turn could negatively impact their own performance or motivation.

**Evaluation of Gatekeepers**

Despite student’s opinions, gatekeepers make the ultimate decisions regarding whether to intervene or not in cases of problematic behavior and how to intervene. Pope (2014) notes previous court cases (i.e., *Ward v. Wilbanks*) have ruled that the “professional judgment” of counselor educators supersedes that of students, and he highlights that gatekeepers have a responsibility to prevent students from harming clients above honoring students’ rights to freedom of value expression, that supervisors maintain full liability for supervisee misconduct, and that students have different professional rights and expectations relative to licensed professionals. In *Regents of University of Michigan v. Ewing*, it states that judges must “show great respect for the faculty’s professional judgment”, and that they “may not override it unless it is such a substantial departure from accepted academic norms as to demonstrate that the person or committee responsible did not actually exercise professional judgment” (p. 225). This grants nearly unilateral power to counseling programs to make judgments based on their expertise, not that of others, and there are compelling reasons for these decisions. However, this begets a question about ensuring the quality of the decision-makers: who is gatekeeping the gatekeepers?
Brown-Rice and Furr (2015) responded to that question with a study of 335 counselor educators from CACREP-accredited programs, which revealed that most (75%) participants were aware of colleagues with problems of professional competence, all participants felt it negatively impacted their work or the profession in some way, and many (64%) wanted more information on how to respond. Additionally, there is a dearth of literature addressing general competency of the gatekeepers themselves, despite some literature focused on specific issues (i.e., dual relationships, cognitive decline) and the increased literature on assessing competence in counselors-in-training and practitioners (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015). The study further reported that, for those who reported colleagues with problems of professional competence, the most commonly reported issues were: lack of emotional regulation (67%), lack of professionalism (66%), psychological concerns (57%), unethical behavior (49%), insufficient clinical skill (49%), lack of academic knowledge (46%), and indications of personality disorders (34%) or substance use disorders (16%) (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015). Many (64%) participants indicated that they knew how to respond to colleagues, and 36% reported that they were aware of procedures for reporting colleagues (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015). As the only study to date to examine gatekeeping amongst gatekeepers, the findings indicate that counselor educators with problems of professional competence are negatively impacting colleagues and may be negatively impacting students, which also implies that these counselor educators may have evaded the detection of gatekeepers in their own graduate programs as students. Though research has begun to address student and faculty perceptions about gatekeeper fitness and efficacy, more information is still needed regarding actual practice. This literature could contribute to understanding of doctoral students’ development as gatekeepers in areas such as supervision of
supervision, gatekeeping role models, and understanding about the definition or practice of gatekeeping.

**Doctoral Training and Gatekeeping**

Though doctoral training is outlined by CACREP standards and informed by the ACA Code of Ethics like master’s programs, differences in curriculum and training may influence students’ experiences and development, especially as gatekeepers. Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) found that, from their sample of 33 counselor education doctoral students from 17 different programs, program attrition was related to the level of fit between faculty and student expectations and goals. Similarly, mismatched expectations between students and faculty or the program and incorrect assumptions about doctoral training were the primary reasons for student attrition in the first year of doctoral study in a study of 58 students across four different doctoral programs at one university (Golde, 2005). Expanding on these findings, Protivnak and Foss (2009) interviewed 141 counselor education doctoral students and discovered that departmental culture, faculty support and mentorship, personal factors, and academic variables affected their experience the most. These findings suggest that both general expectations of program training and faculty mentorship that are consistent with student expectations are likely to strengthen student retention and development (Woo, Mulit, & Visalli, 2016). Matching expectations between students, faculty, and programs are similarly important for efficacious gatekeeping and possibly also for doctoral student development and self-efficacy as gatekeepers.

**Doctoral Gatekeeping Training and Development**

Research on the preparedness of future faculty members to be effective gatekeepers and on what doctoral programs are doing to prepare their students could provide insights on ways to prepare the future of the counselor education professoriate to more successfully prevent gate
slippage in counseling training programs. Students appear to develop as gatekeepers through academic and experiential learning and faculty mentorship, rather than through specific training (Dediego & Burgin, 2016; Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002; Majcher & Daniluk, 2009; Nelson, Oliver, & Capps, 2006; Trepal & Hammer, 2014). Such complexities associated with gatekeeping and training may explain the lack of literature in the area of gatekeeping preparedness and gatekeeping training efficacy in doctoral programs (Rapp, Moody, & Stewart, 2018). More information on the practice and content of gatekeeping training in doctoral programs and how doctoral students make sense of this training relative to their process of learning to gatekeep is needed. As Homrich and colleagues (2014) note, lack of clarity in standards or expectations for professional competence can severely hamper gatekeeping efforts for training programs and the profession.

Doctoral students may have limited or no access to certain facets of the gatekeeping process, thus their exposure will likely depend on their relationship to the department and faculty (Rapp, Moody, & Stewart, 2018). For example, if students do not have graduate assistantships, clinical work, or program experiences in which a gatekeeping scenario occurs, they may have limited opportunities to apply themselves as gatekeepers and thus struggle to gatekeep as faculty members due to a lack of practice. Given doctoral students are neophyte gatekeepers, they may lack experience in several or all aspects of the gatekeeping process, which may be a reason why they are an understudied population in gatekeeping practices relative to program faculty or site supervisors (i.e., Homrich et al., 2014). Additionally, Gaubatz and Vera (2002) found that the implementation of CACREP standards of professional competence vary by program, which could lead to significant differences in how each department may handle and train students on gatekeeping issues. As Brown-Rice and Furr (2015), Swank (2014), and Rapp, Moody, and
Stewart (2018) all assert, more research is needed to understand the how doctoral students gatekeep in both counselor educator and supervisor roles, including the processes by which they gauge professional competence.

**Doctoral Student Professional Roles Which May Involve Gatekeeping**

**Supervision.** As part of doctoral training in counselor education, all CACREP-accredited programs require coursework in supervision (CACREP, 2016). Literature to guide supervisors in developing their supervision theory and practice abounds, such as Tangen, Borders, and Fickling’s (2019) multi-theory model of structuring supervision, specifically designed for neophyte doctoral supervisors. A qualitative study of expert supervisor’s descriptions of easy and challenging supervisees revealed few differences between participants’ foci (i.e., preparedness for supervision, self-reflection), and supervisors identified observable, objective criteria as the most influential features of evaluation (Kemer, Borders, & Yel, 2017). There are also several studies which explore counselor education doctoral students’ experiences as developing supervisors.

These studies predominantly focus on the supervisor role with gatekeeping as a potential sub-theme rather than focus on gatekeeping within a supervision role (Rapp, Moody, & Stewart, 2018). Trepal and Hammer (2014) explored the experiences of nine doctoral students immediately following their supervision practicum experiences using critical incident theory and found that the support of others, parallel processes, and gatekeeping were salient themes which emerged as formative in the doctoral supervisors’ development. Conversely, a study of eight international counselor education doctoral students from different countries identified that supervision training lacked support from instructors, peers, and supervisors of supervision, and they indicated greater emphasis on multicultural models of supervision were needed in doctoral
supervision training (Jang, Woo, & Henfield, 2014). A study of 19 racially and ethnically underrepresented counselor education doctoral students identified both support and lack of support due to discrimination or lack of cultural sensitivity as central themes in their experiences during their studies (Baker & Moore, 2015). These studies suggest that support may be an integral piece in doctoral student development, especially in supervision, but that doctoral training programs should better integrate multiculturalism and consider the impact of intersectionality as they craft and adapt their supervision coursework.

Borders (2014) highlights the importance of ethical practice, which include self-reflection, multicultural competence, and regular and transparent evaluation, during which gatekeeping often occurs. Supervisors’ multicultural competence is predictive of supervisee satisfaction and the strength of the supervisory relationship (Crockett & Hays, 2015). In concert with and addition to multicultural competence, it is important that supervisors be aware of the power dynamics at play in supervision, and they must avoid under- or over-asserting their power or else risk lack of growth and resistance in the supervisee (Copeland, Dean, & Wladkowski, 2011; Crockett & Hays, 2015; De Stefano, Hutman, & Gazzola, 2017). Power dynamics may include additional layers for doctoral students, who may be the supervisor but not the instructor of record, and if a doctoral supervisor fails to wield power appropriately, a student’s underdevelopment could result in problems of professional competence. Borders (2014) also outlines 12 best practices based in the literature on supervision and on experiences from expert supervisors, including supervisor preparation for supervisors-in-training, which includes role modeling, using the supervisory relationship as the primary tool for growth, balancing support and challenge, relevant knowledge and theory, and a personalized theory of supervision. These best practices are further expanded upon to state part of the key role of a supervisor is to serve as
an evaluator and professional gatekeeper (Borders et al., 2014). It appears that some of these practices do play out in practice.

A study of 87 doctoral students in a clinical psychology program found that their supervisees often described them as intelligent, ethical, good listeners, and self-confident, and the majority (68%) rated their supervisor as outstanding (Bucky, Marques, Daly, Alley, & Karp, 2010). However, in Ellis’ (2010) review of 28 years of supervision literature and myths about supervisors, he found that anywhere from 10-50% of supervisees felt they were receiving inadequate supervision, had or were currently in a harmful supervision experience, or perceived that their supervisors were not well trained. These concerns were further validated by the results of his subsequent studies which found that 93% of the 363 supervisees were receiving inadequate supervision and over 35% were receiving harmful supervision and shared the narratives of 11 supervisees who had received harmful supervision and its negative impact on their development (Ellis et al., 2014; Ellis, Taylor, Corp, Hutman, & Kangos, 2017). Supervisors-in-training are not receiving the best possible training due to the lack of research about efficacious supervision practice and results of current training practices (Falender, Burnes, & Ellis, 2013). The concerns about supervision provided speak both directly and indirectly to the training or lack of training that supervisors received or did not receive in their training programs.

To better prepare supervisors-in-training to provide adequate supervision, best practices should be taught and observed, including gatekeeper roles, and sufficient supervision of supervision should be provided by doctoral training programs (Falender, Shafranske, & Ofek, 2014). Though more research is needed to understand the struggles supervisors-in-training experience, a study of 10 counseling psychology doctoral students revealed common themes of difficulty with: navigating their role as a gatekeeper, managing several supervision processes at
once, crystallizing their own supervision style, doubt about their abilities, and co-supervisor
dynamics (Gazzola, De Stefano, Thériault, & Audet, 2013). Difficulties with the gatekeeper role
were described by participants as concerns about their ability to evaluate professional
competence, discomfort in delivering negative feedback, or issues with the hierarchical nature of
the power dynamics in supervision (Gazzola et al., 2013). Additionally, Gazzola and colleagues
(2013) identified several stressors that are likely unique to doctoral student supervisors,
including their difficulties establishing an equitable and supportive co-supervision dynamic, as
some participants felt they were forced into a “good cop/bad cop” role or experienced negative
impacts from a disagreement with their faculty co-supervisor.

The supervisor-in-training’s competence is thought to impact their ability to serve as a
gatekeeper and to help supervisees achieve their needed clinical growth and development (Getz,
1999). From the supervisee’s perspective, Fernando (2013) found that, of 85 masters-level
supervisee from seven different CACREP-accredited universities, supervisees expressed greater
satisfaction (t = 3.98, p < .001) with doctoral student supervisors than faculty supervisors, and
supervisees also reported greater self-efficacy after supervision with doctoral students compared
to faculty supervisors (t = 2.63, p < .010). Age was not a statistically significant factor
(Fernando, 2013). These differences may be due to any number of factors such as a supervisee’s
perception that a doctoral student may be more approachable yet still competent or students’ pre-
existing perceptions about faculty members. Fernando’s findings are interesting considering
differences in supervisee evaluation between doctoral students and faculty. Swank (2014) was
the first study to compare doctoral and faculty supervisor ratings of practicum students, and she
found that doctoral student supervisors’ ratings were significantly lower than faculty members’
rankings of supervisees and also indicated less change from midterm to final evaluations using
the Counseling Competencies Scale. Though she suggested it may be due to less experience as a supervisor, the difference in scores could be attributable to any number of factors noted thus far.

Though use of doctoral supervisors in critical gatekeeping courses such as techniques, practicum, or internship introduces additional ethical considerations for doctoral students and programs to better address, doctoral supervisors require experience to grow and could provide an additional layer of protection against gate slippage. Beyond buffering programs against gate slippage, Walsh, Bambacus, and Gibson (2017) propose that doctoral students are preferable supervisors for group counseling courses with experiential groups. Doctoral students provide the supervision of the master’s students’ group leading skills with supervision of their own supervision, which resolves discomfort and potential ethical violations due to dual relationships associated with faculty providing this same supervision (Walsh et al., 2017). Though supervision of supervision would provide support for navigating supervision difficulties, this model would necessitate strong gatekeeper skill for doctoral students as the faculty teaching the content component of the course would not be privy to the group and thus the master’s students’ group counseling skill development. This proposal introduces the other role in which doctoral students may serve as gatekeepers: teaching.

Teaching. Little is known about doctoral students’ experiences as gatekeepers in the counselor educator role (Rapp, Moody, & Stewart, 2018). A study of faculty counselor educators across rank and position identified that all participants identified gatekeeping as a central ethical obligation, referenced ethical and licensure standards, and reinforced clear expectations to scaffold due process throughout training; however faculty also noted that faculty dynamics and administrative intervention may impact the implementation of such policies, particularly if the faculty member was un-tenured (Schuermann, Avent Harris, & Lloyd-Hazlett, 2018).
Gatekeeping protocols in a teaching role might be extrapolated from existing literature on faculty counselor educators, but it is important to recognize that these roles are likely experienced differently. Though little is known about its use in counselor education, co-teaching is perhaps the best example of these themes.

Co-teaching experiences typically involve a doctoral student being paired with a faculty mentor to collaboratively teach a course. Co-teaching experiences paired with teaching coursework improves counselor education doctoral students’ ability to develop a teaching style and philosophy, create course material, and manage student behavior in the classroom (Hunter & Gilmore, 2011). However, many studies, like Hunter and Gilmore’s 2011 study, explore counselor educator faculty’s views, but not counselor education doctoral student’s perspective on their teaching experiences. One suggestion for counselor education doctoral student teaching development is to implement a formal co-teaching model in one’s program, which the five doctoral students in Orr, Hall, and Hulse-Killacky’s 2008 study found helpful. A qualitative study of nine participants revealed that doctoral students feel more emphasis should be put on an intentional structure for teaching development within programs, with increased training on pedagogy and teaching delivery techniques (Waalkes, Benshoff, Stickl, Swindle, & Umstead, 2018). Doctoral students find it most helpful when co-teachers are clear about their expectations for the student, including operational (i.e., increased autonomy in planning and delivering lectures) and developmental (i.e., specific, concrete feedback on skills) expectations for the experience (Baltrinic, Jencius, & McGlothlin, 2016). Additionally, doctoral students begin forming opinions of faculty members’ teaching prior to co-teaching experiences, so it is important to consider the relationship the student has with the potential co-instructor and their fit with that instructor’s teaching philosophy and style (Baltrinic, Jencius, & McGlothlin, 2016).
In terms of teaching style and mentorship, the relational factor may be the most important feature in determining fit for doctoral students’ co-teaching experiences. A Q methodology study of 25 counselor educators identified three predominant teaching mentorship styles: supervisor, facilitator, and evaluator (Baltrinic, Moate, Hinkle, Jencius, & Taylor, 2018). Baltrinic et al. (2018) describe the supervisor as a faculty mentor who gives direct and honest feedback, often in a more formal or corrective format, and engages in formal pre-planning and instruction for teaching skill development, as they view the relationship as hierarchical and primarily instructive. In contrast, facilitators tend to give nurturing feedback, conduct unstructured one-on-one sessions focused on processing the mentee’s instructional decisions, view the relationship as more egalitarian, and avoid prescriptive or modeling as mentorship tools (Baltrinic et al., 2018). Finally, Baltrinic et al. (2018) define evaluators as those who emphasize content and coursework on teaching and a development of a strong theoretical foundation for teaching but place less importance on pragmatic or grading aspects of mentorship and on sharing their own success or mistakes in their teaching development. Depending on the doctoral student’s learning needs, it might be advantageous to choose a co-instructor who mirrors their need for feedback, support, or skill-building respectively.

As implied by different mentorship styles, there are power dynamics and role expectations as a doctoral student teaching, co-teaching, or acting as a teaching assistant to any course which are unique to their position as a member of the instructional team, but perhaps not the instructor of record. Additionally, doctoral students are still subject to being evaluated as counselor educators-in-training, thus potentially subject to gatekeeping themselves. Finally, doctoral students must manage multiple roles and relationships with students, such as when a doctoral student has been a peer to a master’s student in a course but also serves as an instructor.
in a different course with that same master’s student. Balancing different power dynamics and relationships with master’s students can be difficult but enlightening, as doctoral students may become aware of problems of professional competence from any number of types of contact with the student (Scarborough, Bernard, & Morse, 2006). In a recent study of 10 counselor education doctoral students, it was found that multiple roles have both a positive and negative impact on students, especially in the areas of power differentials and professional development and learning (Dickens, Ebrahim, & Herlihy, 2016).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Methods Overview

Further research on how doctoral students in counselor education programs develop as gatekeepers is needed to better prepare future faculty and reduce gate slippage (Rapp, Moody, & Stewart, 2018). This study adds to the literature by providing a description of students’ experiences of gatekeeping training and a phenomenological analysis of the process of becoming a gatekeeper. Results illuminate areas of further research in the field with respect to doctoral student experiences of gatekeeping, the impact of CACREP-accreditation on gatekeeping training and preparedness, current program practices for gatekeeping training, and areas for improvement in gatekeeper preparation as part of the counselor educator and supervisor role.

This study consists of a pre-screening survey to ascertain eligibility for inclusion in the study sample and semi-structured interviews with those who met inclusion criteria. The target population is current doctoral students in Council for Accreditation of Counseling andRelated Educational Programs (CACREP)-accredited face-to-face Counselor Education programs in the United States. Criterion sampling was used to ensure participants had sufficient gatekeeping coursework and experiences to discuss the topic in-depth. Interviews occurred via video conferencing and were transcribed verbatim. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyze transcripts and address the research questions. Interview participants received a monetary reward for their participation and were contacted about the results of the study.

Research Questions

To accomplish the study objectives, the following focal questions will be addressed:

1. What are the gatekeeper experiences of Counselor Education Ph.D. students in CACREP-accredited programs?
2. How do Counselor Education Ph.D. students learn to gatekeep?
   a. What formal learning teaches Counselor Education Ph.D. students to gatekeep?
   b. What informal learning teaches Counselor Education Ph.D. students to gatekeep?

3. How do Counselor Education Ph.D. students understand their role as gatekeepers to the profession?
   a. How do Counselor Education Ph.D. students perceive their role in preventing gate slippage as gatekeepers?
   b. How do Counselor Education Ph.D. students identify when to gatekeep counselors-in-training to prevent client harm?

Research Design

This study consisted of a pre-screening survey and semi-structured phenomenological interviews. The pre-screening survey contained several closed- and open-ended questions to estimate gatekeeping-related coursework and experiences within survey participant’s doctoral training program, and it served to screen for eligibility and provide contextual information for follow-up interviews. The survey was administered online via Qualtrics. Participants self-selected to take the survey and were recruited from a cross-sectional target population of face-to-face (less than 50% of coursework completed online) Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral programs with CACREP-accreditation in the United States. Participants were described through use of forced-choice questions about regional ACES affiliation and open-ended questions about their program’s home institution. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the second component of the design to help the researcher better understand participants’ worldviews on a concept (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015). Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed using IPA.
Samples

Survey Sample

For the pre-screening survey, the target population was doctoral students in CACREP-accredited, face-to-face counselor education programs in the United States. The survey also screened for the interview inclusion criteria. There are at the time of this study 82 CACREP-accredited doctoral (Ph.D. or Ed.D.) programs in the United States (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2019). Of those programs, seven are online, meaning students complete 50 percent or more of their coursework using distance technologies and 75 are predominantly face-to-face, meaning that students complete 49 percent or less of their coursework through distance technologies. A review of the 75 currently accredited counselor education doctoral program websites that are face-to-face indicates that on-site clinics are present at about 43 of these programs (CACREP, 2019).

Those eligible to take the survey include current students pursuing a doctoral degree in counseling or counselor education. Current students are enrolled in at least one credit towards the completion of their degree requirements or program of study at the time of the survey. The survey was made available to counselor education programs across the United States, where CACREP-accreditation is utilized and recognized.

Counselor education doctoral students were selected, because the ACA’s Code of Ethics expectations for students serving in the roles of supervisor and counselor educator apply directly to doctoral student’s training programs (ACA, 2014). Accreditation from CACREP indicates that a program has met specific requirements for coursework content, faculty-to-student ratios, and assessment procedures. Programs that are accredited also must have a remediation and retention policy to address gatekeeping issues with students. Selecting students from CACREP-accredited
programs increases the likelihood that those included in the sample have the required experiences to complete an interview and that they have met or are meeting certain criteria relevant to gatekeeping. Examples of this criteria include completing coursework in teaching and supervision, in which students serve in the role of gatekeeper. Other criteria examples could include the assumption of standardized expectation for knowledge, skills, and competencies among these students in accredited programs.

Students in predominantly online programs (50% or more of coursework offered online or using distance technologies) meet CACREP-accreditation requirements differently and are less likely to have as much gatekeeping experience, due to their lack of face-to-face interactions with other students, and thus were excluded from the interview portion of the study (CACREP, 2019). For example, some online programs engage in intensives or residency requirements in which students meet for long weekends a few times during a school year to engage in supervision, as opposed to maintaining continued weekly contact with supervisors. As such, students may not have the opportunity to assume a gatekeeper role as they have less points of contact in which they would identify such concerns.

As this survey was an online Qualtrics survey, the sample was collected through online recruitment. A national counselor education listserv, in addition to professional networks and organizations, was used to identify and distribute the survey to potential participants. Professional organizations include a division of the American Counseling Association known as the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) and its regional associations such as the North Central Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (NCACES). Professional networks include professional contacts and colleagues with connections to other counselor education doctoral programs whose students likely meet eligibility criteria.
The survey had 77 respondents, with 75 total survey participants after data cleaning and removal of duplicates. The majority of respondents reported receiving Master of Arts (36%), Master of Science (35%), or Master of Education (23%) degrees, as seen in Figure 1. Respondents reported master’s degrees from 59 different universities and about 80% of these master’s programs were CACREP-accredited. Figure 2 shows that the name of respondents’ master’s degrees varied, but the majority reported the degree title Clinical Mental Health Counseling.

Figure 1

Type of Master’s Degree Received

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master of Arts</td>
<td>36.49%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master of Science</td>
<td>35.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Education</td>
<td>22.97%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master of Counseling</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Arts in Education</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Specialist</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Philosophy</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. There were two respondents who reported not having received a terminal master’s degree and instead reported other degrees.
All respondents reported that their doctoral degree was a Doctor of Philosophy or PhD, and most respondents endorsed Counselor Education and Supervision as the name of their degree as seen in Figure 3. Respondents represented at least 36 different doctoral programs across the United States. All but 1.45% of respondents indicated that their doctoral program was CACREP-accredited, and about 11% of respondents reported that more than half of their coursework was
completed online. The majority of respondents belonged to either the SACES or NCACES regions (see Figure 4). About two-thirds of the respondents noted that they had an on-site clinic where students completed clinical and supervision coursework and experiences.

Figure 3

*Name of Doctoral Degree*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counselor Education and Supervision</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor Education</td>
<td>11.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>8.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation Counseling and Administration</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: Counseling</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor Education and Counseling</td>
<td>4.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling and Counselor Education</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation Counseling and Rehabilitation Counselor Education</td>
<td>1.43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4

*Survey Respondents by ACES Region*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SACES</td>
<td>64.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMACES</td>
<td>5.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCACES</td>
<td>25.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NARACES</td>
<td>4.48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. No respondents belonged to WACES region. There are two CACREP-accredited doctoral programs in this region, with one program predominantly online.

The survey also asked about gatekeeping content and learning within their programs. Seventy percent of respondents’ programs did not offer formal training or professional development in gatekeeping, however most respondents felt prepared to act as a gatekeeper to the profession (see Figure 5). Additionally, 75% felt that their doctoral program coursework had prepared them to be an effective gatekeeper, and 84% felt that experiences (i.e. practica, internships, assistantships) provided by their doctoral program had prepared them to be effective gatekeepers.

**Figure 5**

Belief that Respondent is Prepared to Act as a Gatekeeper to the Profession

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>82.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>17.65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview Sample**

Using the pre-screening survey, participants for the interview portion of the study were eligible if they met the following criteria: currently enrolled in at least one credit towards the completion of a counselor education doctoral degree, enrolled in a CACREP-accredited program, and 50 percent or more of their coursework is face-to-face, not online. In addition to meeting survey eligibility, participants for interviews must also have completed or be currently enrolled in at least one supervision- and at least one teaching-related course or experience, and they must be at programs with on-site clinics. Those courses and experiences which qualify for relevant
gatekeeping participation may include: supervision theories, supervision practicum, teaching coursework, teaching practicum, teaching assistantship, part-time or adjunct teaching, co-instruction or instruction of counseling program courses, teaching-related internship, or supervision-related internship. On-site clinics were identified as clinics located on university property that are affiliated with the counseling program and where a counseling program’s master’s and doctoral students conduct counseling and/or supervision training.

These criteria will promote the “homogenous sample” which represents the phenomenon required for IPA (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 50). Participation in two or more experiences irrespective of time spent in a program was selected because programs may sequence coursework differently or differ in availability of experiences like graduate assistantships. As such, time enrolled in the program or overall progress towards degree completion were not sufficient inclusion criteria and completion or enrollment in specific coursework which addresses gatekeeping was selected instead.

Participants experiences that do not meet interview criteria as relevant gatekeeping include supervision of non-master’s-level supervisees (i.e. limited license professionals) or supervisees who are not currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited master’s counseling program (i.e. social work or psychology students). Additionally, teaching experiences with those other than counselors-in-training at a CACREP-accredited program will not qualify for the teaching education and experiential requirement. Participants will also be excluded based on the following: enrollment in an online doctoral program where 50 percent or more of their coursework is completed through distance learning technology, program is not affiliated with an on-site clinic, and student has not completed or is not currently completing at least two courses or experiences identified as relevant to gatekeeping learning and experience.
These criteria were intended to increase the homogeneity of the sample for the purposes of IPA following the interviews (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). Additionally, the criteria increased the likelihood that participants have completed enough coursework and experiences to have acted as a gatekeeper or seen gatekeeping firsthand. Programs with on-site clinics are also more likely to engage doctoral students in teaching, clinical work, and/or supervision both as a part of and in addition to CACREP doctoral training standards, thus further increasing participant experience and the likelihood of gatekeeping experiences. On-site clinics were identified as university-affiliated training facilities that are designated by the counseling program to fulfill practical or clinical coursework requirements and where counseling services are provided by counseling graduate students under the clinical supervision of counselor education doctoral students or faculty.

Those who met eligibility criteria and self-selected to participate in an interview comprised the sub-sample for the interview portion of the study. Eligibility for participants was verified via the pre-screening survey, email correspondence, and prior to beginning the interview. Participants were encouraged to share more about role(s) they had during their coursework and experiences, which may also have met eligibility criteria, but were not otherwise captured by the pre-screening survey.

After screening for eligibility based on survey responses and further promoting homogeneity of the phenomenon by including those with the most coursework and experiences in gatekeeping, a total of 36 respondents were eligible for interviews. Of the potential interview participants contacted, 15 responded and completed the interview. The ages of participants ranged from 23 to 35 years of age and were generalized to preserve confidentiality. Interview participant demographics can be found in Table 2.
### Table 2

**Interview Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Racial and/or Ethnic Identities</th>
<th>Student Citizenship Status</th>
<th>Year in the Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trent</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20’s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20’s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>Nonbinary</td>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20’s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clyde</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercedes</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firefox</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20’s</td>
<td>Nigerian-American and Black</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20’s</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20’s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20’s</td>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>White and Native American</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20’s</td>
<td>Latina and Chicana</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Some information has been altered to protect confidentiality.
Instrumentation

Survey

The survey consisted of 22 questions, including the final question which asked for participant email contact information. Of the questions, six were open-ended items and 16 were close-ended items. There were four multiple choice questions, nine yes or no questions, five short response questions, and two matrixes consisting of a total of 16 yes or no questions. The survey took about 5-10 minutes for participants to complete. The complete survey is located in Appendix A.

Interview Protocol

In-depth semi-structured interviews lasting 45-60 minutes were conducted via the internet audiovisual meeting service Zoom. The interview protocol focused on participants’ experiences of learning to become a gatekeeper, rather than on the roles in which it occurs or their experiences with being gatekept, except where relevant to their lived experience becoming a gatekeeper (see Appendix B for Interview Protocol). An example of a question which explores participants’ experiences with gatekeeping is ‘What has been your most influential experience as a gatekeeper?’ Follow up prompts such as ‘How do you view yourself as a gatekeeper?’ and ‘How do you assess the professional competence of trainees?’ were also asked. To describe participants’ learning and training process, questions such as ‘Which courses have informed your understanding of gatekeeping?’ were asked, including the occasional probe ‘How so?’. The protocol also asked questions which identified how participants perceive their role as gatekeepers like ‘What indicates to you that a student or supervisee presents a gatekeeping issue?’, including the prompt ‘How do you differentiate between taking action or not taking action when students or supervisees concern you?’. The complete interview protocol is located in Appendix B.
Procedures

Initial feedback on the layout and readability of the pre-screening survey in both computer and mobile formats was sought from an interdisciplinary group of doctoral student peers. A group of seven students outside of the counselor education discipline provided input regarding the logistical aspects of the survey in Qualtrics. Suggestions for improvement of wording, structure, and coherence were adopted where relevant.

Institutional Review

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) exempt status approval was obtained for the pilot study of both the pre-screening survey and interview protocol, including the interview protocol cognitive interviewing. Separate HSIRB approval was obtained for the full study prior to conducting pre-screening and interviews. Separate informed consent documents were provided for the survey and the interview.

Survey and Interview Protocol Pilot Testing

Counselor educators and doctoral students who had published several articles on gatekeeping in counselor education or were conducting gatekeeping-related studies at the time of the pilot were identified as initial key informants. Snowball/referral sampling strategies were used to recruit a heterogeneous group of faculty and doctoral students who have been identified or self-identify as being experts or experienced with gatekeeping in counselor education relative to their position (Patton, 2015). Criterion sampling was also utilized to ensure the pilot participants resembled the study’s target population. Eligibility was current full-time status as a faculty or doctoral student in a face-to-face, CACREP-accredited program. Faculty did not need to be employed by a university with a doctoral program. Feedback was collected by sharing both the survey and interview protocol with participants via email and soliciting responses to these
instruments either in-person in an individual unstructured interview or via email, which was based on participants’ comfort and availability.

Four counselor education faculty and four doctoral students completed the pilot testing, collectively representing all five regional associations of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES). The in-person feedback interview lasted 25 minutes, and one email of feedback was solicited from all other participants. All email participants were asked follow-up questions for clarification on their feedback. The in-person interview feedback was logged by hand without identifiers to preserve confidentiality. Email feedback was pulled from the original message and placed into an Excel spreadsheet with regional location and student or faculty status and no other identifiers. All feedback was anonymously logged verbatim and coded as either “faculty” or “doctoral student” in an excel spreadsheet. Participant feedback was carefully considered and then integrated as appropriate.

Overall results suggested no substantive changes to the survey, with suggestions for clarity of wording on both survey and interview protocol. The suggestion to ask about negative and positive gatekeeper role model examples in interview protocol was nearly unanimous. Once feedback was integrated into the instruments as appropriate, all emails and hand-written logs were destroyed or deleted.

**Cognitive Interviewing**

Five cognitive interviews were conducted with experienced doctoral students who met criteria for the study. Interviewees all identified as women, with one white participant, two Latinx participants, and one Asian international student participant. Participants identified as previously or currently belonging to NCACES, NARACES, SACES, and WACES regions. Several participants also had familiarity with IPA. Participants were identified via key informant
and criterion sampling and recruited by email. Participants each completed one 60- to 90-minute in-person or video call interview where they were asked the research questions and then asked follow-up questions about their responses, cognitions, emotions, and other feedback or suggestions.

Feedback was logged anonymously by hand and identified via participant number. Based on cognitive interviewing feedback, the following changes were made to the interview protocol: eliminated redundancy, rephrased questions to better meet their purpose, and added a question about barriers and power dynamics. All participants reviewed the finalized interview protocol after changes were incorporated to provide additional feedback. Cognitive interview feedback was destroyed after it was integrated into the interview protocol.

**Pre-screening Survey**

A review of the CACREP directory website for each face-to-face CACREP-accredited program in the CACREP directory was conducted to ascertain which programs have on-site training clinics. Participants were recruited via direct contact of programs which meet inclusion criteria and via use of a national, professional email listserv Counselor Education and Supervision Network (CESNET). An email was sent containing information about the study, the informed consent document (See Appendix C), and a link to the Qualtrics survey indicating agreement to the informed consent documents (See Appendix A). Three total emails regarding the study were sent. The second email was sent one week after the initial call, and the final email was sent two weeks after the second email (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). Those who participated in the survey entered into a lottery for a $50 gift card. One participant was randomly selected and awarded the gift card electronically.

**Interviews**
Responses to the pre-screening survey allowed participants who did not meet eligibility criteria to be excluded from interview selection. Participants who indicated interest in doing an interview at the end of the survey were invited to participate using the contact information they provided. Participants were initially contacted following the close of the survey, with a reminder email being sent one week after the first email and a final reminder email being sent two weeks after that.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom video call and lasted 45-60 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded on two separate recorders and stored on a password-protected, encrypted device. Upon completion of the interview, audio recordings were transcribed and then destroyed. Transcripts and research decision logs were stored on a password-protected, encrypted device.

Participants received their $15 gift card rewards via an anonymous electronic delivery service, “Gift Rocket,” to the email they provided at the conclusion of the interview. An email with the transcript was also sent to each participant for initial member checking so that they could correct or further elaborate on any responses provided during the interview. All interested participants were provided access to the final research results.

**Positionality**

I am both the researcher and a member of my target population, so it is imperative that I engage in frequent reflexivity and be intentional about the methods of data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Saldaña, Leavy, & Baretvas, 2011). As a counselor education doctoral student in a CACREP-accredited program with an on-site clinic who has completed all coursework, I am very likely to identify with my participants. My ability to empathize and relate so closely with my population enhances my knowledge of the topic and population, increases my ability to create precise instrumentation, improves my likelihood of building rapport with
participants, obtaining higher quality and specificity of data, and strengthens my data analysis lens as a group insider. However, it is important that I do not superimpose my own experiences onto participants and miss critical observations or interpretations.

In order to for the study to approach rigor in qualitative research, efforts to maintain credibility, dependability, and confirmability were addressed, such as positionality and trustworthiness (Toma, 2011). I utilized several strategies to increase my mindfulness of my own lived experiences to use them intentionally to further inform rather than limit the study. First, I engaged in regular reflection about research ideas and decisions and documented these in a log trail (Mertens, 2015). I made decisions in adherence to both the ACA Code of Ethics and relevant research ethical mandates to address study dependability. Second, I consulted with peers and faculty both within and outside of my discipline to obtain multiple viewpoints about methodological choices. Third, I used a diverse focus group of counselor education faculty and doctoral students to enhance and pilot the precision of the survey screening instrument. Both of these strategies increased confirmability and transferability (Mertens, 2015; Saldaña, 2015). Fourth, I used member checking twice throughout the study to promote accountability and accuracy of both my transcriptions and interpretations of the data with participants. Member checking paired with reflexivity regarding my positionality address progressive subjectivity and promote the study’s credibility (Mertens, 2015). Fifth, I engaged in several rounds of coding and analysis to promote credibility (Saldaña, 2015; Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). Finally, the decision to use IPA to analyze the data was intentional as it uses the double hermeneutic, which is amplified in this study as I meet my own sample criteria, to use my knowledge to help expand on this area and build rapport, but also maintain boundaries appropriate to the research process to avoid imposing or projecting my experiences onto participants or analysis (Smith, Flowers, &
Larkin, 2009). To execute this last strategy, I provided a written summary of my own gatekeeper experiences as an appendix (See Appendix D), using pseudonyms to protect supervisee and student confidentiality.

As a counselor education doctoral student, I am personally and professionally driven to better understand this topic as a result of my own personal experiences of becoming a gatekeeper. I acknowledge that I felt underprepared to engage in gatekeeping and that my coursework lacked information about how to identify and address gatekeeping-related issues in practice. When I searched the literature to supplement this knowledge gap, I also felt that there was a gap in the research regarding how to become a gatekeeper and learning gatekeeping. The idea for this dissertation stems from my own experiences where I have had to serve as a gatekeeper to the profession, but I felt unprepared to do so. Though I have had positive experiences seeking out faculty for advice and mentorship on this topic, it is my hope that I have contributed to the literature base regarding how doctoral students learn and develop in their gatekeeping roles during their doctoral program training.

**Budget**

The complete itemized budget for the project is as follows: secure interview transcription service fees for up to twenty interviews totaling $1,500 at $1.25 per minute via rev.com (based on an estimate of twenty 60-minute interviews), interview gift card rewards for up to twenty participants for $355 at $15 per participant with $2.75 service fee, and a $50 gift card reward for lottery for the survey with $4.50 service fee. A $300 grant from North Central Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (NCACES) and a $500 Data Collection grant from the Western Michigan University Graduate Student Association were received to address expenses.
Further funding has been sought from the Western Michigan University Graduate College. The total budget is estimated to be $1,909.50.

**Data Processing and Analysis**

IPA was selected as the primary data analysis method for coding the data. The range for the typical IPA study is from one to 15 participants to reach saturation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Following completion of interviews, participants’ transcripts were transcribed using a secure, confidential transcription service (rev.com) and then sent to participants to verify, add, or change content as an initial member check. Once initial member checking concluded, transcripts were coded, and then codes were synthesized into themes using IPA. It was noted how themes and sub-themes addressed or related to one or more of the research questions. Several rounds of coding occurred to identify content, process, and meaning (Saldaña, 2015; Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). Counselor education doctoral student peers were asked to review the codebook and themes throughout the coding process to promote confirmability.

Following the analysis process, all participants were asked to review candidate themes from the data and invited to provide input to the data analysis process as part of the final member checking process. Fourteen of the 15 participants provided feedback and validation of transcripts and 12 of the 15 participants provided feedback and validation of the final themes. Once member checking was complete, data analysis was finalized and used to address the research questions in the research report. A research log and audit trail of research ideas, codes, themes, and decisions was kept throughout the data analysis process.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Organization of Data

The data were organized by themes hierarchically, including meta-themes, themes, and sub-themes. There were two meta-themes, or overarching themes, which were present across several themes and sub-themes: “In the middle” and Navigating the Grey Space of Gatekeeper Development. Additionally, five major themes emerged, with each of them having between two to six sub-themes. The results of the interviews and description of these themes follows below. Additionally, Table 3 provides a brief overview and structure of the data.
Table 3

**Summary of Themes and Sub-themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Key Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of the Gatekeeper Role</td>
<td>Protecting Clients and the Profession</td>
<td>Preventing harm to clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protecting reputation of profession</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid Legal Action or Repercussions</td>
<td>Legal Considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support Student Development</td>
<td>Compassion and empathy for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strengths-based approach to feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lead by Example</td>
<td>Doctoral students as role models for master’s students or other students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gatekeeping as leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learn and Develop as Future Counselor Educators</td>
<td>Thinking “if I were the gatekeeper as a faculty”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborate with Program and Colleagues</td>
<td>Work together to prevent gate slippage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Relationships</td>
<td>Multiple Professional Roles and Boundaries</td>
<td>Wearing several “hats” in the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Dynamics</td>
<td>Boundary crossings and violations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional Power Dynamics and Hierarchies</td>
<td>Impact of culture on relational dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of culture on gatekeeping process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of “politics” on gatekeeping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
<pre><code>                          |                                                | Perceptions of power and authority                                         |
</code></pre>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gatekeeper</th>
<th>Gatekeeping in the Classroom</th>
<th>Less mention of teaching</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contexts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Compare and contrast to supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gatekeeping in the Clinic</td>
<td>Felt more immediate in clinical work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Compare and contrast to teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing</td>
<td>Theoretical Approach</td>
<td>Formal assessment and intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Competence</td>
<td>Practical Approach</td>
<td>Informal assessment and conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intuition and subjectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways of Learning</td>
<td>Formal Training and Course</td>
<td>Learning from content or didactically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Lack of training or content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience Acting as a Gatekeeper</td>
<td>Learning from direct experience in a gatekeeper role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentorship, Role Models, and Support</td>
<td>Role models or mentors and qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of role modeling or mentorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observations and Examples</td>
<td>Who is gatekeeping the gatekeepers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Case studies or observing peers being gatekept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of gatekeeping examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of gate slippage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Meta-themes supersede and overlap with all themes and sub-themes.
Themes

Meta-Theme 1: “In the Middle”

The meta-theme “in the middle” is the only in vivo-named code as it was verbatim mentioned in this way across nearly all participants. The lived experience of this meta-theme was described throughout all participants’ interviews and addresses all research questions. Being “in the middle” also permeated all other themes and sub-themes, as a superordinate context for how doctoral students do gatekeeping specifically as opposed to faculty or supervisor gatekeepers. The experience of being “in the middle” ranged from approval and comfort to frustration and disempowered. Carmen felt it was where she belonged: “I haven't felt like ... even though I feel like I'm a middle person, I feel like that's where I should be.” Gary described a neutral being “in the middle” experience from the standpoint of learning: “So us doc students kind of fell in the middle. And we were just observing this whole process of, ‘Okay, now these students have received an evaluation, where there's a dispositional issue. Now what's being done about that?’” Gary described it as a neutral experience and part of the context in this example, whereas other examples like the one shared by Helena described the middle role as disempowering: “How do I feel about the role? Is I feel frustrated as a doctoral student and again being in the middle.” The context of what doctoral students were in the middle of also made a difference in their lived experience of this role. There were four general areas where doctoral students felt “in the middle” of faculty and master’s students: authority, evaluation, professional identity, and relationships.

Authority

Several doctoral students spoke of their experience as being between master’s students and faculty in terms of authority, which is derived from their role as determined by the sub-
theme Institutional Power Dynamics and Hierarchies. As a result, the expectations for this role and the authority that comes with it varies by the program, as with this example from Jeff:

The faculty would often ask us to play a somewhat gatekeeping role to adjunct professors of how do you experience them as a professor, do you think they should continue being here? What are your concerns? And there are a couple of adjuncts that weren't welcome back, because the doctoral students had vocalized like this is alarming. I'm really worried about having this person teaching and running the course.

Though the role expectations may differ, there were similar lived experiences of being “in the middle” with authority and power. Carmen described the expectations of her program as feeling she did not have the final say but rather raised the alarm:

I think defining my experience as a gatekeeper, I definitely don't see myself as the last say. I think I'm more of someone who puts out kind of like a yellow or a red flag about a student. So that might mean in the classes that I'm helping to TA or any supervisees that I have but I definitely wouldn't consider myself like the final say. I think I'm more in the front lines of the gatekeeping.

The specific types or amount of authority was different for each program that participants represented, but it was consistently described as more than master’s students and less than faculty.

Laura described the physical location of doctoral students in terms of authority, regardless of program expectations: “As a doctoral student, we not the highest on the totem pole or the bottom of the totem pole.” Ella described that she was oven conscious of this middle position, even though it had never been explicitly given to her:

I guess, because it hasn't totally been articulated, then I guess, I don't know, it's all feels
pretty in-line because it does feel fairly consistent. Like I feel like our faculty are fairly consistent in the way that they approach us. Again, it's just a funny, like it's just a really unique role to be in this in-between. Because, I mean, they treat us like they value us, but also obviously, there are certain things where we're still, there's a hierarchy.

She focused on how, though she was aware of her lower position in the hierarchy, that she still felt valued and empowered by faculty as a gatekeeper, however she did not always perceive this same level of authority in her interactions with master’s students:

Students also, I know that they test us more and they do some things they wouldn't do with the faculty. That's a little bit frustrating because again, the hierarchy, they know that we're nonfaculty. I feel like generally, students are very respectful, but we don't always get the same level of respect that the faculty does.

Master’s students’ perception of power and authority of faculty was higher than for doctoral students, leading to barriers for her. Jeff summarized how both the actual and perceived authority to gatekeep impacted his own experience:

It does become difficult to navigate that because one of the criteria that I've always articulated as a gatekeeper is that if you want me to gatekeep, you have to give me the authority to do so. Otherwise, all I'm doing is just frustrating people because I'm trying to gatekeep, and then the people in power to have final say are dismissing that role. So if you want me to take on the role of the gatekeeper, you need to give me the sufficient authority to gatekeep.

This perception of authority and power as a gatekeeper influences how master’s students will respond to doctoral instructors and supervisors.
Perception of power and authority also influence developing gatekeeper’s self-efficacy as well. Gary described how his authority was dependent on faculty’s support:

I also have to recognize that based on my position of, I think, relative power ... relative to the master's students, but then also many ways not in a position of power when it comes to faculty, and being able to make any sort of decision or being able to offer some perspective that's weighted, to any real extent by faculty.

Laura described that her perceived power influenced both her self-efficacy as a gatekeeper and decision-making process: “And so I was glad that we were on the same page, but if we weren't then I don't think I might have, I don't know, maybe conceded more easily because of my lack of power in the program.” Helena described how she worried about her authority being dependent on faculty; she felt it could impact her efficacy as a gatekeeper and, at times, lead to gate slippage:

As a doctoral student, I feel like it's a weird hierarchy of powers because I'm not faculty, so these students that I'm usually overseeing are... they have me and then they have their professor supervising them. And so I think at times it can be very frustrating because I guess because of that lack of power as still a student even if I am supervising them. Because... So in my experience, there's been sometimes where I have seen things that raise an eyebrow or that I feel needs some remediation or extra support or something. And what I have encountered is that the faculty experience something different from the student, and so it's not always taken seriously or I feel like there's a lot of holes in which students who maybe are not ready to move on to the next level are still moving on. And our program in particular is a very big program. So there's large classes, lots of students
going in and out, and so I think that that causes a lot more room for students who are not ready to end up moving on and graduating.

Doctoral students are hierarchically “in the middle” of faculty and doctoral students in training programs, but this meta-theme also captures other experiences of being caught between two forces or roles.

**Evaluation**

Doctoral students are evaluators of master’s students, but they are also simultaneously being evaluated on their developing supervision and teaching abilities. Mercedes described this experience and the level of responsibility associated with such evaluation:

> [M]y evaluations of the supervisee become part of the record, the supervisee's record as well, which I think there again is a fair amount of responsibility. So part of what's been articulated is that I need to be able to demonstrate my ability to evaluate as much as the supervisee needs to be able to demonstrate their skills.

Riley felt that this middle position in evaluation was one she was comfortable with, as she had established rapport with her supervisees and her faculty supervisor:

> So the first thing that comes to mind is talking about something that we've learned about in class is just how there's that evaluative piece of supervision for me. So obviously I'm trying to build rapport with my supervisees. I can bring up the fact that there's an evaluative component. I think that all my professors, but primarily my supervisor, has created so much trust and rapport between all of us that I don't really think very much...

Carmen also felt that this middle place of simultaneous role of evaluation was appropriate and comfortable to her as she felt she had enough safeguards and power to be effective at her role:

> I think everyone is fairly in line with that middle person kind of role that we have. I think
having the individual and group supervision kind of keeps us in check about what our role is. So that we don't overstep any bounds. And at the same time we're given the power, so to say to make certain decisions, address certain things and to be aware of concerns.

Trust and support appear to be important elements in both evaluator relationships, though not all participants felt similarly.

Some participants saw the pressure of evaluation while learning to evaluate their trainees in this new gatekeeping role as uncomfortable. Mercedes described it as difficult, incongruent, and full of cognitive dissonance:

Yeah, I think that's been really, really challenging for me. I think that that goes into a lot of the power dynamics. It feels really incongruous to both simultaneously be evaluating and be evaluated. So I think that I experienced a fair amount of emotional and cognitive confusion regarding how much power I had and how much I didn't.

For Gary, he found it difficult and risky to validate master’s students at times for fear of negative evaluation by faculty:

So, trying to validate master's students because they are speaking up about important issues, but then also, recognize they're not going against faculty or the program, because then that reflects on me, and I'm at risk of a dispositional evaluation as well.

When faculty and doctoral students disagree on the evaluation of a student, it can create pressure to conform to avoid risk to their own evaluation.

Gary shared his experience of times where evaluations were not aligned:

It really feels like we're in between a rock and a hard place with our trainees, because we have to model for faculty, something that master's students aren't necessarily getting from
faculty. We're having to model professionalism and yet, to same extent, students are being negatively evaluated for a disposition thing, for advocating for themselves and for their profession.

He went on to say that it can be uncomfortable, but that remaining open and listening to concerns was one way he was able to resolve this pressure: “For doc students, I think my best advice would be to just hold space for the fact that you're in a very uncomfortable position of being evaluated and evaluating place, in my program's experience.” Jeff identified the pressure to perform through the reminder that doctoral students are also being graded: “I honestly think a lot of times the doctoral students take their position with a greater level of responsibility because they're getting graded.” This evaluative role can be uncomfortable for many students because they are also under scrutiny, but it can also be difficult due to the professional identity shift doctoral students undergo.

**Professional Identity**

Another way that doctoral students experienced being “in the middle” was with the professional identity transition that occurs in shifting from a clinician to a counselor educator and supervisor. Clinicians are highly relational and nonjudgmental as they work with clients, whereas counselor educators, though typically relational, must also grade and give evaluative feedback to trainees. Carmen identified the difficulty of this shift and how it connects to “in the middle”:

It can be tough because we definitely can look back. We're doctoral students, we are still students so we can empathize with that student experience of the master's students and how difficult life can be. So we can be kind of stuck in the middle as far as that's concerned.

Layla shared how this transition also overlapped with feeling “in the middle” with respect to
authority:

I felt like I was a new doctoral student but didn't really know what my role... I had a good idea of what a counselor educator's role is then where I was in that setting, I felt like that I was stepping on toes if I went too far. So I had this uneasy middle feeling and I feel like that either presented itself to her or made me less of an authority figure as a gatekeeper. Laura described similar pressure of being in the middle of continuing to develop her skills as a clinician, yet also working to develop supervision and teaching skills associated with gatekeeping:

It's nerve-racking because we're teaching skills, supervising, training skills to supervisees, especially during the first year in the doctoral program in which I have not yet been evaluated on my own clinical skills. And so how could that potentially affect my supervisees? If I haven't received feedback on my own clinical skills. If I'm teaching them to do something, and I'm not completely grounded in my theory or/and don't have much experience, then how could that... It's very nerve wracking to also feel that you could be gatekept at the same time that you're looking to potentially gatekeep someone else.

Laura also noted how, feeling in the middle of this professional identity transition also sparked fear of being in the middle of evaluation as well. Helena described how she had begun to work through this shift, merging concern for student’s wellbeing with assertive gatekeeping:

I think on the flip side of that is I don't want to be aggressive and I don't want to be passive and gatekeeping, I want to be in the middle where I am keeping their wellbeing, students and their clients in mind.

Being in the middle of this professional identity refocus was difficult for both doctoral students
who continued straight through from their master’s as well as those who worked in the field prior to pursuing their doctorate, and this transition overlaps with several sub-themes such as Support Student Development.

**Relationships**

The tendency to approach trainees similarly to clients as doctoral students make a role shift may also connect to their feeling of being in between students and faculty relationally or socially. Ella describes how doctoral students may feel “in the middle” as a result of doctoral students’ capability to have Multiple Professional Roles and Boundaries:

> It's been interesting. I think it's a weird place to be a doc student and you're kind of like in between. In a lot of ways it's been helpful because I feel like I have different kinds of relationships with students than the faculty might, but it's hard because I don't necessarily have the like authority that a faculty would.

Gary described how he does not feel relationally much different from master’s students, but that the power dynamics are what stand out:

> So, our faculty operating so top-down, it really has felt like it's removed my ability to have any semblance of power. I think that master's students perceive me and other doc students as having power that really isn't there. I think that there's some semblance of some sort of admiration, like, ‘Wow, you're doing my goal. I really want to be a doc student, as well.’ And then having respect for that reason. ‘Oh, you must have power because you're a doctoral student and that's above me.’ But realistically, it doesn't feel any different from being a master's student. I feel in some ways, we're trusted with less.

Ella described how her position of being in the middle evaluating them was what separated her from master’s students socially:
I mean, we came here and I don't, my husband and I didn't know anybody here, and so that idea that everybody's like, ‘Oh, you'll meet people through school,’ I'm like, ‘But I can't be friends with the master's students because I evaluate them. Like I can't hang out with them.’ It's like I only have this little group of people, of 10 people, that I'm really exposed to that I can actually like be friends with.

Helena noted that she felt pressured to provide relational space and loyalty to her trainees but at the same time she did not feel comfortable speaking negatively about faculty:

And so there's been a few professors that I have seen and that have made microaggressions to students and to me as a supervisor. And that's something that I do keep in mind. Not something that I want to do. And it's hard because sometimes my own supervisees talk to me about these things about the faculty. And they're trying to process what this is, and then me, I feel very... with my hands tied because I don't want to bad mouth the faculty, but at the same time, I have seen and experienced the very same things that the supervisee is expressing to me. So that's difficult.

Though the social separation from master's students may be experienced differently depending on the program and individual doctoral student, there is a social distinction felt.

Doctoral students also described feeling socially in the middle with respect to faculty relationships as well. Ella described the discomfort of the in-between space when faculty crossed that social separation:

I guess the only thing I've had trouble with and actually the supervisor that I really overall enjoy, I really am again aware of who she does and doesn't like and I don't know that I should really know that. I feel like at times a couple of professors have not necessarily like modeled really great behavior for us as like gatekeepers, like they do let
their guard down quite a bit and I still feel like it's almost uncomfortable because we're in this in-between space that like I get professors are real people and they need to just let loose and talk openly with some people, but I feel like when you're teaching us to be supervisors and to be teachers, maybe that shouldn't be like the behavior modeled for us.

Layla highlighted the importance of the relationship with the faculty member in terms of whether she felt her middle place was valued or effective as a gatekeeper:

I think that as a doctoral student, I don't always have as much say as I would like. I might be a little bit more diligent about creating a remediation plan or things like that, like in my first example, but sometimes I do have the ability to work well with the professor and get them to see when it's needed. So it can go either way.

Gary outlined how he felt a faculty member negatively impacted his relationship with supervisees, leaving him as the middle person to address the fallout:

That's been really challenging for me, because it ... to this point, I almost don't want to bring up issues with my supervisees, because I don't know what's going to happen to them, if anything. There's a possibility, like last semester, the whole issue got squashed, and then all of a sudden misconstrued and all convoluted. If it does go anywhere, how is it going to come back in a meeting with my supervisees. Because it wasn't left up to me to ultimately try to confront my supervisee. I did end up having to go back and clean up and confront. But this other faculty member kind of fumbled it, and that was part of why it got so messed up.

The overlap of authority and power on the social and relational dynamics of doctoral students and their faculty and master’s students can cause doctoral students to feel doubly in the middle if boundaries are mismanaged.
Gary summed up how feeling relationally in the middle can negatively influence gatekeeper development: “It really feels like we're in between a rock and a hard place with our trainees, because we have to model for faculty, something that master’s students aren't necessarily getting from faculty.” Conversely, Ella identified the difference in confidence and comfort when the social and relational elements are balanced with the other elements of being “in the middle”:

I mean, I think it's good to hang out with people in some of those ways, like sit around and have a meal together and then maybe there's added comfort there to be able to... I mean, I have a student that I really, I like her, like I really genuinely like her. And because I have a relationship with her, I can call her out on a little bit more stuff. Like I don't hang out with her outside of class or anything, but just through like being around her a lot, we've developed a lot of rapport to where I can be a little bit more direct with her because of that relationship.

Social relationships may be more complicated to navigate due to the experience of being “in the middle.”

Doctoral students’ location of being “in the middle” socially, professionally, hierarchically, and with evaluation is nuanced and experienced differently depending on the doctoral student, program, and situation. Carmen summarized a key implication of the “in the middle experience”:

I think it is like we talked about we're a middle person, so where do we fit? We're still playing a huge role in the field and how gatekeeping is happening in our field. So to find out more about what our role is or how people are viewing our role.

Regardless, there was an overarching lived experience of feeling between or in the middle of
other people, roles, or forces, which adds unique pressure and dynamics to the role of developing gatekeepers.

**Meta-Theme 2: Navigating the Grey Spaces of Gatekeeper Development**

Participants often used the verb “navigate” to describe the unknowns of their developmental process as neophyte gatekeepers. These unknowns or “grey space” overlap with each major theme and were present in each participant’s interview. This meta-theme includes the process or approach doctoral students took when trying to work through the difficulty or unknown aspects of learning to gatekeep, thus Navigating the Grey Space of Gatekeeper Development. This meta-theme most directly addresses research question two, but also overlaps with answers to questions one and three as well. The major “grey spaces” that doctoral students felt they needed to navigate included: balancing support and challenge in feedback, developmental parallel processes, gatekeeping as a process, and self-efficacy as a gatekeeper.

These “grey spaces” are unique developmental hurdles for doctoral students as opposed to faculty or site supervisor peers. Ella described her role, part of which overlaps with being “in the middle”:

> I get to be the eyes and ears for the faculty because they're not there on how people are doing in internship, getting to do site visits, and getting to talk to their internship supervisors about how things are going at their site. That’s been really, really helpful.

Ella navigated the grey space, using her middle position, by gathering information to help faculty make better-informed gatekeeping decisions with information they may not otherwise be privy to. Gary used the same metaphor, but worried faculty were not as receptive to this method of navigating gatekeeper development:

> It's not something that faculty can do. They can't necessarily provide the one-on-one
attention, or they're controlling the whole classroom, or they're in charge of the group sup. So there are things that they might miss, and I think that from at least at this level of training, the doc students are able to provide another set of eyes and another filter of clinical judgment, in order to help provide valuable information. And I don't think in my program, that that's being accessed in a meaningful way.

Highlighting the greyness of the situation, Carmen noted a similar way of developing her skills that “while not as concrete as I would've liked, they've made it pretty clear that they are over the class as a whole. They're over the supervision as a whole and I am there to relay concerns back to them.” Mercedes best described the complex and layered experience of navigating grey space as a developing gatekeeper over time:

Our responsibilities change based upon our observation skills and supervision skills generally. So beginning, you can bring up concerns. But then as you become more experienced and you start supervising higher level classes, you begin to have the responsibility of sharing in those discussions with the supervisee and the instructor of record. Versus I think at some of the lower level classes, you're just more of a recommender.

Doctoral students, by virtue of their middle position, can learn and fulfill their role as a developing gatekeeper by trying to supplement information used in trainee evaluation and then learn from these experiences.

**Balancing Support and Challenge in Feedback**

Balancing support and challenge was an area that all participants mentioned as complicated to navigate. Doctoral students spoke to this balance in both feedback they sought to give and feedback they received themselves. Gary succinctly described the impact of balanced
feedback from faculty on his development saying “So I loved that, the balance and the challenge and support. And I think that that's really been central to my development as a gatekeeper.”

Clyde described the benefits of finding that balance on both ends, noting it made the gatekeeper development process clearer and more predictable:

> But I've always felt like any feedback I got was to make me better and it has, and there's a relational component of that too. Of like faculty making the time to build a relationship with doc students as people. Just as we, as doc students and them as faculty have to make the relationship a priority with the master's students. People feel better about being evaluated by somebody they trust. And when you're being evaluated by somebody that you don't have confidence in, it's a lot scarier and that's what I can say from my professional experience.

Riley described how receiving a balance of support and challenge from her supervisor of supervision helped her develop a level of autonomy as a gatekeeper:

> I would want to emulate again her ability to build rapport, her ability to support and challenge us, and her trust for us, and I think she does a good job of helping us to become autonomous, but at the same time realizing we definitely need to learn from other people.

Chelsea described how a balanced approach to feedback built her gatekeeping confidence: “And a lot of them, again, challenge me in good ways, but also emphasize my strengths. So, like built confidence so that way when I did get that constructive feedback, it was more well-received.”

The participants distinctly preferred a balance of support and challenge, which they also sought to emulate in their own work with trainees.

Trent described his developmental process of learning to engage in some of the challenge and conflict inherent in gatekeeping, also noting he felt it was developmentally normative:
I feel like I've gotten more comfortable with being blunt and being relational at the same time. Because I used to feel that, you know, even though I probably knew that it didn't have to be exclusive, it felt like it was exclusive. And I just had trouble with approaching conflict, like I think a lot of people do in their initial supervisory style, I guess.

Firefox felt her difficulty in navigating how to provide feedback came from receiving conflicting or unbalanced feedback herself:

> It seems like depending on the professor I have or who I may consult with about gatekeeping issues, I'm receiving different feedback and it's hard to gauge how to gatekeep as a doc student for master's students not really knowing what my role is and how much authority I have.

Layla felt that her faculty did not provide enough support for her or enough challenge for the student to reinforce her attempts to address a student’s resistance to her feedback:

> But if there's totally no self-awareness then I just bring up my view and I'm like, ‘This is what I'm seeing. I just want to share that with you now and see what your thoughts are on that,’ which I have had someone be like, ‘I don't agree,’ and I was like, ‘Well, this is the evidence,’ and they're like, ‘Yeah, okay, maybe.’ And that was the problem, right? I wasn't the professor so she didn't care about me saying that that's what I think because the professor wasn't saying the same thing as me until it was too late.

When feedback does not feel balanced, doctoral students are less likely to feel supported in their development and are often confused about how to navigate similar issues in the future.

Helena spoke more about trying to be balanced in her approach to moving forward with remediation and weighing her power:

> And so I guess that's my role as a gatekeeper, keeping that in mind that there's a lot of
power at play and this is someone like, "Why leave that in there?" like emphasis on education And so making sure that if I'm going to I guess ask from remediation that it's really grounded in facts and grounded in genuine support of the student and their growth. Ella shared that she struggled to understand how feedback was given and the lack of consistency resulted in her feeling less able to navigate the feedback process for trainees:

I'm the only one in my doc program that didn't go to this master's program, and so the idea of me being expected to give people feedback, not knowing like what that was supposed to look like, that we weren't all uniform and our feedback was really uncomfortable, because we did switch around each week.

Carmen summarized the experience of navigating the balance of support and challenge as an unknown and how it varies by program and person:

I think to what we've talked about, know your role and that may look different department to department. So find out what your expected role is and ask for what you need. I mean we're not meant to be the be all say all. We're meant to be ... we are there for training and for improvement so that we can be the best that we can be. And I think it's important to remember to ask for the feedback. We're not expected to get it right the first time. That's why they're there.

Clear expectations and examples are important for doctoral students to work out how to give feedback to trainees, and faculty Mentorship, Role Models, and Support also play a key role in developing this skill.

**Developmental Parallel Processes**

Doctoral students are receiving feedback while also learning to provide feedback to trainees, which creates one of several developmental parallel processes for gatekeeper
development. Gary stated how helpful seeing feedback through the parallel process was: “So, seeing two forms of feedback. One from my trainees, and one from faculty, was really something that I felt was really positive for me as a developing gatekeeper.” Helena described the parallel processes of experiencing the skills she was trying to develop as a gatekeeper herself:

Yeah. It's interesting because it... again the parallel processing, right? I am getting this feedback and then I'm also giving feedback. And so I think it's very helpful because that helped me realize what I do and do not appreciate about certain types of feedback. And so I try to learn from that, basically take what I like, don't take what I don't like and then integrate that into my own style of supervision or my own style of gatekeeping.

Ella noted her awareness of the parallel processes occurring: “Yeah, it's been pretty interesting. I guess, yeah, it's difficult to like have somebody watch you like intervening with a student, it's just like all the different layers.” Parallel processes can be difficult to navigate due to the newness of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to develop as a gatekeeper, but they can also be a tool to navigate these uncertainties.

Daisy described how a parallel process of learning might look on both the faculty end and master's student perspective in gatekeeping:

The first one is when I talked about the example I was thinking okay, so probably that's, they just come, they just shared their battles on gatekeeping to us and they want us to do the same thing as well. So I think that's a power thing. That's between me and my professor. And another thing is the gate... I think the gatekeeping is there's one concern I have. So if, for example, I don't know what's going on, on my student's side, so they may have some concerns with themself, for example, they may have identified one area for growth, but they don't know how that will impact my evaluation on them. So they may
choose not to say it with me.

Chelsea described more of the internal process the doctoral student might experience, with the discomfort the grey space creates, but also with the opportunity to seek out consultation to navigate it:

But I mean, you feel a little bit more comfortable, I think being a gatekeeper because there's that layer of safety with your supervisor. So with the faculty member looking at your tapes, you're navigating this situation with, ‘Hey, what do you think? Do you think I'm making the right decision, providing that validation.’ That's helpful because you don't necessarily get that when you're in a full-blown gatekeeping role.

Jessie shared that the transparency of the situation helped her to navigate the grey space and will continue to help her develop her gatekeeper identity:

I think the transparency with me was really important and the additional support that I was getting. Our goal is to be faculty members. In my future, I'm likely not just providing supervision for master's students, but I'm probably kind of the tier of that system. Providing supervision and support for doc students, who are then doing the same for their master's students in a lot of programs anyway. To feel the support and know how much it meant to me, I think is something that will always stick with me, so that if that situation comes up in the future, I know to make sure that I'm not like neglecting the doc student. Just because the master student is kind of the one with the areas of concern. I think that, yeah, like I said, that's something that I will certainly never forget.

When a parallel process lacks transparency or when doctoral students do not feel they have the tools or support to navigate it, it can complicate their development.
Gary elaborated on the way that Institutional Power Dynamics and Hierarchies can negatively impact these parallel processes, leading to unnecessary learning barriers or self-doubt for some doctoral students. “I think that it creates the potential for parallel process, necessarily having need. But I think that there is circuitous patterns of power that are being manipulated in different ways, more than other dyads and triads within my cohort.” Mercedes provided an example of such a situation and how it could impact her development:

I think it's working with specific instructors who kind of may not be quite sure themselves or may have their personal issues where they want to be liked or whatever it is that kind of make that process really difficult to navigate on top of just learning the general skills and what you need to do in certain situations.

Layla reflected on the power dynamic on two levels of the parallel process, describing how the instructor’s response to the master’s student’s developmental struggle can impact others:

So that kind of power dynamic I would say is frustrating, but it also makes me really mindful of a power dynamic for a master's student, those master's students that maybe worked as a psych tech for like 15 years and is finally getting their master's or something and being like, ‘Don't try and tell me what I don't know.’ So it's a delicate balance between honoring their experience while also acknowledging that's your bias or your assumption and this is the training that we're trying to give you for you to be more mindful. Because I've also been in a master's class with those people who have had 20 years of experience and they just ramble and ramble or they have been therapy for years, so they give too much information and the professor has to either instill some power to be like, ‘This is not helpful,’ or they don't and then it's a detriment to the rest of the class.
These parallel processes create similar discomfort and pressure, as they tie in with being “in the middle.”

Gary said he felt that he struggled with his wellbeing, feeling that the parallel process forced him to prioritize master’s student’s development over his own at times:

It really feels, especially now, like there's a lot of lip service towards doc students, at least to take care of yourself. But then at the same time, ‘We're evaluating you on all of these responsibilities and duties that you have, and you better not mess up even a little bit. You better not compensate or compromise in any way, because master's students look up to you, and you also represent us in the program. So, if you do take this time to compromise for yourself or take care of yourself, then that's not going to look good on us. So you really can't do that.’

Jessie felt it felt like her layer of the parallel process was moot if faculty did not utilize the feedback she provided:

We're not included as doc students supervising their work, to provide any feedback. I would hope that the instructors who are teaching the practical courses, are using our evaluations and feedback and kind of taking that into consideration when they're providing their input. I think that's maybe one area where they might be missing out on.

Conversely, Firefox noted the potential personal fallout of too much responsibility in navigating that parallel process:

It was just like the sheer thing of that we're both going to do it versus the one this semester's putting it all on me, which I don't mind. But also if it doesn't go well for your student, then that falls on me.
Doctoral students must navigate parallel developmental processes and their outcomes while in the precarious position of being “in the middle.”

**Gatekeeping as a Process**

Doctoral student development, as with master’s trainees’ development, appears to occur as a process and along a continuum. While developing their respective skills in tandem with their trainees, doctoral students are also learning to navigate what to do as gatekeepers at each point in the gatekeeping process. Trent outlined how his identification of gatekeeping as a process also influenced his development as a gatekeeper:

> And then also just this idea of not doing gatekeeping as an end product, to viewing it as a process from the beginning. They can start from admissions and start from whenever you first notice anything and how to be supportive and informal. Because there's a lot of scary things that can happen if it only happens at the end. Or if nothing happens at all, people are just permissive, there's a lot of scary things that can happen with that. So just recognizing how important it is being involved, getting feedback, all those things.

Helena described it as feel there are multiple levels of gatekeeping:

> And so in that, there's different levels to gatekeeping as well. And so I don't necessarily believe every gatekeeping incident means an official remediation plan, but it is a conversation to be heard. And I think that it should be something where we actively create a plan to help. So whether that's support extra homework, writing an extra reflection paper, it needs to be something to ensure that we are not causing harm to those who they're going to be serving.

The gatekeeping process has various levels to navigate in addition to the gatekeeper’s own developmental process and other challenges.
Participants addressed this grey area by seeking to address issues early and proportionally. Clyde said:

But usually it's something where we're seeing little flags, little personality flags over time and we want to catch it as early as possible and actually try to give assignments and have class discussions that bring that stuff to the surface so we can catch it.

Gary noted that for gatekeeping to truly be a form of advocacy or leadership, it must be done as soon as it is identified and done in a supportive manner:

But doing that in a way that feels unconditionally positive, that feels supportive. I think is really challenging but ultimately, is the role of the gatekeeper, to advocate to the student ... to the student for the student, in those early stages, before it becomes more of a formal remediation process.

Carmen echoed this sentiment, noting examples where it also becomes easier for both trainees and gatekeepers if it is resolved sooner rather than later:

At the same time from those experiences where I felt like there were some doctoral students who should have had earlier gatekeeping, that has really informed me about the importance of gatekeeping on the front end instead of trying to resolve things on the back end.

Laura described how she has integrated early intervention to her own gatekeeper development:

I think that it means protecting clients is number one, but also helping the students that you do gatekeep and gaining more experience, gaining more feedback, improving skills. I think it's a really challenging thing though, especially... Yeah. If people have certain plans in their mind that they're going to continue and if gatekeeping isn't done in a...

What if it's done suddenly, as opposed to in the way that I have tried to do it, then I think
that it can be pretty shocking and hurt student's ego, potentially.

In addition to early and supportive intervention, participants also identified that gatekeeping is a process rather than an event.

As a process, developing gatekeepers identified the need to continuously assess any gatekeeping concerns. Mercedes described this ongoing process: And I think that that is, I think until the end of the semester, that's an ongoing process. “It's not a final decision until the decision needs to be made. Because I think that foreclosure can be really dangerous too.” Ella noted that doctoral students often play a role at some point of the ongoing evaluation, which can span more than one course and generally is something the student is already aware of:

And so, yeah, I feel like it's pretty ongoing, it's not something at the end of this semester that somebody, it's a big surprise they find out that they need some sort of remediation or extra help. There's a lot of intervening like in the middle of courses to get people... The doc students help out usually with the extra supervision and extra help that people really need.

Doctoral students recognize the ongoing nature of assessment, but they may struggle to navigate their role at any given point in that process.

Gary highlighted how ongoing assessment often may seem like waiting, observing, and offering limited support for doctoral student gatekeepers, which can be difficult:

Realistically, a decision of wait and see is going to most likely be what the choice of option. And then, in that circumstance, just offering support to the student. I also recognize that being in a master's program, it's really challenging and it's very stressful. And at times, there are going to be things that eke out of me that aren't consistent with your personality, or with how you're trying to think for yourself, or for how you're trying
to grow. So holding space for that and not being alarmist necessarily, when it comes to identifying the student issues.

Jeff shared an experience with the opposite issue of navigating how to continue to have difficult conversations with students as they continue to come up without demoralizing trainees:

And there was a lot of conversation around, ‘Well, I don't want people to feel disheartened. Or I don't want people to feel judged, whatever, anterior your negative emotion there.’ And that was a bit of a, ‘Yeah, but unfortunately that comes with the territory.’ Instead of a conversation of, ‘Yes. However, you can explain to them what your basis was, what your criteria was, where you see them excelling, provide them feedback as to how they can grow.’ I think a lot of people if you're just giving, ‘Yeah, you suck.’ That's stings.

Firefox identified that she felt it comes down to who has the availability and commitment to make a long term investment in that ongoing assessment: “Once again, I think it fostered the availability of who can really do it? Because gatekeeping is an investment, and you don't know the timestamp on that investment.” Finally, Trent described how important it is for gatekeepers to be mindful gatekeeping as a process, elaborating on how gatekeeping too late can decrease the quality of the gatekeeping and support:

So I guess it's a balance. Like it has to be ... I feel like if gatekeeping and remediation are really considered like philosophically as a process from the beginning, it helps to mitigate some of these issues. But I think sometimes if these things aren't recognized early on or if things present later on, I don't know sometimes it feels like the oh, shit factor comes in and then it's like, ‘Oh, we've got to respond.’ And of those times, that's whenever I feel like maybe the support doesn't always balance as much with the protection and just
crossing your T’s and dotting your I’s. The outcome of gatekeeping interventions also impacts developing gatekeepers’ self-efficacy.

Doctoral student’s self-efficacy as gatekeepers appears to depend on the extent of perceived role congruence between gatekeeping as a doctoral student in their program and expectations for counselor educators and supervisors as gatekeepers to the field. In turn, their self-efficacy as developing gatekeepers also may influence their perception of the efficacy of gatekeeping in training programs in general. Mercedes described this questioning of self-efficacy as normative and essential for her developmental process:

I think for me personally, other messages or other things that I've received throughout the process that have led me to question my competence. When really, that might or might not have been part of the intention of the messengers. But I think that's part of the experience of being a doctoral student also is questioning your competence, questioning your capability.

Clyde described how faculty helped boost his self-efficacy as a gatekeeper and help him calibrate his gatekeeping assessment as well:

Nobody that I know has felt completely dismissed and those kinds of concerns. And I've also seen doc students feel comfortable enough to say like, ‘Am I reacting too strongly to this? Is this some of my own stuff?’ Or you know, ‘What is the context here? How far outside of normal is this behavior we're seeing from this person as defensiveness we're seeing from this person?’ And usually we get a good response of saying like, ‘Yes, it's concerning, but on a one to 10 this is kind of like a five.

Trent described how he felt his involvement in the process as a doctoral student increased his self-efficacy as a future counselor educator: “I mean I think from the beginning there's been a
recognition that we are part of it as doc students, and that's going to be an important part as faculty and supervisors, too, but more so as faculty.” Self-efficacy often comes as the doctoral student gains more knowledge and experience in gatekeeping, as discussed in Ways of Learning.

**Self-Efficacy as a Gatekeeper**

Additionally, doctoral students may struggle with their self-efficacy if they do not feel they are taken seriously or if they perceive a lack of authority to gatekeep. Layla described feeling ineffective and stuck in one such situation:

It's not getting anywhere. So just feeling very stagnant I think and like not having the authority, the backing to be like, ‘Look, we can't keep being stagnant. There's going to be a remediation plan or something.’ I didn't have that authority. So it just left me in limbo for an entire semester and then it backfired because she wasn't actually gatekept because she went on.

Ella described how her self-efficacy as a counselor and program manager was high and that she struggled with self-efficacy as a developing gatekeeper due to a different role and level of power:

And I am somebody that worked for a long time, so I was a program manager and supervised about 20 staff and I was a site supervisor for interns too. And so I feel like I have a lot less control right now than I used to, so that can be challenging. And so really I'm just informing faculty and they end up making the decisions. I think it's a challenge in that way and it's been hard.

Chelsea described a similar institutional barrier to her developing self-efficacy as a gatekeeper during her doctoral program as opposed to higher self-efficacy with gatekeeping in other roles:

I do have more structure in terms of, as a supervisor role whereas I think from my faculty positions I've had, there's a lot more hoops to jump through. It's not like you can say, ‘Oh,
boom, yep. Remediation plan. It's like, yeah.’ You have to talk to the department chair.

You have to, I mean like there's all those hoops to go through. I'm sure that varies where you teach, but for my experiences there's a lot more hoops to jump through.

Gary described becoming disheartened by a lack of follow up on his gatekeeping concerns, which impacted his perception of his gatekeeping efficacy as well as that of other doctoral students:

That's what's communicated to us as doc students, is ‘Okay. Well, this is an issue. Thanks for bringing it to our attention,’ and it doesn't go anywhere. We are told essentially in that moment, I feel, that, ‘Either your concern wasn't valid or it wasn't really severe enough for us, to warrant our attention to do anything. Well, even if we were to do anything, it really wouldn't go anywhere.’

Finally, Helena provided an example where she felt helpless and ineffective as a gatekeeper and how that invalidated her gatekeeper development:

I think the one where I guess my negative experience in gatekeeping, that student really was not... well, I think was causing harm to her clients and I was not supported. What I had to say was minimized. And so that was difficult because again, I had to bite my tongue and say, ‘Well, I'm not the professor. And even though I know the student is not ready and is doing harm, I can't do anything. So I just have to go with it.’ And that was a very uncomfortable place to be.

Negative experiences, typically involving perceived gate slippage, can decrease developing gatekeepers’ sense of efficacy and in their perceptions of the efficacy of the program or profession.
Doctoral students struggled most of all to navigate situations which impacted their self-efficacy as gatekeepers. Mercedes noted her solution was to use interpersonal skills to boost her own gatekeeping efficacy with certain faculty:

I think the power dynamics between faculty and students I think generally as a doc student has been difficult for me to navigate. I think there are certain expectations that are placed on you as a doc student that aren't placed on you as a master's student inherently. But at the same time, it's real difficult to navigate how much power you actually have and how much you don't. So when it comes to faculty personalities and faculty, their individual expectations, ways of communicating what they need. Some of them really need you to stroke their ego, and some of them really don't.

Gary felt that interpersonal dynamics played a role, but was at a loss as to how to better navigate this issue to avoid gate slippage:

I'm frustrated by it, because I see the good that can be done for master's students in my program. I don't think that I have all the answers, and that I know everything. But I think that what I have to contribute is valuable, for what it's worth, at my level of training. And also, I have concerns that if there is, depending on faculty dynamics within the department, that there's the opportunity for issues to be missed until it's too late to go back and remediate students.

Navigating the grey space of their developing self-efficacy appeared to be a difficult area for many participants and several expressed feeling frustrated or at a loss with how to navigate it.

**Theme 1: Perception of Gatekeeper Role**

The first theme entails participants’ perceptions of the gatekeeper role, including their view of its purpose and functions. This theme directly addresses research question three and its
two sub-questions. There were six sub-themes which further describe aspects of the gatekeeping role: Protecting Clients and the Profession, Avoid Legal Action or Repercussions, Support Student Development, Lead by Example, Learn and Develop as Future Counselor Educators, and Collaborate with Program and Colleagues. A defining aspect of this theme is that it was discussed within two different contexts: the role of gatekeepers in general and the role of doctoral students as gatekeepers within their program. Overall, participants perceived the role as “important” and “necessary” to the profession, with the main intention being to protect clients from harm and thus protect the profession (see sub-theme 1a). Participants would discuss their overall duty to the profession from ethical perspectives of preventing harm and legal considerations (see sub-theme 1b) but would also occasionally reference it from the perspective of a future counselor educator or supervision (see sub-theme 1e).

When discussing the role of gatekeeper as a doctoral student within a specific program, there was a stronger emphasis on sub-theme 1c in which doctoral students felt that it was important to support the students in their development. This aspect of gatekeeping as a doctoral student often tied into expressions of compassion and empathy for students, as expressed by Trent: “Because I think a lot of times, counseling students are pretty good people. We're pretty relational, pretty humanistic, we want them to do better. Most of the time I think we're all working towards the same goal.” Though both gatekeeping as a doctoral student and gatekeeping to the profession at large references all sub-themes, there were distinct institutional differences in viewing their role as doctoral students as well as a shared difference represented by the “in the middle” meta-theme. Laura described the key difference of doctoral students as gatekeepers.

Doctoral supervisors are the ones that work most closely with the students in supervising their clinical work. And so we are the people that have the best eyes on all of the cases
and the ones who could be the most aware of any issues that are going on and so to take that as being the eyes and ears for the program for potential cases of gatekeeping. Doctoral students are able to provide valuable feedback that faculty may not otherwise have due to their position of being “in the middle.” This distinction is further expanded on as part of the professional relationships theme.

**Sub-theme 1a: Protecting Clients and the Profession**

All participants referenced this sub-theme as part of their ethical duty to the profession. Many of them also referenced this sub-theme in relation to CACREP standards or programmatic standards as well, especially when discussing how they assess trainees’ professional competence, which addresses both research question three’s sub-questions about assessing competence and preventing gate slippage. This sub-theme is best summed up as the core duty to prevent client harm as highlighted by Gary:

[T]he overarching goal of gatekeeping is to protect clients from harm by making sure that all the students and trainees that we're sending out into the field are ready and are practiced enough to handle the diverse array of issues that clients can present with.

Jessie summed the balance of protecting clients while still supporting students:

… the transparency about the whole process, the ability to be able to balance that. ‘We're here for the clients first and foremost, but how can we best support you and your growth as a counselor?’ Finding that good balance of in between, but still making it very clear.

Additionally, Laura further expounded on the prevention of harm as an ethical mandate: “What is articulated is to follow the ethical code, that our clients are first, that it's our responsibility to be graduating ethical, well-trained counselors.” This sub-theme captured the cornerstone of what it means to be a gatekeeper for doctoral students.
Sub-theme 1b: Avoid Legal Action or Repercussions

Since the infamous Julea Ward case, programs have been more cognizant of legal retaliation. The sub-theme of avoiding legal repercussions was identified in all but two transcripts as an aspect of the gatekeeping role or something doctoral students were warned about. This sub-theme was represented by stating overt fear of legal concerns, use of documentation implied to prevent or reduce legal threats, and taking additional measures with training to reduce legal culpability. Fear of legal concerns also overlapped with doctoral students, such as Clyde, feeling that they did not have access to all the information or experience needed for gatekeeping:

And I think some of that comes with a liability component too, that students have sued programs but have done gatekeeping and kept them from regressing and I think there's a desire to maybe protect us from that level of conversation or that concern as well. Doctoral students were not always party to legal decisions, but avoiding legal liability was still included in their training.

The focus of some participants on documentation also represents this mindfulness of legal liability. Jeff stated how he documents work with students fraught with liability:

And that usually is how I start to begin that conversation. And I document. I document that, we have this conversation, we address this, I tell them I'm a big believer of giving people tangible expectations, setting a very clear, ‘I want you to ask this client, are you having thoughts of killing yourself? Are you having thoughts of hurting yourself?’ I want that asked next session.

The use of documentation was not the only way doctoral students sought to prevent legal liability. Trent outlined avoidance of legal liability as a double-edged sword within the
gatekeeping role:

And at times, I think that it can become cynical or CYA, very cover your ass. So I think just knowing that that's going to be a process to develop that, like acknowledging that there's going to be the conflict and uneasiness and weirdness that you'll still feel about it. But like, be prepared for it, and then purposefully working towards finding that balance. Because it's not helpful for anybody, I think, if it's a fear based for everybody, fear based for students or fear based for faculty. It's got to be from a context of support.

This highlights the difficult balance of gatekeeping under fear of litigation and providing the support that trainees need to develop.

**Sub-theme 1c: Support Student Development**

Doctoral students are developmentally and hierarchically not far removed from master’s students, thus creating a tendency to identify or empathize with them. Additionally, doctoral students may experience a parallel process as they develop as gatekeepers, supervisors, and educators while their trainees are developing as clinicians; doctoral students may even feel they are still developing as clinicians themselves. Trent described how gatekeeping supports student development:

I think it just helped me to be much more mindful of it and just continue to recognize, as far as the presentation I went to, just continue to recognize gatekeeping is a process. It starts in the beginning, you know remediation is part of it, gatekeeping is not negative.

Gatekeeping is just about supporting students.

Doctoral students across all fifteen interviews expressed the importance of focus on student support and compassion for students. Although Daisy cautioned that this empathy and support may cause doctoral students to overextend or feel conflicted about their gatekeeper role:
But I don't know if we are just being so nice to students and we don't want to disappoint them, or we try to avoid any conflicts between students. Try to avoid any issues so we move forward, but I understand as people we don't want to make any trouble, we just want to make peace. I understand that but as gatekeepers I feel pretty bad. Providing too much support and too little challenge due to this conflict could lead to gate slippage and is something for developing gatekeepers to be mindful of.

This balance of support and challenge is reflected within both meta-themes, but it also is represented by doctoral students’ approaches in supporting their trainees. As framed by Jessie, the balance of supporting students while acting ethically involves:

the transparency about the whole process, the ability to be able to balance that. ‘We're here for the clients first and foremost, but how can we best support you and your growth as a counselor?’ Finding that good balance of in between, but still making it very clear.

Jessie further noted that keeping her role as a gatekeeper versus a counselor can be difficult when she is able to empathize and relate well to the student:

I've also certainly recommended additional support outside of our department as well, of like, ‘Are you seeing a counselor to kind of help with whether it's the anxiety that might be interfering with some of your work, or whatever it might be?’ To make sure that they're getting that additional support. Even though obviously I'm a counselor and I use some of those skills in session, I'm not there to be their counselor. Trying to make sure that I keep those roles separate too, which can sometimes be a challenge.

These quotes highlight how many doctoral students resolve the conflict between the empathy for the difficult situation the student is in and their ethical responsibility as a gatekeeper.

Another way doctoral students addressed this conflict was reframing their view of student
development. As Firefox described it, she viewed gatekeeping as advocacy. “More of an advocate, yeah, advocating for the student, advocating on behalf of them. Do students see it that way? [laughs] Uh if they're on the receiving end. My supervisees, luckily, have, they have seen the value of it.” Master’s students may not always understand or agree with the need for gatekeeping, but it feels disingenuous to allow a student to proceed in their training if they are not developmentally ready to do so. Gary describes this situation as a developing gatekeeper.

I think, ultimately in keeping things active in advocacy, that we are advocating indirectly for clients but we're also advocating directly for our trainees to be their best selves before they get into the field. Because the field can really get you down if you're not prepared for it. So I think by instituting these stopgaps for particular students, we're allowing them to take a really honest self-assessment in that moment.

Chelsea further describes the balance between protecting clients and supporting students:

I honestly think it first and foremost protects our clients or the people we serve. I also think that sometimes we have to protect students from themselves, which sounds weird to say, but sometimes they might not be in their best mindset to make decisions, and those decisions could potentially be life altering for them. But really, first and foremost, I always think about the clients and the populations that we serve and how for me, part of my counselor identity as a supervisor and counselor educator is to make sure we're letting people into the field who truly can be in the field doing an actual job and so on and so forth.

Advocating for the student’s developmental needs, even if that means advocating for gatekeeping and remediation, reframes this balance of support and challenge as what is best for both the student and the clients. It also connects to a way doctoral students are Navigating the
Grey Space of Gatekeeper Development.

**Sub-theme 1d: Lead by Example**

Doctoral students are expected to lead by example as future counselor educators and supervisors. Some participants characterized gatekeeping as leadership.

So I tried to be a voice for that and I didn't have a whole lot of success in making a difference… but one of the reasons I did want to earn a doctorate and work towards becoming a leader in our profession is to make a difference and to make sure that people entering the field were well prepared and did have those values instilled and that identity instilled in them.

Clyde spoke to wanting to lead by example after seeing gate slippage and a lack of gatekeeping among leadership within the field. Riley also characterized her development as a gatekeeper as stemming from leadership experience:

I think gatekeeping's like a form as leadership as well, because I think there's a lot of directness that has to... Like you have to be express in about, ‘Hey, these are the expectations,’ you have to be very open and direct and honest about a person's growth, their readiness, things like that. And sometimes those are difficult conversations to have, I think. So I think just past experiences in leadership roles… I think that taught me a whole lot about leadership and having difficult conversations.

The contribution of leadership experiences, within and outside of the counseling profession, were mentioned as influences in gatekeeper development by over half of participants, indicating that leading by example was an expectation for gatekeepers.

**Sub-theme 1e: Learn and Develop as Future Counselor Educators and Supervisors**

This sub-theme is specific to doctoral students in their role as gatekeepers as they are still
learning and developing their skills. This aspect of the gatekeeper role captures the idea that doctoral students are thinking of themselves as future counselor educators and supervisors as they are making gatekeeping decisions. It was represented in all fifteen participants’ lived experiences as developing gatekeepers, perhaps summed up by Trent as the awareness that “we want that training, because we're going to have to act as if we're going to be professors.”

Carmen highlights how this sub-theme differs between gatekeeping to the profession and gatekeeping within the program as doctoral students and the different mindset of each.

That one's a tough one because in the coursework they're so focused on you're going to be a supervisor; you're going to be a faculty, and this is what you're going to do when you're in that role. And then so more of the role of what we're doing right now is doctoral students comes from that supervision that we receive. And from that while not as concrete as I would've liked, I think they've made it pretty clear that they are over the class as a whole. They're over the supervision as a whole and I am there to relay concerns back to them.

Doctoral students are learning to think of gatekeeping from two, potentially separate, frames of reference: how they would act as a faculty or supervisor and how they are expected to act as a gatekeeper within their own program. The greater the congruence in these roles, the greater the confidence the participant seemed to have in their gatekeeper identity development, which Mercedes outlined:

I think that it's an important part of our identity as counselor educator doctoral students and counselor educators. And I think that what I would have wanted to be told is it's okay to trust yourself and your skills as a counselor to be able to recognize that there are issues.
However, if there is a lack of congruence or consistency in these roles, it can create role conflict for the doctoral student as Firefox questioned “Also, if I as the doc student allow this student to go ahead and slip through the cracks, what does that mean for me when I'm an actual faculty member?” This highlights how doctoral students conceptualize their role in preventing gate slippage, indicating that the goal of gatekeeping to the profession, not necessarily only within their program, is their primary mode of assessing trainees.

Additionally, if their role as doctoral student gatekeepers is unclear, it can also cause dissonance. Jessie described her confusion about the difference:

It wasn't our role as gatekeepers, as doc students. It was our role as future counselor educators, as gatekeepers in that particular class. Then in our supervision class, I would say is the only other time where we're really talking about it as doc students and what our role is in there. Even there, it's really unclear.

She also questioned what these differences mean for her development and readiness as a future counselor educator “what does that process actually look like? What is our role in it as doc students? How does that role start to transition when we become faculty?” The answers to these questions seemed unclear for the majority of participants, like Gary: “And I think that that's really interesting, because there's huge potentials for research, for training, for workshops about gatekeeping, the role for doc students. As you're becoming faculty, what does that look like?” Ella framed this uncertainty from a more practical perspective wondering:

Because that's what it comes down to really is like how can we make this a tangible thing that we can continue to assess on an ongoing basis? And some more tools around that to know like how I'm going to feel equipped to do that someday in one way or another.

These feelings of uncertainty surrounding the developmental transition from gatekeeping as a
doctrinal student to gatekeeping as a counselor educator and/or supervisor highlight important differences in how training impacts gatekeeper development and confidence.

**Sub-theme 1f: Collaborate with Colleagues and Program to Prevent Gate Slippage**

Efficacious gatekeeping within a training program does not happen in a vacuum or at the individual level. Programs need to coordinate and communicate with all gatekeepers within the course sequence to identify and continue to monitor issues as trainees move through the program to decrease likelihood of gate slippage. Fourteen of the doctoral students interviewed directly identified this collaboration with other gatekeepers within the program, though they varied in their view on the efficacy of that collaboration to stop gate slippage. Jessie describes the process and identifies a lack of inclusion of all gatekeepers as a potential flaw:

Faculty meet and talk about students, and what strengths they're seeing and what growth areas they're seeing. Then they have a one-on-one meeting with their adviser to talk about it, so they're getting that feedback too. I think what typically happens is like, if someone's not really a concern, it's just like, ‘Oh, they're fine.’ Then the focus certainly goes on people who might present as more of a concern. But you're not always including everyone who sees what's happening in those meetings, right?

Jessie implies that greater collaboration with doctoral students is needed to prevent gate slippage. Riley also identified the importance of collaboration in the efficacy of the gatekeeping as well as her feeling of being supported by the program.

I think there's an amount of collaboration that has to take place, and open communication not only between faculty and supervisors and students, but also between faculty members, doc students, whoever is working with these students, I think that collaboration piece is really important.
Without that feeling of inclusion and support as a collaborator, doctoral students may feel discouraged or become concerned about increasing gate slippage. Gary shared this sentiment, tying it in with concerns about lack of power related to the “in the middle” meta-theme:

So for that reason, I think that transparency's so important in having us sit at the table and being able to take part in those discussions, even if it's just to observe and have that modeled for us. I think that's hugely influential in demonstrating trust and in demonstrating faculty belief that, as doc students, we have something to offer. And that our perspectives are valuable. I think that that has been missing.

When students do feel heard and a part of that collaboration, it helps programs identify patterns that may have gone undiscovered otherwise as noted by Ella.

There's a lot of consultation. Like we have a doctoral seminar class where all the doc students, every semester in a class together, and there are times where some concerns maybe about a student has been brought into that class. And then the faculty will also sit around their table once a week and they will talk about individual students if they have concerns, and that's where you see like what the pattern is.

Collaboration increases the chances that faculty will see a certain behavioral pattern across courses, that they otherwise might not have seen or known about.

The efficacy of the communication and collaboration on the gatekeeping outcome appears to be related to the quality of the relationship between the doctoral student and the faculty. Layla noted her power and her involvement in the gatekeeping and remediation process depend on her working relationship with the professor:

And then now as I'm learning about it, I think that as a doctoral student, I don't always have as much say as I would like. I might be a little bit more diligent about creating a
remediation plan or things like that, like in my first example, but sometimes I do have the
ability to work well with the professor and get them to see when it's needed. So it can go
either way.

This highlights an important feature in gatekeeping: the professional relationships between
doctoral students and those in their program.

**Theme 2: Professional Relationships**

The professional relationships theme focuses on the various types of relationships and
dynamics doctoral students experience as they develop as a gatekeeper. These relationships
primarily include interactions with faculty, master’s students, administration, and other doctoral
students, but the nature of these relationships varies based on their professional role, such as
student, clinician, instructor, supervisor, and peer. Mercedes describes how professional
relationships and boundaries may impact gatekeeper development during doctoral training.

I think these faculty who I more want to emulate, they still have a very strong sense of
what their professional identity is and what the boundaries are. But they have a personal
way of approaching it that makes you feel ... it's a very relational way of approaching the
gatekeeping process, which I think makes me feel safer. And I think I tend to get turned
off by faculty who I see particularly at the doctoral level, using students to have their own
needs met. As opposed to again, having those professional boundaries and that
professional identity in a very relational way.

Professional relationships were mentioned across all fifteen interviews and can be divided into
three sub-themes: multiple professional roles and boundaries, cultural dynamics, and institutional
power dynamics and hierarchies. This theme addresses research questions one and three directly
as it relates to how doctoral students’ different experiences within their professional relationships
help them develop as a gatekeeper and inform their understanding of the gatekeeper role. Jessie wondered about the nebulosity of navigating professional relationships throughout the program.

That's probably a really icky part for me, of like, where do we set those boundaries and maintain those boundaries? I think the same would probably happen as faculty, when it comes to advisement versus an instructor versus a supervisor. How do you actually parse those things out for your students? I'm left wishing that more discussions and guidance happened for those multiple roles, and how that impacts the dynamics of what you're sharing, what you're not sharing. Is it for the best interest of our supervisees or for the gatekeeping part of things? I believe there should be more guidance surrounding how to balance the various roles with our roles as gatekeepers for our master’s students. Often, things discussed with one supervisor or in their groups could benefit the future supervisory process by informing other roles of the personal or professional competence risks.

The professional relationships themselves are unique to each doctoral student, but they appear to be a unique feature of gatekeeping as a doctoral student rather than a common issue with a general gatekeeper role.

**Sub-theme 2a: Multiple Professional Roles and Boundaries**

This sub-theme appears in thirteen of fifteen of the transcripts with both positive and negative perceptions to having multiple professional roles which can challenge boundaries. This sub-theme has similarities to the Ways of Learning sub-theme Faculty Mentorship, but it is broader in scope as it incorporates other types of relationships with faculty and students. Riley noted how her professional relationship with a faculty member was helpful in her
development and observed professional boundaries.

So my supervisor for my internship in my master’s program had a really great experience. She did a really good job of building that rapport. There was a lot of closeness and ability to talk about things outside of the counseling role that I was in. It wasn't inappropriate amount, but I was able to talk about, ‘Hey, this thing happened in my personal life that's affecting me right now.’ So that was really great and I think important because our personal lives do impact our work as counselors.

This quote presents an example of a boundary crossing that led to the student feeling more supported and engaging in further self-reflection as a gatekeeper. Chelsea provides another example of how balancing multiple roles as a doctoral student being evaluated and receiving feedback as a supervisor and also working together to evaluate and supervise master’s students contributed to her development.

I have been very fortunate to have some great supervision experiences as a supervisee. And a lot of them, again, challenge me in good ways, but also emphasize my strengths. So, like built confidence so that way when I did get that constructive feedback, it was more well-received. Rather than you're doing this, you're doing this, you're doing this, and if you don't fix it, then you're out of here kind of thing. It was, ‘Hey, I really think you could improve on these areas. Let's make a plan, let's talk about.’ They were very proactive, and it was more a ‘we’ thing, not a ‘me’ thing, which I thought it was a unique way of spinning it.

Chelsea’s description of how she balanced being an evaluator and being evaluated within a faculty relationship also connects to the experience of being “in the middle.”

The meta-theme “in the middle” results in the opportunity for doctoral students to have
multiple overlapping professional roles, which can also result in boundary crossings and violations. Firefox expressed how her professional relationship with faculty had the potential to positively or negatively influence her gatekeeping:

Sometimes I experience it as a bit confusing. It seems like depending on the professor I have or who I may consult with about gatekeeping issues, I'm receiving different feedback and it's hard to gauge how to gatekeep as a doc student for master's students not really knowing what my role is and how much authority I have.

This example highlights the potential for multiple relationships to create helpful boundary crossings or stressful boundary violations.

Sometimes these potential conflicts can arise from the roles themselves being at odds. Trent describes such a situation:

our doctoral group course was us leading a small group experience, that a lot of times happens in the group course for master's students… we didn't have conversations about gatekeeping as related to what happened in group, but oftentimes students were more vulnerable and open about what was going on. So we had conversations about like what does this mean for a student.

The roles of clinician and instructor (in this case of a techniques-related course) occurring simultaneously could lead to ethical dilemmas and role conflict, adding new dimensions to doctoral students’ relationships with master’s students. Jessie had a similar experience, expressing concern for the potential boundary issues:

One thing that comes to mind isn't like a specific example, but rather kind of the multiple roles that we use in our program. The same year… where we're doing our supervision… we are also doing our advanced groups class, where we would use interpersonal
processing groups with the first-year master's students. There is a lot of overlap when it comes to those roles. Hearing things that they're sharing in those groups, and sort of was the understanding to use some of that information in our conversations in our supervision class, for how that might be impacting their growth when it comes to their counseling identity.

Here the role of supervisor and clinician are overlapping and may be juxtaposed in purpose. Helena also reported a similar experience with professional development groups being used for gatekeeping and her difference in opinion from her supervising faculty:

we have to run professional development groups for the master’s program. And there was a student in one of my groups last semester who the faculty had concerns about. And so I told him, ‘I'll let you know if I am seeing what you're seeing in group.’ And yes, maybe the student was... maybe he lacked a little bit of social intelligence, but I was not seeing what she was seeing.

In this example, the doctoral student is acting in a type of clinician or instructional role but being asked to gatekeep in a more unconventional context.

Alternatively, Ella describes how peer-like activities may complicate relationships with a hierarchical and evaluative component.

And I've had the faculty even be like, ‘Well, once the master students graduate, you can be friends with them.’ And then I think the faculty, like once you graduate, they may actually like hang out with you. Part of it is this small town thing, but like, I mean, we're such a small town that there's so much overlap and the mental health community is so small that people just end up like all these different lines are crossed and dual relationships and stuff, but, yeah, that's where it was like most visible to me is just like
the social boundaries.

She also described additional boundary crossings which were challenging for her.

I guess, yeah, it's difficult to like have somebody watch you like intervening with a student, it's just like all the different layers. One of the weirdest experiences I thought that I had was, like we had a program, like party… but it was at a brewery and I like walk in, and this is like after internship with... I'm supervising people in internship, like I'm the instructor, and we show up at a brewery and I like look around and I'm like, ‘Are people drinking? Like are we all drinking together?’ And then I like look around and the faculty is drinking beers, and I was like, ‘Okay, like I guess we are.’ But like, I don't know, I came from a workplace that like I would never like ever go to Happy Hour with my staff like that, those lines were like very clearly drawn.

This example of the doctoral student’s discomfort with engaging in a social activity with alcohol with both faculty and supervisees shows the impact of professional relationships on doctoral students and outlines another aspect of how this sub-theme connects to feeling “in the middle,” in this case of conflicting social and professional expectations. Professional relationships are also influenced by cultural dimensions, such as the “small town” culture described in these examples.

Sub-theme 2b: Cultural Dynamics

This sub-theme describes the various power dynamics relating to cultural identities across professional relationships and was present in some capacity within all interviews. There were some differences in which cultural dynamics were discussed, especially age and racial and ethnic identities. Gender, race, ethnic identity, citizenship status, socioeconomic status, regional location, religion, political views, disability status, and age were all mentioned. Other cultural factors, such as sexual orientation, were not mentioned, but may warrant further exploration. It is
important to note that the doctoral students’ cultural identities intersect, but that there are also additional intersections of their students and supervisees and faculty, each with their own intersectional cultural identities.

Several of the cultural identities were mentioned by one or a few interviews, but still had salience for their gatekeeper development. Jeff described differences in providing feedback which he partially attributed to the region where he grew up.

I grew up on the east coast, so living in the Midwest, it's definitely noted that I'm very direct, has allowed me to have this ability to deliver feedback in a way that's not cruel, but isn't misleading or unclear as to where I see the pitfalls and shortcomings.

Jessie identified disability status as a cultural dynamic she has worked with students on.

There have been a couple of times where there might be a disability involved of like, ‘Well, there is a processing issue. Okay, well, let's come up with a game plan for how to address that, because this is going to impact you for your career as a counselor.’ Does that mean taking notes in session, so that you can better follow things along, so that you can see it visually and whatnot? Really working to kind of support that growth and kind of almost treatment planning for them in a sense.

This exemplifies a doctoral student being mindful of cultural dynamics in assessment of competence. Conversely, Carmen did not feel like they were significantly impacted as a developing gatekeeper by cultural dynamics. “… culture dynamics. I mean I really haven't felt them. I haven't felt like ... even though I feel like I'm a middle person, I feel like that's where I should be.” They espoused recognition of the “in the middle” experience, but they did not feel that there were specific cultural dynamics that had impacted their development.
Age was discussed predominantly from the standpoint that younger doctoral students, especially those who have less clinical experience or were one or two years into their program, felt more insecure about their authority and skill in providing clinical feedback.

Like we talked about different challenges we may face before we started working with these supervisees and one of my classmates brought up the factor of age. Like what if I'm only a year or two older than my supervisees who are very early 20s, very young, kind of thing. And my supervisor very much is like, ‘Hey, what do you have that they don't have? You have experience. You've completed your entire master’s program, you're a semester into your doc program, you're competent and qualified to do this.’ That very much helped me and I think my classmates as well who are also in their early 20s.

Riley describes her and her cohort members’ insecurities about their age and lack of experience and how those will impact their confidence and efficacy as supervisors and gatekeepers.

Alternatively, Jeff discussed ages of faculty and his perceptions about their lack of gatekeeping efficacy.

Some of the older ones don't really care. That's the big problem. My program where I'm at, for a long time there was a very significant age gap between the younger faculty and the older faculty. Primarily, it was a much older faculty, 60-plus. And they had a lot more a laissez-faire. ‘We're just going to keep people and educate people, and it's all good. When they get out into the field, they'll internship and stuff. We'll take care of this, that and the other.’

Layla also had similar concerns to Jeff, which also echo the “in the middle” experience.

I would say professors that are males, older males of a certain generation, there's definitely... some of them are perfectly respectable and keep it professional. Some of
them think that because they're close to retiring age, they can say whatever they want.

And so I think that power dynamic of no, that's not really appropriate for you to say or present in this supervision but I'm going to not really say anything… because you still hold my grade. You're a gatekeeper for me so you could consider hot-tempered or something.

She worried that older professors would perceive her as young and impetuous for disagreeing, so it impacted what she felt comfortable bringing to supervision and how she avoided approaching them with gatekeeping concerns.

Racial and ethnic identities were brought up more frequently by racially diverse (n= 4) participants and the one international participant. Daisy describes her experience as an international student and its impact on her self-esteem as a gatekeeper and clinician.

I think the pop culture part because I'm international student. So I have some self-esteem issue. And for example, as the professional settings, so I remember when I first came here, I don't know something about professional roles, what you're doing in a certain situation. Now I definitely have got better, but I still think there are a lot of cultural thing I don't know. And so, also becomes one part of my self-esteem.

Navigating cultural differences creates doubt, thus increasing the doubt Daisy might have already been feeling as a developing gatekeeper. Helena describes how her identity as a Latina and Chicana impacts her in many capacities,

I guess it's just something that I know impacts every part of my own experience as a student, as a clinician, as a person. And so I know that it's impacting clients and I know it's impacting students as well. So it's important for me to keep that in mind. And when I see or experience power plays or microaggressions or discrimination, prejudice, which I
have seen, I have experienced myself and I've seen my own supervisees also experience that. It's very frustrating because I don't want to tell the supervisee like ‘You just have to go with it. Right?’ Because that's what I'm doing essentially. And so it's hard for me to hold those conversations at times.

Helena goes on to say that she has used her own experience with racial discrimination to better prepare her trainees and model cultural sensitivity.

On my own end, I do prioritize talking about multicultural issues within the supervision relationship and as we're staffing those that is something that I do bring up and especially the power that we have and privileges that we have at our intersections over our identity. Right? And so I think the experiences that I've seen, that just reiterates that and that's an important conversation and that we have to consider that in all aspects, whether that is just supervising or whether that's gatekeeping, we do have to take those into consideration.

Her ability to empathize with what happens when conversations about cultural competence do not happen motivates her to help her supervisees become more capable of broaching than the faculty who have microaggressed against Helena.

Layla described feeling othered by supervisees and experiencing racial discrimination tied to her religion:

And at my particular university, I would say that there's not a very large cultural diversity. I'm Middle Eastern white, so there's definitely comments about in my religion isn't very clear. So there's definitely comments and probes about things like that. And then whenever I work with someone, everyone that I've worked with has been of the dominant culture, and religion, and stuff.
Trainees’ perceptions which “other” Layla may add barriers for her as a gatekeeper in building rapport and being taken seriously by her supervisees. Firefox shared a similar experience which was harmful for her as a black woman:

The gatekeeping from that standpoint was I was really pissed off at their professor for not stopping it or not stepping in. She later apologized, but what I told her is that as a black woman, I have a dark skinned black woman, me being associated with danger or with very negative feelings does not have a good impact on me and I still have to be in this program for two more years.

Firefox was personally impacted, and she was worried it would have negative impacts on her future ability to work with students in the program.

Firefox also highlighted how her racial identity has shaped her own clinical work and thus the way she assesses students for gatekeeping issues:

Then overshar...
professional. We would talk about how that might be impacting our work in supervision. Jessie exemplifies the trend that all the participants who identified as people of color tended to be very mindful of cultural difference and especially of discussing these cultural factors with their students to further their trainees’ multicultural development. They all prioritized active and direct conversations surrounding developing multicultural competence in students and supervisees, and some of them highlighted deficiencies in their relationships with faculty.

Helena discussed the impact that witnessing racist faculty has influenced her goals for her own gatekeeper development.

So that same faculty member that I had told you is racist in many ways. The gatekeeping that I’ve seen her do always seems targeted at students of color. And I don’t think that’s because students of color are disproportionately needing to be gatekept. And so I think the faculty that I do admire and respect are the ones who have enough awareness and understanding of the role of race and gender in power dynamics. And so there’s been a few professors that I have seen and that have made microaggressions to students and to me as a supervisor.

This example also overlaps with the Ways of Learning theme as the student is forming their antiracist gatekeeper identity as a result of their own experiences with racist faculty.

Nine of the 11 white participants did discuss the impact of race and privilege on their gatekeeping and how they have or have not seen culturally sensitive gatekeeping within their programs. Gary was concerned about the assessment of students of color and felt caught “in the middle” of faculty and master’s students.

So it feels like we are almost being asked to support a system that is counter to our personal beliefs. Speaking for myself and my cohort, it feels like we’re being asked to
support a system that master's students are perceiving as being socially unjust, and as providing privilege to privileged people, and not being an active force, students who are coming from oppressed identities. I think it also ... I think that it creates the potential for parallel process... But I think that there is circuitous patterns of power that are being manipulated in different ways.

These worries about the cultural competence of faculty gatekeepers relates to another sub-theme about Role Models where doctoral students question ‘Who is gatekeeping the gatekeepers?’.

The white participants also voiced concerns about perceptions of fairness with their own work. Clyde felt that faculty modeled cultural inclusion, making it an expectation for doctoral students in their work with students as well.

Culture is present in every single thing that we do, and I think we need to be constantly cognizant of it. And there is a trickle down and modeling component of how transparent and open and direct faculty are and broaching with us as we are with the master students and how we see them handle that with master’s students.

Interviews seemed to feel that they and their faculty were more efficacious counselor educators and supervisors, and gatekeepers, when they were more culturally aware and open to discussion. Gary notes how important it is to consider cultural factors in assessment of competence as well. “the general objective practicum student might not necessarily be activated by a client in the same way, holding space for the fact that our supervisees are coming in different identities of privilege and oppression... factoring that into your assessment decision.” However, some white students spoke to more negative experiences or concerns about cultural diversity.

Ella identified the importance of representation in a program, noting that both master’s students and doctoral students benefit from cultural diversity, and that multicultural development
may suffer if diversity is lacking.

I feel like we're just not exposed to as much, we're not going to have as much exposure working with different kinds of students. Again, it's just like this cycle of just staying the same because it is the way that it is. It's harder to bring people in because they don't feel comfortable being a part of the program. And then we continue to not probably learn as much and get as varied of an experience as would be helpful working with different kinds of students. And, I mean, of course, there are some things that come in, but in general, like we're a pretty homogeneous group which has a lot of its own challenges.

She identifies experience with diverse students as important to her development, including as a gatekeeper, but feels there is a deficit here due to systemic issues. Laura had the opposite type of negative experience.

And I was actually removed from that supervision position as to not have that same backlash towards me because I was one of the people that filled out her midterm evaluations. And I guess I would say that, that was a negative experience because, in my opinion, it had nothing to do with racism or discrimination at all. It was just that she wasn't able to reflect a feeling, she wasn't turning in paperwork on time. There's a lot of checkmarks on the assessment that we use that she wasn't meeting and yet there were cries of racism.

Laura disagreed with being removed as supervisor, noting the student had concerns with the instructor of record as opposed to her, and that this experience was scary and unsettling. She also noted that it encouraged her to reflect on her work as a supervisor, but she noted that being removed had lessened her confidence in dealing with a similar issue in the future. Chelsea noted that she had less confidence in addressing cultural dynamics in teaching as opposed to
supervision: “I guess cultural dynamics is definitely something that I've struggled with as a
gatekeeper, more so in terms of the counselor educator role. I feel way more comfortable
navigating that as a supervisor for some reason.” It appears that the white students sought more
exposure to gatekeeping issues that are strongly characterized by cultural dynamics to better their
abilities and preparedness but did not always feel that they had this opportunity.

In comparison to the way Layla described censoring herself with certain supervisors,
some white students felt cultural dynamics impacted their relationships with faculty as well. Jeff
worried that as a white male, his intentions as a gatekeeper might be misunderstood when
challenging a faculty of color.

Because that was the ones where it's like, ‘Don't push it. This is not going to go well,
because it can very clearly look like, here's a doctoral student, challenging a professor of
color and that's not gonna look good.’ It was one of those like, ‘All right. I guess that's it,
and then they have to make that decision.’

Jeff felt this cultural dynamic may have contributed to gate slippage in this instance. Gary, also
identifying as a white male, felt hurt when a mentor accused him of sexism, and he indicated that
he felt it damaged his ability to trust this faculty.

I also think being a male supervisee as a doc student within a female-dominated faculty,
has really not been helpful. Conflicts with my current supervisor, who has told that I've
been disrespectful to her. And that I have somehow asked her to prove her
professionalism, prove her expertise. And I feel like it just goes back to holding identities
of power and wanting to feel like they're holding on to it because this particular faculty
member is at the top.
Some of the other participants identifying as white or male had similar concerns about being misunderstood by faculty or students who were culturally different from them or felt faculty misused institutional power to address perceived cultural dynamic, like with Gary.

**Sub-theme 2c: Institutional Power Dynamics and Hierarchies**

All interviewees discussed power dynamics as a part of their gatekeeper development; these power dynamics varied across institutions as a feature of the differences in training programs. This sub-theme has significant overlap with the meta-theme “in the middle” as being in the middle also references doctoral students’ position in the institutional hierarchy, with more authority and power than master’s students but less authority and power than faculty. Riley described the structure of the different levels of power within the hierarchy in terms of evaluator relationships:

So I mean the first thought is like I trust both of them to be adequate gatekeepers. I think they’ve presented themselves as very competent and trustworthy to me and all of my peers. So I experience them primarily as gatekeepers of masters level students, but I also know that they’re both gatekeepers of myself and the other doctoral students, so they’re gatekeepers in a variety of ways. It's like matrix like I guess. As I work as a gatekeeper for the master students, my supervisor's making sure that I'm providing good services and able to move forward in my doc program kind of thing. So very positive overall, but I do know there are lots of different levels to this at the same time.

Helena described what these power dynamics might look like from the doctoral student perspective:

They want to make the role seem maybe more smoother than what it actually is. I think there's a lot of hidden things within that role that are not talked about such as the politics
and gatekeeping, which I think I should probably look and see if there's any literature on that because there really is. At least in my experience and what I've seen, there is a lot of that. And so the way they communicate it is like we're here to help these students grow and gatekeeping is how we do that, we're ensuring that people who need extra support get it, and people who don't need to be counselors, don't become counselors. But I think underneath that is a lot of different complexities.

Additionally, a piece of this power dynamic was the awareness of the evaluative component, which some students had negative experiences with, and others felt faculty balanced this role positively. This hierarchical position influences power and authority and thus some participants spoke to their perceptions of influence on the gatekeeping process and the efficacy of its outcome.

As with cultural dynamics, these power dynamics influenced Trent’s willingness to speak up when he disagreed with a faculty’s assessment of a trainee.

But yeah, the power dynamics are inherently there. So I think there's been times of disagreement, no matter which way that is, that I might have felt a little bit less inclined to address it candidly, as compared to if I was a peer and I'd feel more empowered to be like, oh I don't know, this might be a different opinion, but maybe ultimately I'll defer to you or something like that. But to where maybe I didn't want to share it, it's like, okay, I understand what you're saying based off how you think. Even if I don't think that, I didn't say it.

This fear of conflict with a faculty who is above him in the hierarchy could contribute to gate slippage. Jeff was frustrated with the program’s politics and how he felt the level of power and authority of the instructor impacted the efficacy of their gatekeeping. “There's a lot of politics
involved. There's a lot of politics where who the professor is, is it a graduate student? Is it a doctoral student? Is it an adjunct professor? Is it part of the faculty?” Other participants felt similarly and described how these experiences to develop as stronger gatekeepers.

Layla spoke to how her experiences with power dynamics with faculty, such as being talked down to, helped her reframe how she approaches power dynamics in her work with master’s students.

So that kind of power dynamic I would say is frustrating, but it also makes me really mindful of a power dynamic for a master's student, those master's students that maybe worked as a psych tech for like 15 years and is finally getting their master's or something and being like, ‘Don't try and tell me what I don't know.’ So it's a delicate balance between honoring their experience while also acknowledging that's your bias or your assumption and this is the training that we're trying to give you for you to be more mindful.

Layla was able to empathize with these students and develop her ability to give feedback and self-reflect as a result.

Other participants felt that the power dynamics were well-managed by faculty and that there was a balance of support and challenge and a mutual respect and trust, which overlaps with the meta-theme Navigating the Grey Space of Gatekeeper Development. Mercedes summed up the impact of this overlap. “The power differential is always there, but I think that their way of being more relational and engaging makes that power differential feel less intimidating.” Riley described this balance as diffusing the pressure of the power dynamic.

So it's been very positive, I think. And I really appreciate how she's created an atmosphere of which she's still respected and with my supervisor, I don't view her as an
equal in any way, but at the same time it's safe and supportive enough where I can not always be afraid that I'm being evaluated.

Carmen felt that the power differential in faculty having the final say was a relief and protective element, helping them feel supported.

So in that sense of power dynamic I don't feel it. Positively, I do like that they are the final say, that they make the final decisions and that they are the ones to execute and carry it out and tell the student about it. Even in a class where maybe a student gets an F or something along those lines, it really comes back to that instructor or supervisor. And so for me, I see it in a positive light.

This view of power dynamics highlights how faculty might use their power to protect doctoral students from student backlash or even legal retaliation.

Clyde spoke to how he felt respected, which allowed him to trust faculty and their experience when they asserted their authority over a gatekeeping decision.

So I mean, when they have that much experience, who am I as a doc student to think that I know more about the context of gatekeeping or any aspect of student development than they do when my experiences as a clinician and limited experience as a supervisor coming into the program. Faculty always has the final say and I've always felt respected. I've at no point felt like my opinion was not respected or that my anxieties about a person were not understood and validated. And at the same time, that feedback sometimes has been like, ‘This is something we're going to talk about, but we can't say more than that right now based on what's going on with this person.’ Yeah. So the power dynamic is there, but there's an atmosphere of respect in our program.
When the power dynamic is mitigated in a respectful way, it builds rapport and trust between doctoral students and faculty. Daisy felt that her understanding of power dynamics helped her become a better supervisor and reduced some of the pressure she put on herself.

So my cohort really helped me to either to understand it's not just has to be someone in power and to kind of... What should I say? To kind of be the person who can change our supervisees lives. But we just work with them in a process.

In addition to power dynamics among gatekeepers, there are also systemic power dynamics which influence gatekeeper development.

Recruitment and retention concerns at institutional, programmatic, and even individual faculty levels may be at odds with efficacious gatekeeping processes. Chelsea described how university politics may reduce the efficacy of the program’s gatekeeping.

Yeah, university politics for sure, for sure. Nothing too drastic firsthand for me in terms of being a gatekeeper, but just from experiences that have been shared in my internship class or whatever. It's sort of like whatever the university says and whatever keeps that funding the department open is what you do. And sometimes that's not always the right thing.

At a programmatic level, Laura described gatekeeping tensions between adjunct faculty and program retention expectations from core faculty.

My one experience that I had, where I was working under an adjunct faculty member, and she was very much supportive of the idea that we were going to gatekeep a certain two out of the nine people in the class. But she got a lot of pushback from the full-time faculty committee that was over clinical courses and that, that's not typical that typically in a class, you don't hold back anyone, nothing less more than one person.
Helena described the impact of incongruence between institutions and program faculty, influenced by both cultural and power dynamics associated with differences in retention goals.

Well, I think the gap is again those power dynamics whether they're systematic or institutional because we're saying if a counselor does X, Y, Z, then maybe they're not fit. But then we see a student do something that is maybe similar and somehow they'll continue. And so I think that that is very incongruent.

Power dynamics permeate every level of the hierarchy, occasionally influencing the assessment of competence of trainees. Institutional retention goals are often directly opposed to ethical and accreditation goals, such as gatekeeping, and power dynamics determine which goals are pursued.

Another type of power dynamic that doctoral students spoke to included power dynamics between faculty, which influenced policy or their gatekeeping experience indirectly. Gary summed up how a disconnect between faculty at different levels of the hierarchy could contribute to gate slippage.

Faculty members that I'm referring to are operating at a much lower level of power within our faculty. I think that's part of why they resort to informal proceedings, in conversations, and trying to nip things in the bud before they get to the point of having a full remediation need.

Several participants felt adjunct faculty were more committed to gatekeeping but struggled with being lower on the hierarchy than core or tenured faculty, but Jessie felt working with adjunct faculty was more confusing for her in developing her gatekeeper identity and hindered the overall gatekeeping efficacy of the program.

[P]art of the confusion on my part and wondering what our role really should look like, is
inhibited by the fact that all of my experiences have been with adjunct faculty. I think because of that, it just makes it really unclear of what exactly the process should look like or can look like. I will say, having my experience with my second example was probably the best experience I could have asked for.

Laura described her thoughts on why the power differential between adjunct and core faculty may impact gatekeeping.

I've had mixed experiences. I've worked with some adjunct faculty who are primarily clinicians in the field that seemed to have taken gatekeeping a lot more seriously and thought more holistically about what would this mean if we let this person out into the community. Whereas some full-time faculty were more focused on pushing students through the program and meeting certain number requirements of how many people had to pass the course as opposed to who was ready to pass the course.

Helena also described another way in which institutional hierarchies can impact gatekeeping efficacy, with programs growing large enough that gate slippage occurs.

I mean classes up to 50 people and it's just a whole bunch of master's students and people can get in there and not say anything and keep going through their program. And sometimes I think there's just a lot of room to miss really important things. And so that incident makes me think of that like, ‘Okay, we're so worried about admission numbers that we're really missing pretty critical things that are...’ In [this state], you can't even get a license, I don't think with certain criminal charges and stuff. And somehow she got into the program and so that just confuses me and really makes it clear that this is a systemic issue of, You need to produce more students so that the school can get more money and somehow that trumps maybe the quality of counselors we're sending out.
Institutions value money and thus large programs, but faculty may not have enough people to provide the oversight to prevent gate slippage.

Program faculty may also feel conflicted about the idea that not every student is a fit for the counseling profession. Jeff discusses how he manages this feeling.

And I think that's something a lot of people struggle with, is not everyone is going to graduate. That's not really on us. That's more on, did you do the best you can do to offer them solutions, resources, tools, did you equip them? Okay, and if you didn't, and it didn't work out. Okay, you did the best you could.

As doctoral students, participants did not have the final say in gatekeeping processes, but their gatekeeper development or other experiences may have been influenced by power dynamics. Conversely, Firefox indicated that power dynamics may not have directly impacted her as a gatekeeper, but did influence her in many other ways. “Their power dynamics have influenced me in a lot of ways. I don't think gatekeeping is one of them. Gatekeeping is probably one of the only things they're all on par with, like they're all in agreement with.” Power dynamics influence each part of doctoral students’ experiences, directly or indirectly influencing their development as gatekeepers.

**Theme 3: Gatekeeper Contexts**

The context in which doctoral students are gatekeeping have an impact on how they assess professional competence and understand their role as gatekeepers. This theme was discussed across all interviews, with nearly all gatekeeping examples occurring in one of the two contexts, which were subthemes 3a Gatekeeping in the Classroom and 3b Gatekeeping in the Clinic. These sub-themes represent the two roles which the ethical code designates as gatekeepers: teaching and supervision. Though ethical codes dictate that counselor educators and
supervisors are responsible for gatekeeping, it is important to note that doctoral students recognize and experience gatekeeping primarily within these contexts. Some participants, like Trent, talked or thought about their teaching and supervision roles as overlapping and meshed with respect to gatekeeping.

Honestly, it's hard for me to separate those two out, because their roles mesh so often. Because a lot of times they might notice things in class which we talk about, but a lot of times skill-based things are what come out or dispositional, which I think happen more in practical courses. So, yeah, I don't know. I feel like even if they're not involved in the supervision, we still come to them, even if they're more in a teaching role with that student, we might come to them with a supervision thing. So, yeah, it's hard for me to separate those two out, I think same.

Whereas, others spoke of these roles as more distinct, such as Chelsea’s view: “As a gatekeeper? Good question. Well for me, I'll talk about it in two realms, the supervision and the teaching aspect.” Gary described his evaluation context as varying depending on the course “kind of non-clinical way, or non-clinical course, that I felt was really influential to how I perceive gatekeeping from a teaching lens, versus just a clinical lens.” Though not all participants viewed or spoke of the roles as distinct, all participants had examples of both supervision and teaching experiences or coursework. However, gatekeeping in the classroom (teaching role) was mentioned only half as frequently as gatekeeping in the clinic (supervision role).

Sub-theme 3a: Gatekeeping in the Classroom

Gatekeeping in the classroom includes gatekeeping experiences and contexts which occur in the teaching or counselor educator role. All interviewees referenced teaching experiences, but fewer interviewees identified gatekeeping experiences within the teaching role as opposed to the
supervision role. Daisy spoke to this discrepancy in a way which overlaps with Ways of Learning, indicating that she would appreciate more training and experience in how to gatekeep in the teaching role.

But I have overlooked in my program is your role as a gatekeeper in your class, because in my doc program, we are always focused on clinical course. So although all of our students they really do very well in the regular classroom, but I think that's also something we need to talk about because one day there may be a concern in the regular class.

Gatekeeping in the classroom may have some unique challenges relative to gatekeeping in clinical courses as a supervisor.

Content courses by nature tend to make it easier for gatekeepers to assess knowledge, typically with grades. Carmen shared, “I've also had some gatekeeping with classes that I've taught. Not as much ... because students will just kind of shoot themselves in the foot, like not turn stuff in, turn in really late, drop the class.” However, Chelsea identifies how grading could contribute to rather than prevent gate slippage.

I know for a fact that there are faculty who and [do] grade inflating. Like whatever you turn it in, everyone gets an A. It's like, I hope that was helpful. She does not do that, and I think that, that's really helpful for gatekeeping because let's say someone continues to get A’s in so and so's class, and then they show up to take their NCE or they go into a doc program and they submit their first paper and it's ripped to shreds.

The efficacy of grading as a form of competence assessment is dependent on the gatekeeper.

Experiential components may allow opportunities to assess skills to some extent and interactions with students may also bring dispositional concerns to light, but structurally, content
courses are not as well set up to gatekeep for dispositional issues. Clyde described the eventual impact of this deficit of gatekeeping in the classroom.

I think the hardest part is when we don't see that stuff until internship and then we're like, ‘Okay, now this person's already progressed halfway through our program, has good grades, which is always a hard thing where you're academically performing well, but then we see something where there's a big concern.’

Gatekeeping for disposition, considering the typical content-focus of coursework and assignments, is often easier later in the program during the clinical sequence.

As a result, gatekeeping in the classroom can seem more nebulous in terms of how to prevent gate slippage related to dispositional deficiencies. Trent identified how his program sought to resolve this gap in evaluating dispositions.

I think something that's been pretty helpful, is that for one on all of our syllabi, we have a statement that says it's not just your academic grade that determines if you pass, but also dispositions. So I think the idea of we have knowledge and skills, and that's often what's covered in classes, but then we very specifically have our ... well now seven dispositions. And for all of our clinical courses, we grade on that, like that's very much infused into the program.

By using documentation for the course such as the syllabus, they have extended their ability to better gatekeep for dispositions in the classroom.

Grades also provide the most concrete form of documentation for gatekeeping in the classroom, overlapping with the sub-theme Avoiding Legal Action. Carmen said, “So they're not surprised, but it really comes down to those evaluations and it comes down to the grades that we give and that's the only way that we can base our gatekeeping on something solid.” Grades were
the only clear example of gatekeeping in the classroom mentioned by ten of the participants, but Chelsea described how the teaching context influences her work with students when gatekeeping.

And so having those conversations of ‘Hey, do we withdraw before the deadline? Do you power through and get what you get and maybe have to think about retaking the class.’ But then that then you also have to think financially what's that going to do to that student if they're paying for it or if they have a GA and they have to maintain a certain GPA, so those are the things I've come across in terms of gatekeeping.

Gatekeeping in the classroom appears distinct due to the emphasis on knowledge in professional competence assessment, and there are unique challenges associated with grading and documenting the need for gatekeeping.

Though there are distinctions, gatekeeping in the classroom also has similarities to gatekeeping in the clinic. The primary similarity is how doctoral students felt that frequent and ongoing assessment should consistently and accurately reflect to the student where they are at in terms of performance, via their grade. Clyde described his thought process when working with a student who was raising concern early on, including his uncertainty as a new grader and gatekeeper.

And one of the things that my faculty advisor thought was important is that if we're going to say that this person's not performing at the standard, we want them to, the grades have to reflect that. And being a new grader this isn't something I've had a ton of experience with. Like, what is the floor for performance? Now this person was performing either at the worst in their group of their class or close to it, but I still don't know at the graduate level what the difference between a C and a D and an F is.
Clyde struggled to gauge what grade represented the student’s performance and how gatekeeping translated into grading. Daisy described how her mentor used grading as a means of informal assessment and provided opportunities for students to continue developing and correcting their work in the classroom.

Yeah, so I remember I told you when I got the final, when anyone got a final grade from the class that a professor taught, they won't be surprised. So I think that makes the biggest thing is will we want to implement any remediation plan or make any final decision. We need to make sure that is something not surprising to our students. Because if that's something surprising, that means our students don't know their expectations. So I think knowing the expectations, giving student the chance to correct their... To solve their own issues and provide support to help students to solve their issues are really helpful.

Daisy identified that continuous and developmental approaches to evaluation, such as grading, help keep students apprised of their performance. This openness may make the gatekeeping process easier and more transparent for students, as such ongoing informal and formal feedback do in supervision settings.

**Sub-theme 3b: Gatekeeping in the Clinic**

Gatekeeping in the clinic includes gatekeeping which occurs within the supervision role. This sub-theme was referenced more than twice as often as gatekeeping in the classroom, especially when considering the gatekeeping examples discussed throughout the interview. About half of the participants referenced their theory of supervision, but none of the participants discussed a philosophy of teaching. To further illustrate this discrepancy, when asked about her role as a gatekeeper Riley, like many other participants, responded by focusing on her role as a supervisor:
I am supervising two masters level students who are in their second skills class. It's an advanced skills class. So pretty much my role as a gatekeeper is just all of those supervisor responsibilities and just ensuring that they're ready to move on to practicum where they'll obviously be working with real clients.

Additionally, many doctoral programs are set up so that doctoral students complete their supervision coursework and experiences within the existing master’s student’s clinical courses. Jessie describes how this structure might look in a program:

Ours is a two-semester process, so we take it in the fall semester and begin our training as supervisors with the pre-practicum class. Then just like they're improving to practicum, we're improving with them to practicum and responsible for the clients that they see too. I was in this weird dual role of co-teacher and supervisor for my students.

Doctoral students who are completing their supervisor coursework are paired with master’s students in all clinical courses including techniques or pre-practicum courses, practicum, and internship classes, so both are developing their respective skills concurrently.

As a result of the more practical, clinical courses comprising the context for this role, skills and dispositions tend to be easier to assess more overtly than in teaching. Chelsea described these two areas as a focus:

And here's what I'm expecting for you. So having the conversation early and often, having a good supervision contract, so on and so forth, I think just makes those conversations easier. So, I do of course evaluation skills, ethical conduct, professional behaviors, goals, are they meeting goals, documentation.

Chelsea further expounded on dispositions in particular as being a common area of gatekeeping in supervision: “But more so, like professional behaviors is, I want to say a common one, but of
my experiences, that's probably been the most common conversation centered around.”

Assessment of dispositions, skills, and knowledge also overlap with the Assessing Professional Competence theme, and it appears that doctoral students may focus more on some of these areas than others depending on their gatekeeping context.

Assessment of professional competence in the clinic looks different than the classroom, especially with video and live supervision options and the one-on-one setting supervision occurs in. The one-on-one or small group feedback context of supervision allows gatekeepers to customize feedback more than gatekeepers in the classroom may be able to. Gary summed this idea up as supervision being about a developmental assessment focused on the individual’s skills and dispositions. “But I think it boils down to developmental lens, looking at the ideas of skills, values, and just a general attitude.” The supervision role includes the opportunity to review clinical video or provide live supervision of sessions to assess these areas directly and frequently.

Ella found these elements of supervision to be empowering, but also notes that it is not always a positive experience:

Mostly positive experiences, but... I mean, I was always doing evaluations for people, giving them a lot of feedback on sessions, watching, listening to sessions, so, yeah, mostly positive experiences. It was something, the gatekeeping piece was something that, I don't know, it can either feel like really empowering and exciting to be a part of, or sometimes it can be ugly.

In supervision, gatekeeping can be uncomfortable because of that same increased proximity to the student that makes it empowering.

However, gatekeeping can also use that close, one-on-one relationship to deliver difficult feedback. Firefox discussed how gatekeeping can be a collaborative process in supervision:
Now, for supervisee, it's letting them know I'm going to consult, letting them know they can be a part of that or I can do it on my own, and then I will follow up with them. Yeah, I make sure that they buy into the experience. The last thing I want to happen is for a supervisee to completely shut down because they're caught off guard or because they feel shamed for something they might have done. My hope is that they can buy into the experience and really see the value of further follow up. If it's a student, like I said, I would have to see patterns before I do any follow up. Then, usually, we have to meet with the professors anyways, and I will see if you're bringing up the students in their consultation with me.

Firefox also noted that she also feels she can intervene and communicate sooner with supervisees as opposed to students. Daisy clarified what she felt it took to provide good supervision as a gatekeeper: “I guess you can be a good supervisor, if you can have a clear communication with your supervisee. And if you can be firm.” These approaches to gatekeeping in supervision may be further complicated by the typically later timing of clinical coursework.

Clinical courses tend to be taken later in the program due to pre-requisites for working with clients, which can make it harder to gatekeep a supervisee who has progressed so far into the program. Additionally, doctoral students may perceive gatekeeping in the clinic as even more important due to their greater proximity to clients and potential to cause harm, as opposed to the classroom where they do not see clients and may have more coursework to complete. Firefox exemplified this difference in approach between clinic and classroom:

Well, if it's a supervisee, I think I lean more so to court taking action because they have actual access to clients, and so, of course, the chance to do harm is much higher. If it's a student, I really wait on the professor I'm co-teaching with and see what they pick up.
This increase in risk of harm also led many of the participants to feel greater pressure to gatekeep. Mercedes shared her worry:

But I feel a bit of pressure to make sure that people who don't need to be getting through to the next phase or to dealing with clients don't get there. And I feel a personal sense of responsibility about that, which kind of heightens my awareness and stress particularly around supervision. And I think also is part of my experience… So I think I feel an additional amount of added pressure or stress to make sure that I'm doing everything right. And being aware of all of the possible implications and both legal and ethical guidelines around gatekeeping particularly because I feel personally like a deficiency related to my licensure status.

Mercedes also noted increased pressure to perform as a doctoral student who is gatekeeping due to her licensure status, which overlaps with the meta-theme of “in the middle” as well as the theme Ways of Learning which pertains to how experiences factor into gatekeeper development.

Given it may feel more is at stake due to increased risk for clients, there is also proportionally more formal support from faculty built in, which is usually referred to as supervision of supervision. This designated space for faculty and peer consultation provides oversight that is not always available with gatekeeping in the classroom, where it may be the doctoral student and instructor only (unless it is part of a formal internship or teaching practicum experience). Gary describes how gatekeeper development in supervision is typically structured as a parallel developmental process, and the impacts of those additional supports for doctoral students such as supervision of supervision:

If it were my supervisee specifically, then that changes things. I'll probably just go to my group supervision course, and offer it to my cohort members, offer it to my faculty
supervisor. And then really try to get all of their input before proceeding with any sort of formal action. And then also just based on that, holding space for the student, and recognizing that at the master's level, and even at the doc level, you're growing so much that things are going to be uncomfortable, and you're going to have areas where you're deficient and areas where you're very proficient.

Similarly, Laura also relied on her supervision of supervision, not only for her development like Gary, but to help diffuse the pressure of the responsibilities of gatekeeping.

It's a lot of responsibility, especially whenever I was in the supervision course we did, we supervised advanced skills for masters students that where they just, they counsel each other. And at that time, whenever I was still learning, I thought that it was a lot of responsibility because I actually did have to gatekeep someone in that class. And it was my first time supervising and I felt pretty overwhelmed by it, but I did get a lot of support from faculty during that time, but it's a pretty heavy responsibility.

Supervision of supervision is an important influence on doctoral students’ gatekeeper development in the context of the clinic, and it overlaps with the theme Ways of Learning.

Perhaps because of the increased sense of risk and harm with supervision, Chelsea pointed out how much of current gatekeeping scholarship and training in the field focuses on the supervision role. “I definitely attended multiple CEs or presentations at various conferences on gatekeeping. But again, it's more centered around supervision gatekeeping, now that I'm thinking about it, reflecting on it.” Doctoral students must evaluate trainees in both the supervision and teaching roles, and their approach to that assessment is impacted by the gatekeeping context and other factors.
Theme 4: Assessing Professional Competence

This theme pertains to how doctoral students think about and evaluate their trainee’s knowledge, skills, and dispositions. It addresses research question two and both sub-questions of research question three, which pertain to assessment and prevention of gate slippage. Participants identified techniques and practicum as the two courses with the most gatekeeping arising from their assessment, closely followed by internship. The other three classes noted by up to four participants in order of frequency include multicultural, ethics, and diagnosis classes. Interview responses mirrored the survey responses in terms of frequency, and leadership, advocacy, or introductory or orientation courses were also mentioned. Additionally, some survey respondents stated it was incorporated throughout coursework without denoting specific classes. In terms of which course survey respondents found the most helpful, the response was overwhelmingly supervision and internship course experiences, with a few mentions of teaching or of related clinical work outside of courses.

Chelsea felt that gatekeeping occurred in even broader arenas, “And [gatekeeping is] going to be everywhere. It's a part of your process whether you're going into research, leadership, teaching, supervision, all the above.” Though there were only six types of courses identified as courses where gatekeeping occurs, this is an area for further investigation. Assessment of professional competence, though it occurred across the contexts of gatekeeping in the classroom and in the clinic, was separated into two sub-themes: theoretical and practical approaches.

Sub-theme 4a: Theoretical Approach

The theoretical approach constitutes how doctoral students think about assessment, including the theories or standards they reference. Standards for assessment in counselor training could include the ACA Code of Ethics, the CACREP standards, or other programmatic
standards. The primary theoretical references participants mentioned included formal assessments, grades, and the knowledge, skills, and dispositions (which relate directly back to CACREP standards and language of assessment). This sub-theme relates more to formal methods of more objectively focused assessment.

All but one participant directly discussed formal performance assessments and are typically used in clinical coursework skills and dispositional assessment. Jeff described the basics of formal assessment: “when we do evaluations, we score people one through five. Five is that they're nailing it, very few opportunities are lost. They are completely showing those skills. They need to show they're doing it wonderfully, you know as a clinician.” Mercedes described how these formal assessments relate to formal standards and are useful in assessing trainees for gatekeeping issues.

So I think again, it's taking into account a lot of factors while still assessing whether they're meeting the requirements of the standards that are posted. So I think it might be one severe issue that really needs to be addressed. Or it might be just a lot of, not quite as severe issues but enough of them to give you concern. And I think the evaluation forms are a helpful tool to visualize how much is going on.

Formal assessments, along with other theoretical references, can help gatekeepers, especially developing gatekeepers, identify concrete areas of performance to evaluate. Carmen further described formal evaluations of supervisees and how they are used in gatekeeping, though she notes even formal assessments may be implemented subjectively.

But then it does tie in, like we just did midterm evaluations before spring break and it ties into the whole here are the core areas. Are you unsatisfactory, satisfactory or excellent? And I think those pieces of paperwork and those little pieces of like you're not showing
up, those are more of what we have for gatekeeping. The actual process, I think it would
be hard to like three sessions in the supervision to say it doesn't look like you're putting in
your effort.

Formal assessments are generally distinct from grades but may impact a student or supervisee’s
grade based on the results.

Grades, as discussed in the overlapping sub-theme of Gatekeeping in the Classroom, are
an aspect of gatekeeping. Trainees grades in clinical coursework may be pass or fail, but it is
typically informed by formal assessments. In addition to making abstract concepts more
quantifiable, Ella also highlighted the benefits of formal assessment for documentation to Avoid
Legal Action and how grades are informed by this ongoing assessment.

And we do have some characteristics that are in our... like our handbook, that we're pretty
clear that we're looking for and that matter. And so I think it's not consistent, but I think
in some courses, it's actually being put in the syllabus like a list of characteristics that
we're looking at throughout the whole program. And so that gives us something a little bit
more tangible to give people feedback on. And so, yeah, I feel like it's pretty ongoing, it's
not something at the end of this semester that somebody, it's a big surprise they find out
that they need some sort of remediation or extra help.

A low grade in a course or a failing grade in a clinical course often trigger remediation or further
gatekeeping intervention.

The criteria upon which such grades and formal assessments are based are CACREP
standards for the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that clinicians are expected to demonstrate.
Within knowledge, skills, and dispositions, eleven participants explicitly noted the importance of
multicultural competence. All participants mentioned skills, explicitly basic or advanced clinical
skills, and all of them identified dispositions either broadly or specifically as qualities they evaluated. Trent summed up how knowledge, skills, and dispositions are a theoretical reference for assessment:

I think that all three of those are kind of theoretically how I imagine it. It's like how is students’ knowledge? Do they actually have a knowledge of what counseling is? How are their skills, particularly in the clinical sequence feedback or Prac or internship. And then just disposition throughout of recognizing that so much of counseling is a way of being.

Knowledge was also mentioned by the majority of participants, but more so within the Gatekeeping in the Classroom theme’s aspect or in relation to the application of knowledge through a clinical skill (i.e. applied ethics of confidentiality). Trent also noted that: “they might notice things in class which we talk about, but a lot of times skill-based things are what come out or dispositional, which I think happen more in practical courses.” Though participants had significant overlap when they discussed each of these three areas for assessment, they did identify core elements they looked for to assess each one.

Several participants described assessment of knowledge, skills, and dispositions as assessment of competency. Trent described this theoretical conceptualization and then provided an example of how he assesses trainees for a foundational piece of knowledge

I think it's helpful for me organize it as knowledge, skills, dispositions, because that's kind of what I think about is competency, is those three. So a good example of knowledge is like, I think that comes out more in the ethics course is this idea of you have to understand the basics of being ethical. Otherwise, you can't go on with this program.

This conceptualizes knowledge as the foundation for developing skills and overall competence.
Jeff provides just such an example of a gatekeeping issue with assessment of knowledge with ethics.

I had a student when I was teaching ethics, who was not going to pass the class. His writing was nowhere where it needed to be. His understanding of ethical issues was significantly lacking. He did not have the skill set to navigate the class that it was painful because I gave them a lot of the tools. There was templates and samples and everything and he just couldn't do it.

The trainee lacked knowledge of ethics and writing, and thus gatekeeping and remediation was initiated, with the outcome being that he failed the course because he was unable to demonstrate his knowledge.

Knowledge is a foundation for skills, and to some extent disposition. Occasionally, content courses bring to light deficits in knowledge through other avenues, like avoidance or poor grades. Ella described how assessment of knowledge exposes gatekeeping concerns: “And so, there's people like we've been worried about like, ‘Oh, they're missing this class a lot. Okay, in this class they haven't turned in their assignments, and in this class this is going on.’”

However, some of what appears to be a gatekeeping issue of knowledge may be an underlying dispositional issue, as in an example that Clyde provided: “And this led to some other difficulties in his life for it was very difficult for him to get to class on time and he was missing class. He was not getting assignments turned in on time.” This student presented as having deficits in knowledge, but he was actually struggling with balancing issues in his personal life. Firefox described how evaluating a student’s knowledge can result in resistance or avoidance due to underlying deficits in skill or disposition or how it can translate into such an issue later:

But, yeah, I think the avoidance students, I pay a little bit closer attention to the ones who
just push back against a lot of assignments or don't show up for harder classes or ask if they could skip certain topics. That, for me, is a huge red flag because I'm thinking, "Well, if we just change that topic to an actual client, what type of counselor would they be later on?" That's what sticks with me a bit more.

Jeff further reinforced the importance of having enough knowledge before working on counseling skills.

When I was getting my master's, my first year, my first semester I took theories, the counseling relationship, and something else. Then second semester I was seeing clients, which I think looking back was way too soon, because I lacked a lot of the academic foundation and the skills to navigate that as well as I could have.

These examples indicate how knowledge, skills, and dispositions often overlap in assessment; evaluation of one area may reveal deficits in one or more other areas.

As participants mentioned supervision as a gatekeeping context twice as often, many of them also spoke to assessment of skills within the clinical sequence. Riley exemplified this: “just based on the level that they're at, it's mainly looking at their ability to use those very basic counseling skills. So it's looking a lot at like, are you able to reflect feelings, reflect content, empathize, name those feelings?” Layla also mentioned counseling skills, but she added that she assessed their ability to conceptualize clients, scaffolding knowledge and skill.

So I will look at their skill development from basic reflections and to complex things like immediacy and things like that. Once I start to feel like they have the basics of being able to hold [a session], I'll go into conceptualization. Are they able to conceptualize the client and then it is developing a treatment plan and what theory the supervisee uses to justify (or direct) their treatment plan.
Daisy ties in how the bottom line in assessing skills involves the Perception of Gatekeeper Role concerned with Protecting Clients and the Profession, so that trainees do not harm clients.

So I think as a gatekeeper, we need to make sure they have the, for example, there's a first thing that comes to my mind is clinical skills and ethics and willingness to reflect on themselves so they can, at least as I think the bottom line is do no harm.

Several participants conceptualized skills broadly, but others referenced specific skills that trainees struggled with.

In addition to multicultural competence and skills, doctoral students also identified instances where assessment of skill raised gatekeeping concerns. Gary identified both extremes of using empathy in sessions:

At this point they were just interviewing and not counseling, when they practiced their skills. But one who really identified with their clients and became emotional in session.

And the other that was the opposite of this, that was really trying to run from emotion and advising the client too much, to the point of discrediting or devaluing the client's story.

Over empathizing, which may lead to burn out or overidentifying with the client, and under empathizing, which can damage rapport and the ability to understand the client, were identified in other examples from participants as well. Trent discussed similar issues that arose during skill assessment, noting how use of skills often overlaps with dispositional tendencies.

So, skills for me stand out in Pre-Prac particularly, I think that's where it comes out the most. But people wanting to be too directive, people not engaging at all, or hardly at all.

Let's see. Judgment, being overly judgmental, I think. And then, this kind of gets into dispositions, too, but just like having personal reactions that they aren't able to maintain.

You know, if people are really responding to something in a negative way and they do
their own personalization, they can't keep it out of the room. I think those are some of the big ones.

Empathy and demeanor in session were mentioned in many of the gatekeeping examples provided. Jeff summed up certain skills in session that he assessed for as a gatekeeper:

“If people are in crisis, and you have no idea how to handle a crisis, that's alarming. Or, if your judgment is extremely poor clinically.” In addition to gauging their use of skills in session, participants noted that when assessing skills, they gauged trainees’ conceptualization as well.

Jessie described an issue with a trainee’s skill with goal setting, which stemmed from the trainee’s lack of ability to conceptualize clients and the rationale for goal setting in counseling.

For example, one of my supervisees really struggled to grasp the importance of goal setting. They were working towards goal setting and increasing that skill, so that they could demonstrate effectiveness there. Really struggled to grasp, why is there any goals at all?

Jeff summarized how he assesses trainee’s conceptualization skill:

I want you to think like a counselor. Are you thinking of things beneath the surface? Are you hearing changes in their tone in the emotion inflection. Are you confronting and challenging people when you hear things that you say, ‘That doesn't really add up.’ Or I’m wondering, ‘Is that really what they said? Is that their words and your perception?’

With both examples, skills and dispositions may be impacting their work with trainees.

When providing feedback on skills, like with scaffolding knowledge and skills, there is often overlap with underlying dispositional issues. Jessie described how she integrated assessment of skills with dispositional qualities like the willingness to critically examine their skills and abilities:
Another thing I will do for my trainees is to give homework for reviewing their counseling videos. To start, I will provide two videos to compare/contrast, typically with one great example of using a skill and one where the skill either wasn’t used or was not implemented effectively. This allows the trainees to learn about their concerns, while also emphasizing what they are doing right.

Trainees are building skills and strengthening dispositional qualities and being evaluated on both areas simultaneously. Layla described how it is natural for trainees to struggle with skills, but notes that what separates gatekeeping concerns from growth and development is the dispositional quality to self-reflect and seek feedback.

Even if they are underperforming on a skill or something, they're aware of it so we can work on it. The lack of self-awareness is probably the biggest and I don't know that I can think of... the only thing that I could think of that wouldn't fall under self-awareness or couldn't be tied back to that would be they're self-aware but their personal issues have not been dealt with and are too far needing further treatment or services before they can navigate between being the counselor in a session, which is what almost happened with one of mine.

Skills and dispositions have significant overlap in how doctoral students assess competency, scaffolding on one another.

Dispositions can be more difficult to assess due to the personal nature of such assessment, subjectivity of dispositional assessment, and how these qualities may not always be as clearly observable as knowledge or skills. Chelsea described this with an example of a discrepancy in assessment of skills and dispositions.
I know I've had a supervisee before who, fantastic clinically, I mean fantastic clinically, but was a real peach for lack of a better word, to our front desk staff to, they never used these words, but this was my conceptualization of it was below them. Whoever was below them. Oh my gosh, we had to terminate the internship early because it was like, you're not following these basic policies and procedures of the practice treating each properly.

Though knowledge, skills, and dispositions often scaffold or overlap, gatekeeping issues may still arise in one area when the trainee displays proficiency in other areas; one area may be lacking, resulting in the need for gatekeeping despite proficiency in the other two. Gary feels that such instances are rare, but describes dispositions as a personal goodness of fit with the counseling profession.

Because then that boils down to goodness of fit, based on that supervisee's current level of healing and personal growth. I think for me again, it boils down to harm, and then any other major ethical violations, and/or, because there's overlap, a major dispositional mismatch in the field, which I think is very rarely the case.

Daisy also framed dispositions as a piece of the counselor educator professional identity: “And another one is professional identity. You need to view yourself as a counselor and let everything be open minded and you need to be flexible.”

Some participants describe an element of dispositions as professionalism in general. Riley said: “Also assessing again that professionalism aspect, how willing students are, my supervisees are, to receive feedback, apply that feedback, how they interact with me as their supervisor, and just looking at those things.” Similarly, Ella identified professionalism and the ability to get along with others, “So I would say, yeah, not getting along with peers, just like
interpersonal conflicts in general and then professionalism.” Several participants used professionalism as a synonym for dispositions congruent with the counseling profession.

Carmen described professionalism as more of a miscellaneous category of dispositions assessed for within supervision:

I think in our evaluation forms, one of the areas that we have is professionalism. And I think that's the catchall where everything that isn't necessarily per the rubric or whatever, those are those things, are you showing up on time? Are you showing up at all? Are you staying in communication? And I think those are the things that start to go first and how are you responding to supervision and feedback that you're given. So that professionalism area is where I first see the gatekeeping coming into play. I can start to notice patterns, people showing up late or not showing up at all or not responding to communication.

Similarly, Firefox identified professionalism as a set of behaviors to assess for outside of skills and knowledge, and she described how they may present in the classroom as well:

You just go through the motions and say, Oh, well this is what the university wants me to make sure you understand, which of course is important. But same thing, like how do they present in class with professional behaviors. How do they treat their classmates? How do they treat you as the instructor? I think that says a lot about somebody's professionalism. How they act in a class versus how they're going to be acting with clients.

Carmen and Firefox described how dispositions in the form of professionalism are assessed for in both gatekeeping contexts In the Clinic and In the Classroom, respectively.
As with skills, specific dispositional qualities were mentioned and described, often referred to as “red flags” by participants. Daisy detailed a more observable gatekeeping issue associated with traditional views of professionalism.

And that's another red flag. If you wear a miniskirt, and I did have some concerns like when my peers show video, their supervisee is dressed, had a revealing in a supervision session, so I think that's a red flag. They reflect on how the supervisee viewed their supervisor relationship and I'd also have concerns if she will dress that in her counseling sessions.

Firefox was concerned about personal and professional boundaries and what those might reveal about student’s and supervisee’s competence: “I'm also looking at boundaries within the students. What are they sharing in classrooms? How are they dealing with being triggered or what comes up for them? Or even the idea of them needing to go to counseling.” Trent outlined several elements he assesses for in a trainee’s disposition, including multicultural competence, self-reflection, openness to feedback, and professional boundaries:

And as far as like dispositions, I think that comes out many ways. But just like receptiveness to feedback, reflexivity, if they are overly concrete throughout the program and not just like developmentally expected at the beginning. So, if they can't handle ambiguity… Multiculturalism, that's a huge one. So, I think it's expected where we're at that people are coming in and they still have a lot of growth to do. But if they kind of get overly defensive in that and go underground, that's a big one. That's kind of a red flag, and I guess that has to do with just openness in general. Lack of engagement, or the opposite of lack of engagement, like so engaged that they are enmeshed with clients or enmeshed with people.
The dispositional qualities of openness to feedback and reflexivity were very commonly mentioned as critical areas to assess for.

Knowledge, skills, and other elements of disposition like professionalism or cooperation may be able to develop, but the participants highlighted that self-reflection and feedback receptivity were necessary foundations to develop these other areas. Clyde described how a lack of these critical skills could lead to the need to gatekeep:

If they're doing anything blatantly unethical definitely. If they are doing something that's borderline unethical and they're confronted about it and become defensive instead of owning it and trying to learn from it, that's a big, big red flag. I mean, being receptive to feedback, I mean, one of the scariest things for me with any counselor in training is thinking, you know, more than you know. There's plenty that you don't know that you don't know yet when you're early on in our program, but that humility and that willingness to say, "I don't know, I made a mistake." That's a big deal.

Some difficulty with feedback may be anticipated developmentally, but trainees must learn how to use evaluation of their performance to better themselves. Continued resistance to feedback and reflection are always a “red flag” for Helena.

And so that's probably the one thing that I'm looking for and if a student is resistant and continues to be resistant, because at first, sometimes they are at the beginning, but eventually they're able to open up and be open. But if they continue then that is one of the major things that caused me to take a pause and consult with the professor.

Helena further identified that when trainees do not respond to feedback or lack self-awareness, they increase the likelihood that they will harm the client through imposing their own values and judgments:
I think if they're really lacking the ability to self-reflect and identify some of the areas where they need to grow or some of the areas in which they may be placing their own values, judgements, views onto a client, to me that is concerning. Doctoral student gatekeepers appear to assess based on similar theoretical standards, but there were noted differences in their individual processes of determining when and how to gatekeep.

**Sub-theme 4b: Practical Approach**

Though there is a level of overlap between the theoretical and the practical aspects of doctoral students’ approaches, the practical approach tends to include the more idiosyncratic, informal, or experiential aspects of how each doctoral student learns to evaluate trainees. These elements of the practical approach that doctoral students identified include a developmental lens, the use of intuition or subjectivity, and engaging in informal assessments and conversations about feedback. The practical approach, which mirrors and compliments the theoretical approach, tends to involve more informal and subjective methods of evaluation.

Though both counseling and education are theoretically developmental, the actual implementation of this developmental approach to gatekeeping seems more idiosyncratic or experientially based in practice. Helena summarized what developmental might look like in practice:

And so in that, there's different levels to gatekeeping as well. And so I don't necessarily believe every gatekeeping incident means an official remediation plan, but it is a conversation to be heard. And I think that it should be something where we actively create a plan to help. So whether that's support extra homework, writing an extra reflection paper, it needs to be something to ensure that we are not causing harm to those who they're going to be serving.
Gary stated that he has a very developmental lens in theory and in practice:

As a supervisor, I used to have a really strong developmental lens that I looked to, so I really tried to determine, based on their current state of the program, what I would expect of the student at that level. I also take a look at the IDM model of supervision, and trying to determine in a more ... that would be in a slightly more objective way. But I think it boils down to developmental lens, looking at the ideas of skills, values, and just a general attitude.

Firefox identified that the severity of the issue dictated how developmental she was in addressing gatekeeping concerns and how her developmental approach was specific to each situation and trainee:

I honestly now believe it can be any behavior depending on the severity of that particular behavior. Because you could have one student who's in their internship experience with a really underdeveloped counseling skill set that might need further conversation and further gatekeeping. But you can also have a very new student who's in their basic skills counseling class, or in another foundational course where they're completely avoiding the topics or avoiding participating because it's making them uncomfortable. Both of those students would need some form of gatekeeping before they continue on. I think it's the severity of the behavior. I don't believe there's one particular behavior or set of behaviors.

Trent clarified the line between developmental lag and gatekeeping issue:

[A] helpful way to differentiate of like, is this someone who is struggling but they're on the right track or just behind, or is this someone who's on the wrong track or more of a red flag? So that was kind of like a process, too, of does it seem like they're just a little behind or does it seem like these are major red flags.
The idea of developmental approaches to training seem more determined by doctoral student’s ways of implementing them on a case-by-case basis.

Part of the developmental lens involves ongoing assessment of the trainee and continued intervention by the gatekeeper to check in and to Support Student Development. Jeff described expectations, but not the assessment criteria, vary based on the trainee: “part of it has been studying different supervision techniques and different models of supervision. That's been helpful to me to be a part of that process of recognizing how do you engage your people depending on where they are developmentally.” Gary characterized the gatekeeping process as highly collaborative and developmental, feeling that the trainee needed more concentrated intervention in knowledge, skills, or dispositional areas.

I don't believe that when gatekeeping is an issue, most of the time it's not because of a personal flaw. It's not because the person is ill-suited to counseling. It's my experience there’s just more exposure needed to course material or to the greater amount of self-work that needs to be done. To me, gatekeeping is more an issue of recognizing possible ... It can be a number of things. It could be in relation to skills. And then, it can be in relation to values and ethics towards the field.

Laura indicated that the decision to intervene or not was heavily developmental as well:

“[T]iming of the semester, frequency of concerns, and I guess, also severity of concerns and also through supervision of supervision consultation with professors, if they feel that it's something that needs to be more immediate versus let's just watch it.” Though the standards of assessment remain objective, the method of helping the trainee demonstrate or remediate can be developmental.

Participants indicated that in addition to a broad developmental lens, they also based their
Clyde outlined how his experience had helped him to form a normative gauge of development for trainees based on their progression through the program:

So there's a personal experience component of what you've been through as a counselor and a student. There's an experience component of the more students you see, the more you understand what the range of normalcy is, but you also want to just see that their development is on par with their peers as far as their ability to execute, their ability to take on professional roles, their ability to integrate knowledge theory, techniques or where they're at in the program.

Riley also described how she used a similar approach at the program level and at the individual level based on the trainee’s context:

I think just knowing where my supervisee should be developmentally, especially because I see some people are just naturally more inclined towards certain counseling skills based on whether just who they are as a person or their life experiences, whatever. And so kind of that wondering, should my supervisee be further along than they are? Are they okay where they're at right now? And even just not being sure what it actually looks like to be ready for practicum internship. Because that can kind of sound subjective whenever we talk about how do we know what that actually means.

Riley also added that developmental approaches at various levels include an aspect of subjectivity, and as Laura pointed out, even remediation can and should be developmental:

“They are not going to pass the course, if the trainee does not have the developmentally appropriate skills based on their level to successfully complete the coursework. Then the formal remediation plan should be put into place.” Gary summed up the various levels where
gatekeepers can be developmental in their approach:

So sometimes it's about norming based on their peers, based on their cohort. But also, just in general, having a more objective, like meta-level of what should a practicum student, ideally, what should their skill level be at at this point in time, versus an internship student. What should they be able to handle from an emotional perspective, from a temperament perspective. And then, skill set-wise, is this something that would be expected of them reasonably. Like, would the average practicum student be able to handle this situation.

Another facet of doctoral students of practicalities in assessing trainees was the use of intuition or subjectivity in evaluating students and supervisees.

Ten of the fifteen participants noted intuition and subjectivity in their discussions of assessment of competence. Trent identified intuition as what triggered his concern and decision to consult:

So part of that is just intuition, I think. I mean I have to trust that to some degree. And then consultation is a second part, so it's kind of like my own intuition is round one. And then if it's not clear enough yet, then it's consultation.

The participants still identified the need for consultation, but this intuition or subjectivity in assessment was many times the “red flag” or signal that gatekeeping may need to occur. Like Trent, Clyde also used his intuition to signal a need for supervision: “If there's something in my gut or something in my… lens that's saying, ‘Something just doesn't feel quite right here.’ That's why I have supervision of supervision and that's why I have an internship course.” Mercedes described in detail what that intuition felt like and implications for her gatekeeper development:

I think also, you get the spidey sense of like, "There's something going on." And even if
you can't specifically point to something, I think I suspect that as I develop, I will be able to more strongly articulate those things earlier on in the process. But for right now where I'm at is mostly it's, there's a felt sense or there's just something you can tell that they're not, that something's not clicking right. Something's happening that shouldn't be.

This “spidey sense” (Mercedes), “gut feeling” (Clyde, Gary), or “intuition” (Trent) guides the initiation of the gatekeeping process and consultation, but it also plays a role in their ongoing assessment.

Gary described how to a certain extent his subjectivity in assessment came down to intuition at times:

I think that's tough because I come at it from ... I try to be objective, but I think that there's so much subjectivity to it. I think for me, it sometimes comes down to like a gut reaction. And rather than responding once I feel that, really trying to analyze that, like "What's going on for me? Why did this particular student's behavior or their comment, or this part of their tape ... why did that not sit right with me?" And then doing the personal work to try to figure out what was underlying that, and then identifying where there was that mismatch.

Riley endorsed this same idea, saying about assessment in general: “I think there's a certain level of subjectiveness that comes with it.” This struggle subjectivity and intuition overlaps with the Ways of Learning’s Observations and Examples sub-theme, which describes how the nebulosity of the gatekeeping process and implementation of evaluation standards can lead to conflict or barriers in gatekeeper development. Ella described the struggle between remaining objective, but feeling the merits of her intuition at times: “I feel like we try to be as tangible as possible and there's just some things that are just like an instinct that you know are not right.” It
appears that objectivity and subjectivity in assessment of competence can create uncertainty and conflict in developing gatekeepers.

Others have sought to resolve this uncertainty through adding their own unique ways of honoring their own intuition and the subjectivity of assessment. Layla connected her own subjective criteria to the developmental aspect of assessment as well, integrating it in her overall assessment approach:

And those are the questions that I asked to get there and then the guidelines are really just on a spectrum. So I feel like they're getting close to yeah, I mean, they're a good place for practicum. Are they in a good place for internship or LPC interns and you can kind of gauge that? But I don't know that there's a clear guideline, it's just my own. Yeah, I feel like that's where someone for practicum should be.

Chelsea also integrated her own subjective elements of gatekeeping and assessment into the process to fortify that part of the process:

So I have my evaluatory lens through [the university’s] eyes, but also I sort of create my own evaluations that I give them at halfway point and at the end. So it might seem a little redundant, but for me, I feel it's really important to make sure that I separate myself from the university. I mean, I am a part of that process, but I'm on my own.

Doctoral students have identified their own ways of strengthening their gatekeeping and assessment as they become more experienced.

Another way that doctoral students have learned to alter or execute gatekeeping in practice is by incorporating more informal assessment and feedback, especially through transparency and multiple, frequent conversations about their progress. As far as the conversation, it too is developmental as Mercedes illuminated:
I think there are some instances in which it's a real challenge because you have to gauge how much of it is where they are now. And how much you perceive them to be able to grow in the context of the time that they have available to grow. So I think again, it's taking into account a lot of factors while still assessing whether they're meeting the requirements of the standards that are posted. So I think it might be one severe issue that really needs to be addressed. Or it might be just a lot of, not quite as severe issues but enough of them to give you concern.

When the context is Gatekeeping in the Clinic, this informal conversation may begin more preemptively as a result of video review or live supervision, like Helena described: “So after a tapescript and having something very concrete of like, ‘This is what was said on paper.’ We were able to talk about why she received a low score.” Helena also noted could also occur after a mistake or gatekeeping concern has arisen, as a form of gatekeeping in retrospect.

And so there was an incident where I came into the office just to check in on them to do some observations and I found some client information just laying out in an open office where anybody could see it. And so that turned into a very important conversation. And it did end up becoming a fitness to practice because... So there was this kind of information, names, address with their treatment stuff. And so we have to talk about privacy and confidentiality.

Though an informal conversation can occur at any point, it is typically the first resort for the doctoral gatekeeper, in keeping with the developmental approach.

These informal conversations tend to occur early on when possible and continue throughout the assessment period. Laura described her process and how it helped the trainee:

And there was multiple checkpoints in which I checked in with this person saying if
they're not able to reflect the feeling in session, or reflect five feelings in session when it
went closer to the end of the semester, that's a checkpoint that you have to meet in order to
going on to the next level. And by the end of the semester, I felt like I had been extremely
clear about the expectations that the person was not blindsided by the decision and that in
the meeting of telling the person that they were being gatekept or held back, that they
were very responsive to that and felt like it was something doable that they could stay
back and complete or gain more skills in the next semester.
Jeff also described how using informal conversations as an ongoing practice, can be
uncomfortable, but is beneficial for both the trainee and the doctoral student’s gatekeeper
development.

Having to have those conversations with people was part of the process, weekly, have to
talk about where you're at, and you're struggling with this. So having those experiences I
think made it easier for me when I went to our core program to recognize the gatekeeping
that does exist, recognize how lax or how strict the gatekeeping is, and also be able to
communicate with people if I felt that they were doing well and able to go to the gate and
to filter people who I think need more time, guidance or just weren't going to make it.
Though it can be uncomfortable, these conversations do not have to feel negative or punitive.

Gary described how his gatekeeper development was positively impacted by the way he
and his faculty responded to student concerns in a developmental way.

But I think that the exposure to this entire situation has been really beneficial for me to
see more effective ways that are not punitive, to handle not only student concerns, but if
there were genuine dispositional concerns, how to handle those in a way that doesn't feel
punitive. And that, I think, is not a formal evaluation for first semester in the program. I
think that's a sit-down, student with their faculty advisor, talking about specific behaviors that are observed, talking about what that looks like and how that affects other people.

Indeed, most participants spoke to how they manage potentially difficult conversations with their trainees to come from a standpoint of Supporting Student Development as opposed to punishing or shaming them.

Firefox provided an example of how she brings trainees into the process to feel supported and reduce fear of evaluation or failure:

That can be too much for a student which will, of course, can cause defense mechanisms to come up. Whereas something I started doing now is bringing my students in on, this is a concern that I have and this is something I want to sit on and I want to have a follow up with my own supervisor about. And bringing them in on this process of, ‘I want to invest more time into that particular situation, or I want to invest more time into you dealing with that particular situation.’ If it does go a bit further to being a remediation meeting, which I think most students fear being a meeting of let's then evaluate your performance. If there's transparency along that way, then maybe they feel more in control if they're more at ease with that process having to occur versus this happened and now we need to start pulling even to all these meetings. That just causes further issues for the student.

Chelsea shared a similar approach and noted how she provided space for the student to share their perspective during informal discussion of gatekeeping concerns, as uncomfortable as such conversations can be:

Honestly, I always like to give them the benefit of the doubt, but I don't mean by ignoring it. So usually, I like to address the situation with the person myself before I go talking to some other staff member or faculty member. So I might, if it's a supervisee in
supervision, I might say, "Hey, I noticed lately X, Y and Z was happening. Or you've been talking X, Y and Z to the front desk. Tell me about that, what's going on?" And letting them give me their take on things before I jump to any conclusions of something's wrong or they're being rude or anything like that. So I do try to talk to the student or the supervisee first. I think that's part of our role. Again, uncomfortable topics, but that's what we signed up for.

Gary and three others shared a similar view that providing this space for students was helpful. Jeff also provided an example of how he conducts these conversations, noting that confrontation does not have to be negative or punitive:

I always take action. I at least start with a conversation of, this is what I'm noticing. And I'm not sure if you're aware of this pattern. And I am willing. I'm very comfortable with confrontation. I don't think confrontations are negative. Doesn't mean yelling and screaming, or this that and the other is needed to be willing to say, ‘Hey, I looked at a couple of your tapes, and you're three or four weeks in with some of these people. And I'm still seeing us really just staying on the surface. And I'm wondering what's going on there. And I'm wondering if you nudge them a bit to see if they're willing to go deeper.’

Jeff, who had more overall teaching and educational experience and had the most experience in his doctoral program, described the greatest comfort with confrontation and conversation surrounding gatekeeping and remediation.

The other common element of these informal conversations on gatekeeping was the importance of transparency and authenticity with the student or supervisee. Jessie directly summarized the importance of honesty and how she presents her concerns: I try to be as transparent as possible when I have those conversations and supervision sessions with them and
say like, ‘This is what I'm seeing and here is why I'm a little concerned about that.’” Daisy views transparency about expectations and the process as so integral to the conversation that she considers it part of her role as a gatekeeper.

For example, we talked about, okay, you need to have a certain counseling skills so we can help you move forward. But what does that look like? So, that may be confusing to our students. So as gatekeeper, I think, or as a I think the supervisor role, I think it's my responsibility to make it clear to our students.

Firefox ultimately summed up that by being transparent and authentic throughout the process, the trainee is more likely to be amenable to feedback and change and the gatekeeper is more likely to feel positively about the conversation:

When I added them, like usually it's like small conversations between supervisor, supervisee, and then if the situation is more then it involves a professor. That's the only step I've gotten to is with the professor. My supervisee said how much she valued that I cared about her and that she didn't see it as me getting in trouble even though it resulted for her that way at her site. But she still see it as me really caring about her wanting to advocate for her and protect her. I was grateful that it was proceed that way.

Ultimately, intuition and subjectivity of assessment, particularly in clinical courses, can lead to the identification of gatekeeping issues in practice, without ignoring the criteria. Additionally, developmental approaches to gatekeeping that feature informal conversations and feedback make gatekeeping less intimidating, more documentable, and tend to be better received by trainees who are struggling. These strategies vary by gatekeeper in their implementation but appear to be present across doctoral student’s use of informal assessment in practice. Both the theoretical and
practical approaches to gatekeeping are learned, just as their trainees’ develop their knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

**Theme 5: Ways of Learning**

This theme includes the processes and experiences by which doctoral students learn to gatekeep or develop as gatekeepers. Conversely, this theme and each of its sub-themes also include what doctoral students feel they are missing or what they feel is unhelpful in their learning as gatekeepers. This theme has four sub-themes: Formal Training and Course Content, Experience Acting as a Gatekeeper, Mentorship, Role Models, and Support, and Observations and Examples. The first two research questions, including sub-questions for question two, are addressed with this theme, and question three is addressed by sub-themes 5b and 5c. Survey responses regarding the respondent’s experience most important to their understanding of gatekeeping were similar to interview participants. Most respondents noted experiences acting as gatekeepers and/or faculty role models, with a few mentioning examples or a specific course.

Helena exemplified the overall importance of the Ways of Learning theme, describing how a variety of experiences, interactions, and knowledge helped her develop as a gatekeeper, whether it was positive or negative:

It's interesting because it... again the parallel processing, right? I am getting this feedback and then I'm also giving feedback. And so I think it's very helpful because that helped me realize what I do and do not appreciate about certain types of feedback. And so I try to learn from that, basically take what I like, don't take what I don't like and then integrate that into my own style of supervision or my own style of gatekeeping. So it has been helpful and so I am appreciative of that. The positive experiences and the negative ones because I’ve learned a lot from both. And it helps me better know who I want to be as a
Helena touched on an important point about learning, noting that she still learned from negative experiences in addition to the positive ones, and that she learned from a multitude of sources over time.

**Sub-theme 5a: Formal Training and Course Content**

The first sub-theme pertaining to the learning and development of gatekeeping is Formal Training and Course Content. This sub-theme includes learning, or lack of learning, from any formal training or content within coursework pertaining to gatekeeping and remediation, and all participants referenced both the presence and lack of such learning. Examples could include a didactic lecture in a course, conference presentation, or training on gatekeeping. This sub-theme was the least frequently mentioned as a method of learning, but commonly noted as gap in learning for developing gatekeepers.

For the presence of formal content or training which contributed to learning and gatekeeper development, most participants noted conversations in supervision or teaching coursework. Carmen shared the two most helpful courses for them as a developing gatekeeper:

> So the teaching course that we had was very helpful. Our professor who taught that is a huge advocate for gatekeeping. So she included that in everything and she was very influential in here's how you gatekeep when you're teaching someone. The other class that I had was the supervision class where a lot of that is about gatekeeping and the professor of that class is also the supervisor over me as I do supervision.

Other common courses where gatekeeping was discussed or featured as a topic included professional seminars or orientation courses, pedagogy and teaching, leadership and advocacy, ethics (at the master’s level), and internship courses. Clyde described how doctoral students
brought questions and discussion about gatekeeping to both their internship and professional
seminar courses, where he felt it was most clearly addressed:

Most of the gatekeeping conversations that I had came out to that class and the other big
one would be the professional seminar course. That's the one where talking about
pedagogy and talking about different classes and talking about the progression of master's
students through a counselor ed program where we had more time to talk about how
gatekeeping plays out, why it's a big deal, why it's a necessary component of what we do.
None of the participants noted an entire course or training dedicated to gatekeeping, but
referenced it more as a chapter, lecture, unit, or sub-topic of other formal content learning areas.
Jessie said, “In our program specifically, there's no course that really covers gatekeeping in itself.
It has been a topic of discussion in maybe two of our courses or three, of our role as gatekeepers
in general.” Learning to gatekeep via content in courses appears to occur primarily within the
same two to three courses via discussions, often prompted by the doctoral students, or
occasionally through lectures, but is more of single lesson or as-needed conversation.

In addition to coursework, a few participants mentioned outside sources of content
learning within the profession as theoretically helpful. Trent summarized how doctoral students
might also seek out further content on gatekeeping outside of courses, noting conferences and
literature as references:

I think it should be taught more, so that'd be great. Particularly for those that are going to
be into a counselor education role, that's super integral to their role. So I would hope that
they're learning about it. And if they're not learning about it directly in coursework, that
they're asking about it or seeking out at conferences or literature or whatever else. So
learn about it and recognize it as important.
Mercedes described how she felt she was able to integrate pieces of coursework on gatekeeping into her learning better through her comprehensive exam process:

I'm sure the level to which our responsibilities as gatekeepers were addressed in both of [teaching and supervision] classes… I can't remember specifically those instances. And that's why I think that my quals paper, my comprehensive [exam] paper was the more meaningful part of that process because it allowed me the opportunity to sit down and take all of those coursework learnings and consolidate them into my own understanding.

So I can't really point to a thing that was specifically missing right now.

Others referenced literature or conferences, they but noted that the topic was treated similarly to coursework, as a feature more than a focus.

Doctoral students were split on where their role as a gatekeeper was articulated to them, with some saying it was not, some saying it was implied through other Ways of Learning, and some said through coursework or formal training. Carmen expressed that they learned via the latter of the three, noting they also sought out guidance through questioning:

I think primarily through the coursework and then I am very upfront about what do you want me to do here? How do you want me to address this? How do you want me to gather this information from students? So I'm always asking for what they want from me so that, I mean I guess I'm very concrete thinker. What do I have? What's concrete? What do you want from me? What's required of me? That's kind of what I go to.

Carmen felt seeking clarification was very helpful to fill in any gaps they perceived.

Several participants spoke to the most informative parts of the content they received. Ella described: “… that was helpful… that was a lot more of like how… Using different models of evaluation and giving us an idea of more tangible things to talk about with supervisees and things
to give them direct feedback on.” Jessie also shared how discussion made the expectations more tangible:

> Like I said, initially, it's just been kind of conversations when it comes to educating us about gatekeeping, the importance of it, why we do it, how we do it. In one of our classes, we did kind of look at remediation plans and things like that specifically. That was really helpful.

The opportunity to review remediation plans was noted by the majority of participants and overlaps with Observations and Examples. Mercedes described conversations about gatekeeping responsibilities, but highlighted how writing had also played a key role in her learning:

> Well, I think that we talk specifically about what our responsibilities are as counselor educators. And we write articles about gatekeeping and kind of some of the challenges of engaging in gatekeeping. So within that class, you know it as part of your supervision experience. But then in the teaching class, it became much more present just through the course content and through the discussion.

Predominantly discussion of the gatekeeper role was what doctoral students found most helpful.

> However, most participants felt the role of gatekeeper as a doctoral student or future faculty, not a gatekeeper to the profession, had not been clearly articulated through the coursework. Jessie elaborated on this deficit:

> Barely. Like I said, yeah, it's really just a few of those discussions in some of the classes. Really, just that professional issues class. It wasn't so much our role for this one anyway, in our professional issues class. It wasn't our role as gatekeepers, as doc students. It was our role as future counselor educators, as gatekeepers in that particular class. Then in our supervision class, I would say is the only other time where we're really talking about it as
doc students and what our role is in there. Even there, it's really unclear.

What had been articulated in coursework on this role distinction, previously discussed in Perception of Gatekeeper Role, was still unclear or insufficient for most of the participants. Layla had more of an issue with the course sequencing and how it did not sync with her needs for the knowledge in practice:

So a class dedicated to let's have a conversation about supervision and the theories and how you would do it and then do a practicum would have been significantly preferred over learning at the drop of a hat while I'm doing it, all of these steps. Because the order that they're teaching those things don't necessarily happen at the same time. Different stages of different models we would talk about at different classes, but I needed to know class six during my second session. It was that kind of stuff. And in retrospect, I was like, "Oh, well, this makes more sense." So I felt a lot better about it my second time because I'd already learned that stuff.

Daisy had a similar experience with course order: “I taught that class in my first year… I was taking the doctoral seminar class, so I wasn't fully prepared to be a gatekeeper at that point. So I think we could change the course sequence a little bit.” These examples represent how participants felt some aspects of formal training or content about gatekeeping was still hazy or unclear, typically due to execution, timing, or lack of detail.

Mentions of feeling learning occurred from content were half as frequent as mentions of doctoral students feeling as if they needed more formal training or content in gatekeeping. All participants had mentions of each side of this sub-theme as well. Those participants who felt that gatekeeping was not well covered or covered at all in coursework noted that they felt it was specifically the gatekeeping role as a doctoral student or future faculty versus the ethical
responsibility to the profession. Gary stated, “There's really been no formal explanation of, "Here you are as a gatekeeper. This is what this looks like. Here's what we're expecting of you as faculty." It's just all been implied.” Ella described guilt over the inconsistency of how the role was understood in her program, hoping for further training:

I knew that students were getting really confused about what they should and shouldn't be doing because we all had different views on that and weren't consistent. And so, I ended up feeling like really guilty about it and I brought it up several times and suggested that we do like a training next time, just to make sure that we were all aligned on what we're looking for and like exactly how we're giving feedback. But, yeah, I just didn't feel great.

Layla described this same ambiguity in how gatekeeping was discussed, or not discussed, in her coursework:

Ethics was like a footnote, like we're a gatekeeper. This is where it is in the code.

Supervision, the first supervision, it was discussed for maybe a class, but there weren't any strict guidelines. There's no like formal structure of it or just why it's important, what are some things we look for and more experiential like, how do you experience having that conversation with someone.

Layla further expressed disappointment in the lack of gatekeeping content, specifically the absence of the how and when to gatekeep: “But let's practice that conversation. What does it look like? Do you know when to do it? Those weren't really discussed.” Many students felt their training lacked the “how” of gatekeeping, among other practical knowledge.

Just as participants were able to identify courses and content which contributed to their learning as a gatekeeper, they also expounded on gaps or improvements they hoped for in content and formal training. Clyde felt he still had much more he wished to learn in terms of
information and content on gatekeeping: “I remember early on wanting just craving more information on the topic and reading about it, seeking out sessions about it. And somehow I'm still here three years later saying I still don't fully understand it better than anyone else.” Layla sought more information about how and when to confront students when there is a gatekeeping issue:

Are you prepared to have that confrontation really? Which I don't know how helpful that was because we all said the right thing, right? We all said, "Oh, I mean, if we need to protect the client, of course, we're going to have that conversation.” But let's practice that conversation. What does it look like? Do you know when to do it? Those weren't really discussed.

Layla went on to say later that the how or the logistics of gatekeeping and remediation were her biggest barrier to learning to be a gatekeeper:

The biggest barrier to gatekeeping would be the logistics of it, I think. I will probably graduate from this program and still not know the formal logistics of legally, when can I fail someone or make them take the class again because happened to one of my practicum students, but as part of my experience, I wasn't with the professor who was typing up a remediation plan or in the room whenever it was being discussed. It wasn't even really told. I have to follow up and be like... she mentioned something about this. Did this happen for me to know anything about it?

Ella wished for more content surrounding remediation plans as well:

I think it would be helpful... I mean, I haven't seen a lot of the actual like professional development plans, I just hear about them. So I think knowing more about what that
actually looks like in a plan, like the more tangible things and like exactly how that's presented to a student and then how that ongoing evaluation happens.

Gary shared similar concerns about program logistics: “Feel like the mechanics, the legalities, and then even graduate university policy regarding remediation, and what that looks like. I feel like there has not been a more formal, practical education.” Nine of the fifteen participants specifically mentioned they wanted more specific information on gatekeeping and/or remediation criteria and process in their program.

Firefox wanted greater clarity on the process of teaching and supervising from the program’s perspective, saying one of her greatest barriers was “Not knowing what the hell these master students are being taught. I just really don't know. This program is so different from my own.” Other students also mentioned feeling a disconnect in their role because their master’s program did something differently. Both Firefox and Chelsea felt a review of overall standards for the profession would be helpful, even as a review:

I mean the concept stays the same but there's so much as a gatekeeper that we have to keep track of, new standards, maybe state board changes, ACA changes, all those sorts of things. So, we're just sort of a quick, condensed, ‘Hey, here's what's new, but here's also how you stay on top of this information.’ Where do you go to find it and how do you navigate it? So I did find that really helpful.

In addition to the broader ethics and criteria for evaluating master’s students, participants also wondered about ethics in their relationships with their trainees.

Jessie noted that more information on Multiple Professional Roles and Boundaries and how to navigate them as a doctoral student might help strengthen her as a gatekeeper:
I'm left wishing that more discussions and guidance happened for those multiple roles, and how that impacts the dynamics of what you're sharing, what you're not sharing. Is it for the best interest of our supervisees or for the gatekeeping part of things? I believe there should be more guidance surrounding how to balance the various roles with our roles as gatekeepers for our master’s students. Often, things discussed with one supervisor or in their groups could benefit the future supervisory process by informing other roles of the personal or professional competence risks.

Further education about ethical management of relationships which may involve gatekeeping were also a concern for Gary:

I think that I haven't actually gotten full training in ‘Here's an ethical dilemma with a trainee. Here's what gatekeeping might look like for that person. Let's step through it from start to finish. Here's a different ethical model of training. Here's what that might look like.’ Like, ‘Here are the rules.’

More concrete education on the practicalities of ethical concerns also overlaps with participant’s desire for more case studies and real scenarios in Observations and Examples.

Finally, participants wanted more information about how the gatekeeping role might look different as a faculty member. Chelsea described wanting to learn how to navigate Institutional Power Dynamics and Hierarchies:

Probably in terms of gatekeeping from a faculty role, there wasn't a ton of conversation about how do you navigate, when you feel that somebody, a student needs gatekept, but your other faculty members don't agree or aren't on the same page. Like how do you navigate that? That's probably something I would have appreciated, I think. I think it's probably hard for faculty to have those conversations because they want their students to
think that everybody's hunky dory on faculty and nobody disagrees. And it's like, come on. I'm sure that happens every once in a while. I mean, that's natural normal. But I wish that was something we talked more about.

Jessie wanted a more formal training component, including discussion of the nuances of gatekeeping as a doctoral student versus faculty.

I really wish that there would be an entire course on it, where we're really talking about like... or at least an entire module maybe, of part of our course. Having it as a random discussion point, it wasn't even listed on the syllabus like that's all we were talking about that day. It just came up. I think having a little more structured education about what really gatekeeping is, what does that process actually look like? What is our role in it as doc students? How does that role start to transition when we become faculty?

The differences between the Perception of the Gatekeeper Role as a doctoral student and faculty member permeated all aspects of Ways of Learning. Firefox succinctly summarized her view on how experience, not coursework was most helpful in learning her role: “I mean, supervision, but I don't know if it's been the actual coursework. But more so the experience of being a supervisor.”

**Sub-theme 5b: Experience Acting as a Gatekeeper**

As hinted at by Firefox’s quotation, doctoral students most valued their experience acting as gatekeepers. This Way of Learning was the most mentioned of all sub-themes, and it includes learning from situations where a gatekeeping issue occurs, and the doctoral student is in the role of a gatekeeper to the trainee or the lack of such experiences. As Carmen put simply: “Outside of that I would just say my experiences with the internships where I've been doing the work, not just learning about it, actually doing it I think has been where I've learned the most.”
All participants mentioned both sides of this type of learning, noting development from experiences and feeling more experience was needed. This sub-theme overlaps significantly with “in the middle” as well as Institutional Power Dynamics and Hierarchies, as well as many other themes due to the broadness of what participants shared.

Doctoral students were able to learn from both positive and negative experiences of gatekeeping, even more so than they did from content-based learning or training. Laura shared:

Yeah, I think that I have learned the most about gatekeeping through actually doing it and that there's a lot missing from what we learned didactically in courses about gatekeeping. I think it would have been super beneficial to go over some examples of when people have had to gatekeep before, what that experience was like, the feelings behind it. I don't think we learned anything like that. It's just based on the experience of the actually supervising that I feel more grounded in my understanding of gatekeeping.

Laura alludes to all four Ways of Learning but concludes that experience is what most influenced her learning and development as a gatekeeper. Riley’s advice for other doctoral student gatekeepers was the following:

I would want to implore my fellow doc students to learn as much as they can while they still are in their doctoral programs. To learn from their faculty who are doing that right this second as they teach masters classes, and to see how they can, if they're not able to be in a supervisor role like I am, how else can they learn more about gatekeeping and what that looks like.

Riley also infers that some of the other Ways of Learning are helpful but puts her supervision experience as the ideal way to learn. Mercedes also felt her experience as a supervisor was most helpful as gatekeeping occurred in the clinical sequence more often:
And then all of my experience as a supervisor in the master's level clinical classes. I think the teaching class actually made me much more immediately aware of the gatekeeping. But I think that the place that I've most engaged in gatekeeping has been in the clinical sequence classes for the master students.

Laura extended the importance of her experience to the variety of gatekeeping issues she had a chance to address in her different supervision experiences and encouraged others to do the same if possible:

Also, seek as much experience in supervising trainees in general to see different issues that may arise especially if you're interested in supervising in the future. I think that experience has been the most beneficial teaching tool of how to gatekeep, how to learn when it's appropriate to gatekeep.

Daisy felt that her experience in the gatekeeper role was similarly powerful for her development and confidence, even though she might not have more power:

I think just my experience being an instructor and a supervisor in master students practicum class, is really meaningful. And because I had the personal experience, kind of gatekeeping although I didn't have the power to make the final call, like you have room for now, but I did have a say in the process.

Though the participants generally spoke positively about having had the experience acting as a gatekeeper, some of them spoke to conflicting feelings that come with the gatekeeping process.

Some students highlighted the mixed nature of appreciating their experience, but they indicated that gatekeeping does not always feel positive at the time. Gary spoke about one such mixed supervision experience: “I was supervising this one student through. That was hugely influential. Even though I felt that the experience itself was negative, I felt there were so many
learning opportunities for me as a gatekeeper.” He was able to reframe the learning as positive even if the gatekeeping itself was uncomfortable. Clyde reflected on his experiences teaching and recognized he needed more experience to increase his confidence over time:

And I think that comes with some experience too. I mean, when you're teaching a class for the 7th or 10th time, there is a second nature component to it that we just can't have as doc students unless we have a bunch of teaching experience under our belts.

Jessie spoke to the juxtaposition of feeling positively about fulfilling the ethical obligations of a gatekeeper but still struggling with the very human elements of delivering difficult news to a student:

It made me really uneasy and uncomfortable, but knowing that we were protecting clients and really facilitating future professional growth for this person, by coming up with a plan for how to best address those goals in a way that was going to be more supportive and allow more time for that to happen. Instead of kind of rushing, because of the length of a semester or something, really did provide a lot of relief and comfort and ended with kind of a positive experience for me, even throughout the experience, it didn't always feel positive.

She felt the experience was positive for her development even though she felt uncomfortable about it. She later noted that she felt it was also positive for the trainee’s development as well, even though it was uncomfortable for them as well:

[I]n the long run, that means that this person is probably going to see so much more success in their future career. It's so fulfilling to know that, even though sometimes it feels a little icky along the way and that's okay.

The confrontation that is often a part of gatekeeping can feel uncomfortable, but may be a natural
part of the process, as doctoral students are especially empathetic towards their students’ reactions to gatekeeping.

However, other participants noted the pressures that come from the responsibility of gatekeeping. Mercedes tied Institutional Power Dynamics and Hierarchies to the confidence she has gained from her gatekeeper experience:

I think that's been really, really challenging for me. I think that that goes into a lot of the power dynamics. It feels really incongruous to both simultaneously be evaluating and be evaluated. So I think that I experienced a fair amount of emotional and cognitive confusion regarding how much power I had and how much I didn't. I think it's an important part of the process when I look at it from the outside. But experiencing it felt pretty vulnerable, and I don't feel like I did ... as a doctoral candidate, I feel like I'm doing a better job supervising than I did as a doc student. Because I personally, part of my process was to say all right, well, I've passed that comprehensive exam. There's only my dissertation in front of me. And I've proven to the extent that I can prove that I'm okay. So I feel more freedom as a candidate than I do, I feel more power within myself as a candidate than I did as a doc student. Because I feel less under evaluation because the things that I'm doing now are just for GA purposes rather than as part of my training portfolio purposes. And I know that whatever part of me says, well that could be also related to the fact that you do have experience. But I think more so, my experience of it is that it is much more related to I don't feel under evaluation at this point to the same extent that I did earlier on. I feel like I've proven something, and that takes a lot of pressure off.
She felt that she gained more confidence, not necessarily from the experiences themselves, but from proving herself and her skills through the process. Laura had similar anxieties about being evaluated herself while she was learning to evaluate master’s students.

It's nerve-racking because we're teaching skills, supervising, training skills to supervisees, especially during the first year in the doctoral program in which I have not yet been evaluated on my own clinical skills. And so how could that potentially affect my supervisees? If I haven't received feedback on my own clinical skills. If I'm teaching them to do something, and I'm not completely grounded in my theory or/and don't have much experience, then how could that... It's very nerve wracking to also feel that you could be gatekept at the same time that you're looking to potentially gatekeep someone else.

Laura expressed some fear and doubt about her abilities linked to her lack of experience as a gatekeeper and clinician.

Jessie described that she felt more pressured by the outcome of the gatekeeping decision as she was the primary person evaluating the student.

Once the decision was made that they were not going to move on to internship, it was a huge relief for me. A lot of my anxiety and worry from that semester came from what potential harm might be happening, if they continue to move forward and feeling like it was all on me. Like all the responsibility is on me, because I'm the one watching their videos, stopping and rewatching.

Jessie was afraid that her status as a neophyte gatekeeper could somehow contribute to gate slippage. Carmen felt an opposite type of pressure where they were torn about the decision, but did not have the final say in the gatekeeping process:
I think we're counselors and we have that compassion piece of us. And so just hearing what she had going on in her life, it was very much like okay I see now like what's going on. But at the same time I want to give you a chance, I don't want life events to pull you back in this process. And I think it was hard, I didn't get to give her the final say. So that was kind of taken out of my hands. So I think it was more ... I was just addressing her directly on, you haven't shown up, you've no showed literally not even told me that you weren't going to show up.

The pressure of being an evaluator, whether the doctoral student was concerned with having too much power or not enough, is driven by doctoral student’s compassion for students and their own confidence in their development. Clyde described this pressure using a teaching example, noting he felt this pressure decreased with time as his confidence increased, but that the compassion and empathy for students was not reduced:

And now that I've co-taught several courses, I'd feel a lot more comfortable knowing the spectrum of normal grading. But at the time there was a... it's just an anxiety that bit in your stomach feeling of knowing how it feels to receive that grade on the other end and how that becomes part of the package that pushes this person away from the program for that time.

Though there are many reasons doctoral students feel pressure in the gatekeeper role, Institutional Power Dynamics and Hierarchies in Sub-theme 2c, the sensation of being “In the middle” in Meta-theme 1, wanting to provide a balance of support and challenge in Meta-theme 2 Navigating the Grey Space of Gatekeeper Development, and other normative developmental features are likely at play in most gatekeeper’s development.
Several participants were clinicians prior to returning for their doctoral degree, and they mused that their clinical experience provided them with increased confidence and experience which translated well to their gatekeeper development. Riley and Daisy both wondered if matriculating immediately to a PhD program after their master’s degree created more of a developmental deficit compared to peers. Thus, Daisy framed her competence as a gatekeeper as uncertain because she was still developing as a clinician:

And any other barrier is we just, I just don't have the... I still think I can still grow as a clinician. So if I have any major concern, I will question myself. Am I really competent to make those decisions? Or I'm just... What if I just made the wrong decision and change my student’s life? And what if my students will hate me forever? I don't want to be hated by anyone. So those are some barriers for me to gatekeep.

Clyde described how he felt clinician and gatekeeper development in the supervision role were parallel processes:

The more supervision you do, the more you're comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty about where a conversation can go and the newer you are at it, the more you want to keep it in safe boxes that are comfortable and don't leave you saying like, ‘Oh, I need to go get some help with this, or I'm not sure what to do with this.’ All of this feels so paralleled with clinical work. It really does. But as counselors develop, hopefully they get more comfortable with the flexibility and the, I don't know, adaptability that you're going to know how to handle things in session. And I see that with supervisors and instructors as well.

Firefox extended this idea to say she felt that experience acting as a clinician may provide a developmental advantage in terms of comfort and ability to learn from gatekeeping experiences:
Well, they have no field experience, whether that is needed or not to be a good supervisor, I don't necessarily think there's a bearing for that. But it's a difference between having somebody who's learning how to be a clinician while also being a supervisor versus somebody who's been a clinician for some time, and then goes back to be a supervisor. A very huge difference in how we're looking at things, so yeah, I'd say that.

As she noted, the difference in development may not necessarily be the clinical experience itself, but that they are undergoing both of the parallel processes that Clyde spoke to concurrently instead of sequentially, like they might for those with more clinical experience.

Doctoral students will have different experiences with gatekeeping and other elements important to their development as future counselor educators and supervisors; their experiences as gatekeepers or lack thereof will also vary depending on their program. Laura acknowledged that though standards of evaluation are the same, programs and individual experiences with the gatekeeper role are probably not:

I mean, I know that CACREP has standards of the classes that we take in supervision and teaching, but I can just imagine how different those experiences are based on the work of information given in the requirements. And so just... like wondering how different other people's experiences are with it.

Each participant had different experiences with gatekeeping, but all of them identified, that despite some negative experiences or uncertainties, a lack of experience as a gatekeeper was a barrier to learning to gatekeep.

The lack of opportunity to gatekeep or the lack of access and support to act as a gatekeeper in a gatekeeping scenario were the two most common ways lack of experience with
gatekeeping was mentioned. Mercedes reflected on how she did not have certain gatekeeping experiences, such as having a conversation with a student about failing a course: “I've never had to be in the conversation in which I am working with the instructor of record to tell a master's student that they're going to have to repeat a course. I'm aware that that's lacking in my experience.” Daisy also acknowledged her lack of experience with more serious of formal gatekeeping conversations:

You just have a real experience with gatekeeping because when my cohort and I are taught practicum class, there was no major issues with our supervisees. So we missed the chance to, for example, to try to create a remediation plan for our supervisee, for students or supervisees or have a meeting to have a really serious conversation to address issues related to gatekeeping. So I said I hope that they could have had a role-play so we can know what that looks like.

Clyde reflected on the interview and realized he wished he had had more gatekeeping experience:

I actually feel like I've had not nearly as many experiences with this as I'd like to and haven't talked much about in the last year because I'm not taking classes anymore. I'm only doing dissertation stuff in my graduate assistantship but clearly it is something that I had plenty to say about.

He also noted that he wished he had had the opportunity to be more included in the gatekeeping process that faculty see.

What's missing? I think my faculty has done the best they can to involve us in those conversations. And like I said, pull back the curtain and talk about prior instances that they've been through it. I really think that most people probably don't get enough
experience with actually being involved in the process and being part of those conversations where the students sit down with faculty members and a doc student or something like that.

Lack of opportunities for doctoral students to gatekeep are difficult if not impossible to account for.

Doctoral programs are structured such that students cannot be guaranteed the experience of acting as a gatekeeper and not all students may have equal opportunities or spaces to have the chance to be a gatekeeper. Clyde described this reality:

So the barrier is you know, I guess our doc program is this only a finite amount of time with a finite amount of internships and in my case assistantship experiences that give you those opportunities and you have to kind of be in the right place at the right time to be more involved in that process.

Jessie felt fortunate compared to peers to have had those experiences as a future counselor educator and supervisor:

I think in some ways, I'm really lucky to have gotten to see what that actually looks like. To feel a little more prepared for whatever my next step is actually going to look like, versus some of my peers who didn't really get to experience that. Then having to be in a full faculty position and have that be your first experience on that.

Layla was also mindful that her cohort did not have the same experience with gatekeeping despite all taking part in the same opportunity and was concerned about their gatekeeper development as a result:

So on one end, I felt lucky that I've had problem supervisees because it gave me more of an understanding. But I imagined my people who had, like my cohort members that had
great practicum students that were ace, top of the class all the time, no concerns, they probably have even less understanding or experience about gatekeeping the logistics and thinking through some of the nitty gritty aspects of it because they didn't experience it and it was more of like, ‘Oh, I'm glad that I don't have your person,’ instead of learning from my experience kind of thing.

Clyde went on to ponder if it was even possible to ethically provide such opportunities.

I don't know how to facilitate that. It's not like you can set a threshold of saying, ‘We're going to gatekeep somebody every year so that all the doc students get a chance to practice it.’ That's obviously horrifying and nobody would do that. I was lucky to have some involvement in one instance that was a gatekeeping experience… Barriers. I mean, just the repetition. Just having enough experience, enough students that have the right kind of struggles where you can say, ‘Is this a gatekeeping situation?’ I've encountered two, three, four in three years maybe and only one of those people was asked to not continue in the program that I had some level of involvement with at all. The barrier is that we can't make opportunities for that and we don't want to make opportunities for that. We don't want to create gatekeeping scenarios. We want every student to live up to a high standard out of professionalism and skill.

Ultimately, there is little programs can do to ensure that each doctoral student has the opportunity to act as a gatekeeper, but programs do have the chance to provide support when students do encounter gatekeeping issues.

The other area that doctoral students felt they lacked experience was when they felt they were not supported, as discussed in Institutional Power Dynamics and Hierarchies, or there were
practical or logistic barriers to their further involvement in the process. Firefox described something common for twelve of fifteen participants:

I don't know because I don't know what the process is there. Luckily, in my case with my gatekeeping I haven't gone that far. I don't know if the doc students at my program were even part of that. If it gets to the point for formal remediation, and because the rule is, is that all of the faculty members have to agree that remediation is needed and then it occurs with the department here. We don't even get that close. We, at the most, we sound the alarm and we start the smaller individual conversations, and then if the behavior or whatever the issue is, is pervasive, then it comes out of our hands and it goes to faculty and really not included after that.

She did not have experience with or knowledge of the remediation and retention process beyond her involvement with Gatekeeping in the Classroom or Gatekeeping in the Clinic. Gary identified similar issues of practicality that he associated with the lack of experience with remediation or programmatic aspects of gatekeeping:

And I think again, just this general, what's the practicality? How do we take ... because sometimes conflicting policies at the graduate level, or graduate school level, university level ... legalities associated with FERPA and things like that. How do we create a plan to help students meet basic standards in a way that's ethical, in a way that's affirming, rather than punitive? And that's not something that I've been exposed to... And I think that that's definitely a gap in extracurricular training for doc students and even faculty.

Gary further expanded on this resulting deficit in experience with his frustration about the differences in involvement:
I don't necessarily believe that is what I think my role should be. I think that I should be more a part of those conversations. I think not just necessarily from the ... like my own personal professional development, but also from the perspective of ... technically, doc students are an invaluable resource when it comes to gatekeeping, because of the greater flexibility we have toward our own students through supervision, and also through teaching internship, as well.

Gary described an experiential difference between the doctoral gatekeeping role and the faculty gatekeeping role that he disagreed with because doctoral students eventually go on to become faculty and supervisors. He also noted the underutilization of doctoral students and how gatekeeper development is also strongly influenced by faculty role models and mentors.

**Sub-theme 5c: Mentorship, Role Models, and Support**

This sub-theme includes learning or lack of learning from faculty mentorship, role models within the field, and feeling supported by these people. Alternatively, it also includes learning from faculty or models who doctoral students would not want to emulate or are the antithesis of gatekeeping. Ella exemplified this sub-theme and how it impacted her learning:

It gave me a better idea of what the faculty is looking for, like what they find concerning, and then seeing some pretty good examples of things being concerning. And I think it was helpful to see like there are things that they identified that I would also identify, made me feel a little bit more confident in my own ability to like be able to like hone in on those people.

This sub-theme also covers the idea of questioning who is gatekeeping the gatekeepers. It directly addresses research questions two and three, including both sub-questions for each, and it also covers question one. In Ways of Learning, this sub-theme was mentioned about as much as
Experience Acting as a Gatekeeper, with all fifteen participants discussing this sub-theme.

Support is a key piece of gatekeeper development, especially the support and guidance of faculty. Chelsea described how mentorship boosted her confidence in her gatekeeping abilities:

For me, I think the biggest factor that's helped me feel comfortable in tackling these roles is the mentorship that I've gotten. Having good supervisors, having good relationships with my faculty members that can really make or break, I think somebody's ability to be a gatekeeper or the ability to even conceptualize themselves as a gatekeeper. So for me, I would say that, that role modeling is critical.

Laura also felt that consulting with her professor was important in giving her the confidence to move forward with a gatekeeping decision, knowing she had support:

I would show my supervision videos to my professor of the supervision course, and they agreed that the student was not ready and then the professor agreed that the student was not ready. And so all of the support that I got from multiple sources really helped me feel grounded in my decision to gatekeep this person.

Helena described how faculty support included discussion of how to proceed with a gatekeeping issue and how it was important that she felt respected and empowered to act as a gatekeeper:

I thought it was a very good experience because the faculty, my advisor was really able to guide us as to how things were going to be conducted, talking about how to present this to the student, went over different types of questions that they might ask, that they might anticipate. And so in that regard, I felt like it was really helpful because the faculty I guess respected the supervisor’s, authority as a supervisor and backed her up in it.

Doctoral students found the respect, empathy, and authority faculty gave to them to be important in building their confidence in their gatekeeping skills.
Jessie described how she felt that she wished there was more formal supervision and mentorship throughout the program, as faculty feedback was still important in building her confidence as a gatekeeper:

I know it's a little bit different, because once we become advanced students and we're no longer in the supervision course, once we've passed that, we are I guess considered successful supervisors and don't need weekly supervision anymore. I also think that it's not true. Just like when you get your LPC, it doesn't necessarily mean you're good, you never need consultation or support ever again. I think that's sort of how it was with the other supervisor, was like, ‘Well, you're advanced, so I trust you.’ Then it's like, ‘Great. I'm glad you trust me, but also I'm needing additional support and guidance for this and you're not providing it.’ Which just ended with me going to other people for support, like the person's adviser instead. Which is what ended up happening.

She highlights the importance of continuous consultation, as with clinicians who should ethically continue to consult with colleagues and seek continuing education, gatekeepers may also require continuous consultation and education. Chelsea also noted that she was relieved at the opportunity to formally seek feedback on her gatekeeping role of supervisor:

And so, when we were talking about the gatekeeping piece, I could show my supervisory tapes and get feedback of like, ‘Okay, how did I bring up that conversation with this student? What could I have done differently?’ So that to me, he was super helpful. Because it's one thing to come in and have a conversation, I'm sure you've experienced this, and explain what happened, like with a client or with a student, but to actually get a tape and to get real time feedback is I think really helpful.

Carmen also noted that the ability to seek feedback before escalating a gatekeeping issue was a
part of how she did her Assessment of Professional Competence for master’s students and gauged her own development as a gatekeeper:

I always have either the primary instructor or my supervisor that I meet with weekly and I bring up any concerns then. So I kind of by doing that, I'm checking in with myself with them to say, am I overreacting? Am I on track? And they've had more experience in that and then I have to say yeah students do this all the time and they pull back around or yeah students do this and they're not going to make it or we need to address this. So I use that check and balance with the primary instructor and the supervisor to see where my concern is at. I don't want to sit with my concerns or report them if it's like not necessary. So I kind of do a check in first before needing to escalate anything.

Gatekeepers may require continued opportunities to meet with faculty to consult and receive feedback on their supervision and teaching as they continue to develop as gatekeepers and future counselor educators and supervisors.

The participants also spoke to the qualities they admired or wanted to emulate in faculty role models and mentors. Riley described humility, openness, and honesty were what she looked for in a mentor:

I think humility, openness, direct communication, those are initially what come to mind. I think that communication piece is a big one, especially from what I've learned from my supervision professor, whether that's with the supervisee in session or with my own supervisor and things like that, I think that open communication's a big part of it. And then being able to have humility to recognize, ‘Hey, this is my first time doing this,’ or, ‘I might be wrong about this,’ or, ‘I don't know the answer, I'll get back to you later,’ kind of thing. So those are the primary qualities.
Carmen also described similar openness, noting they actively looked for mentors who would be responsive to their needs and available to give respectful, honest feedback:

I think responsiveness to my needs because I don't want to be floundering and trying to make decisions without some sort of input. So I've chosen people that I know will meet with me and will give me feedback versus people that might blow off our meetings or might be like you're doing fine. Kind of blow me off or not giving me feedback or not take certain things seriously. I think that's unfortunate if you have that experience.

Openness, honesty, and humility were important, especially in giving and receiving feedback between the doctoral gatekeeper and faculty mentor.

Empathy and respectfulness were also core characteristics doctoral students identified as those they wanted to emulate and were drawn to in a mentor. Jessie described how one role model was open and honest about her feelings, and she validated Jessie’s frustrations by empathizing with them:

I think it was probably the best case scenario, when it comes to kind of seeing that as a role model and seeing how she was handling everything too. That she was really transparent with me too, saying like, ‘Yeah, this is really frustrating. I have to meet with this person outside of my hours too. This is more than I bargained for.’ Being able to kind of normalize that with me was super helpful.

Layla described how one mentor individualized her feedback using an empathetic and respectful approach and delivered it in a supportive, positive way:

And so when we had our supervision class, that professor, the fit for supervision was really well. She did the discrimination model, I think, but she did it in a very reflective way. Listen to what your needs were and responded that way instead of trying to go in
her own agenda or own direction. It inspired me to be like, ‘Okay, I know what kind of supervisor, gatekeeper I want to be because of what I'm seeing,’ whereas I think if I had only had negative experiences, a lot of the drive to go to counselor education was the negative experiences, right? Like, ‘Oh, this person, how are they a supervisor? How are they a gatekeeper? I could do better.’ So having a positive experience was really impactful to be like, ‘Okay, there's something to look forward to.’

Many doctoral students described these relational and developmental approaches to feedback as most helpful, particularly among supervision role models.

Doctoral students also described teaching role models and qualities they admired in mentors while Gatekeeping in the Classroom. Some of these traits were similar, but the context and application were different. Layla described how her role model used her empathy and relational approach in teaching to engage the class and make the material more interesting:

Even though the class was very difficult because we were learning the theory for the first time while doing it, she just had a way about engaging the class and I ended up co-teaching with her the next semester with master's and the way that she just engages the class, it's like a conversation instead of a lecture. I never was yawning in class. I was always really engaged and I was always very interested in what her opinion or viewpoint was. She never presented herself as an expert. She would be like, ‘Oh, I'm not sure. Well, if I were to think about it,’ and it was almost like she was actively, presently thinking about what you asked at that moment and giving her opinion or her personal experience and that added more weight than a scripted kind of lecture or let's stick to the scripts type of format.
Layla noted the difference in teaching philosophy of being relational and conversational as opposed to being an expert and exclusively didactic. Clyde described similar use of empathy to increase engagement and mindfulness in the classroom by his mentor:

Well, the one person I had said that I was co-teaching with, that's also my advisor, that's also my dissertation chair, I have admired her throughout the program. This is a person that I think somehow seems to be super busy all the time, but also very calm about all of it and have infinite capacity for compassion, empathy, and take an extra five minutes with each person, which I'm not there yet. I don't know how somebody does that, but that plays out in the classroom as well. That when I'm in the room teaching, I'm nowhere else. There's no distraction. There's no whatever else is going on in life and whatever happened with that article or whatever happened in my personal life is not flooding in. But it's all in and totally present.

These relational qualities in teaching help these role models be student-centered, which their doctoral students wanted to emulate.

These relational qualities may overlap with Multiple Professional Roles and Boundaries. Chelsea admired how her mentor had a similar teaching philosophy and was relational, but that she also kept clear professional boundaries:

Honestly, I think of one person in particular who, well, first of all, our personalities match pretty close. And I think the way that we view our role as teaching's pretty similar. Maybe that's why I'm drawn to her style of gatekeeping. I really appreciate that obviously she's student-centered, like generally cares about the students in her class, not necessarily an appointment for like, we're pushing boundaries of like, ‘Oh, tell me about what you did this weekend.’
Mercedes described this same balanced relational approach where her role models provide empath, but remain composed and professional in their role as counselor educators:

I think these faculty who I more want to emulate, they still have a very strong sense of what their professional identity is and what the boundaries are. But they have a personal way of approaching it that makes you feel ... it's a very relational way of approaching the gatekeeping process, which I think makes me feel safer. And I think I tend to get turned off by faculty who I see particularly at the doctoral level, using students to have their own needs met. As opposed to again, having those professional boundaries and that professional identity in a very relational way.

Seeing how their role models balance these relational qualities in the classroom and clinic provides an example for developing gatekeepers to find this balance in feedback in their own work as they are Navigating the Grey Space of Gatekeeper Development.

Another important quality referenced frequently was assertiveness or directness, especially with expectations and feedback. This quality was also described as an important piece of modeling the balance of support and challenge within the meta-theme Navigating the Grey Space of Gatekeeper Development. Jeff noted that his mentor’s directness and clear expectations were used to empower students and provide fair evaluation:

My advisor here is probably one of the harder professors in the program, she has very high expectations. She sets very clear deadlines. She does a very good job of explaining. If this is not done, or if you do this, these are the consequences. So she makes it very clear that you're empowered to do what you're going to do, then you're also fully aware of the consequences of your actions, where it's no mystery there.

Helena described how her role model inspired her to find balance with providing feedback, being
direct and empathetic:

I think I've seen other faculty maybe be more passive, so letting things slide where maybe they needed an extra conversation. And so I think that she's fair, so she's not going to jump to the extreme, but when things do need to be addressed, she is going to address them. So she doesn't shy away from those instances where there could be confrontation with the supervisee. I think on the flip side of that is I don't want to be aggressive and I don't want to be passive and gatekeeping, I want to be in the middle where I am keeping their wellbeing, students and their clients in mind.

This aspect of role models and learning to gatekeep overlaps with Navigating the Grey Space of Gatekeeper Development and distinguishes a developmental struggle in finding a balanced approach to assessment and providing feedback for trainees.

Programs typically provide multiple opportunities to work with different faculty in each of the gatekeeping contexts. Gary described how having several role models allowed him to see different ways to approach gatekeeping:

So we had all different models going on around us. ‘For this particular issue, here's one way that you could approach it. And here's all the steps in-between, so you know what you can do with this in the future.’ So I found that that was really helpful.

However, multiple role models may also provide the examples students do not want to emulate, as Jeff stated: “I've had some professors where we're very, very close with our viewpoint in gatekeeping. I've have had others where I'm like, ‘Really? We're passing this person? We're really going to do that? Okay, all right, it's not really my idea.’” Just as there are positive qualities doctoral students admire about faculty, there are also qualities they do not admire.

Doctoral students identified that there were faculty who demonstrated qualities they did
not admire in a gatekeeper. Daisy summarized: “There are different things because I think you can be a good teacher but you may not be a good gatekeeper for a class.” Layla described the frustration with role models who are inauthentic and model the opposite of ethical and effective gatekeeping:

So I think that is probably the most important part. The professors and supervisors that I've had that I've just been really like, ‘Oh, I don't ever want to be like that,’ I just get the sense that they're very stuck in their ways and they almost like want you to think that they know it all instead of just being authentic, which is odd because I feel like as a professor, you're supposed to go in without those assumptions and just be comfortable in the vulnerability and their role is not.

As with the positive qualities, doctoral students also identified negative qualities.

Some of these negative qualities may be an absence of their mirrored counterparts, but others are separate. Firefox described a lack of assertiveness or perhaps too much empathy without appropriate boundaries:

Too soft, yeah, too soft for me. But they're also very busy. If I get, well, it's like, well, let's look at it this way, and hope that it doesn't go the way before we invest all this time because I don't have the time to invest in the time in that student.

Firefox went on to describe that some faculty simply made gatekeeping more of a priority and were proactive:

The ones that I admire are just the ones who have it built into their schedule. It's easier for them to have that follow up with the student and invest a little bit more time to see where their issue is versus the other professors that I've necessarily thought, ‘Oh, they're doing it to solve. They're packed with four classes.’ And just there's not enough room to
do it, and which is why I have to go at it from a softer way... I think it falls down to who has the availability to be able to be more action oriented than more reactionary.

Layla noted a similar issue with lack of prioritizing gatekeeping, but also the opposite level of attention, with some faculty being too strict or unrealistic about developmental expectations:

I think it being a footnote of counselor educators a problem. I think that's where you get counselor educators or professors that you feel like are overly strict. They should take it seriously, but they take it so seriously that the guidelines for like what they expect of a practicum student versus an internship student is at the full LPC level. It's like no, this is a process. And then you've got people on the other end that don't really think about it. So they're like, ‘Well did they turn in the paperwork? Did they pass class?’ And so that's because there isn't clear guidelines for this is where a practicum student should be at and if they're not meeting all of them, this is a conversation that needs to be had.

The ability to clearly and honestly provide expectations for assessment and deliver constructive feedback were lacking in some faculty students observed.

The ability to be authentic and honest was also missing from conversations about gatekeeping with these faculty. Layla described how this deficit was also present with gatekeeping at the doctoral level, where expectations are higher:

So I think for gatekeeping, especially for anywhere but in the doctoral level, if we have gotten to this point, you need to give very clear and active direction about this is what makes you appropriate for it and this one makes you not appropriate and this is how you would need to get there whether you want to do that work or not.

Jeff described the impact of this lack of authenticity and honesty, leading to anxiety in trainees:
The faculty who you're always left up in the air, and there's someone that goes to what really matters, what doesn't matter. Those are professors that I think cause a lot more anxiety, because you're always left wondering, what exactly are your expectations because I could do the same song and dance twice and get two very different levels of feedback.

Insufficient or unclear feedback can be confusing for students across their development.

Mercedes also described a lack of cultural awareness from some faculty as gatekeepers:

That I wish that I felt more faculty and more ... I think doc students are from what I've seen, are more on the edge of like cultural awareness and diversity and social justice. But I think that I wish that more faculty felt, that I felt that they are appropriately engaged in that level of awareness too in terms of gatekeeping.

This particular skill also overlaps with Cultural Dynamics; cultural awareness and humility need to be modeled for both master’s and doctoral students in their respective clinical and gatekeeper development.

Inappropriate or indistinct professional boundaries and a lack of confidence in any area of gatekeeping were the mirror quality of professionalism and confidence. Mercedes described how, when a faculty is not confident in their abilities, it can be difficult to model sound gatekeeping:

I think that it's not the mixed messages from the faculty overall. I think it's working with specific instructors who kind of may not be quite sure themselves or may have their personal issues where they want to be liked or whatever it is that kind of make that process really difficult to navigate on top of just learning the general skills and what you need to do in certain situations.
Ella described what happened when faculty become too comfortable and begin to model poor gatekeeping habits and boundaries surrounding their personal biases about trainees:

It felt uncomfortable because I also wasn't... It was far from actually what the subject I was talking about, that he wanted to like throw in this like little gossipy thing with me. And again, I just didn't feel... There's times where I'd feel like, ‘Oh, you shouldn't like really be modeling this for us. Like you should be showing us to the best of your ability that you're able to be pretty even-keeled and empathize with students and like be strengths-based and not be talking shit about students with us.

Faculty modeling strong professional boundaries and confidence in their professional behavior made a significant difference in whether doctoral gatekeepers were able to build their confidence and feel comfortable relying on those faculty role models.

A lack of support or trust communicated by faculty also created a barrier to learning to gatekeep via modeling. Gary described how he felt helpless and frustrated by faculty’s lack of support for a gatekeeping issue he brought forward:

I feel like there's this sense of helplessness in my role. There's only so much that I can do. And even if I see students who are having potential to cause harm, there's no documented evidence of that. And that's not really going to go anywhere. So, some helplessness, some passivity. And then, just the feeling of being denied by faculty.

Layla described the learning barrier that arises with a lack of trust and a misuse of Institutional Power Dynamics and Hierarchies for developing gatekeepers:

It's a loss of trust, right? You don't feel like you can speak up in class or have a conversation or correct them because like they consider themselves to be almighty. That ivory tower academic, particularly in counselor education just needs to somehow
completely disappear. The whole point of the counselor educator is being grounded in counseling and being able to share that. So if you're stuck in this academia, I'm a god kind of thing, then you're certainly not doing a good job of gatekeeping or sharing what you know. That's my mentality from my experiences with them.

Helena also described the frustration of a lack of trust and support in her efforts to gatekeep:

[T]hat was a very tough semester as a doctoral student who's still trying to learn and really seeing this need for her to have extra support because she was... Those sessions with her clients at one point, I had to interrupt because it was just... it was really bad and I was concerned for the client. The way that she was talking to her... I had to basically let it go, because I was not being supported by the faculty. And so it was rough.

These instances where doctoral students identify a gatekeeping issue, but faculty respond with dismissal or mistrust create missed opportunities for role modeling, even though the doctoral student may still learn from a poor example.

When doctoral students identified consistently poor gatekeeper role models, they also began to question the efficacy of the faculty, often asking ‘Who is gatekeeping the gatekeepers?’ Twelve of the fifteen participants directly discussed their experiences with this question. Jeff elaborated on what it felt like to question if faculty contribute to gate slippage and why:

I think that was something that I think was missing when it came to gatekeeping was the lack of formal explanation, that that is a rule that we do have, and what is expected for us in that role in its own way somewhat ironically, they are gatekeeping the gatekeepers. Who are the people that gatekeep sufficiently, and who are the people that will let anyone move on because they don't want to engage with conflict, they don't make people feel bad, whatever the reasoning is as to why they don't gatekeep.
Jessie described how concern for faculty being insufficient gatekeepers increased her own anxiety: “I think as a doc student is really confusing to know kind of what the expectations are. Why isn't the department on the same page when it comes to things like this? Things like that.” Working with questionable gatekeepers had an emotional toll on several participants.

Gary also described how he felt invalidated and frustrated as a developing gatekeeper seeing faculty avoid gatekeeping:

Honestly, it feels like just winging it every week, coming in and just checking in. And then, they don't want to have any major issues that we could talk about. It doesn't feel proactive. It doesn't feel validating. It just feels like it's more, more just in general, programmatic, ‘Let's just get through.’

Jessie further expounded on the confusion and doubt that these mixed messages between positive gatekeeping role models and underwhelming gatekeeper faculty created:

In that circumstance, there was certainly a lot more support, but I think again, kind of fed into my confusion. I was like, ‘Well, why was it different with this instructor? Why isn't the department kind of handling all these cases similarly when it comes to that? Or who's making the ultimate decision when it comes to passing people along or what that looks like.’

In addition to the emotional impact on doctoral students, there are also practical and developmental impacts for both students and the profession.

Hearing about the importance of gatekeeping but seeing lackluster gatekeeping from faculty could pose a developmental barrier to learning to gatekeep. Jessie pointed out that, though faculty stressed the theoretical importance of gatekeeping, they did not always exemplify it through action, leading to gate slippage:
Our faculties certainly emphasize the importance of gatekeeping, but the actual execution of it is less clear. Certainly less kind of guided from faculty and from my experience, has not been consistent among the various faculty in my program. Unfortunately, I have been involved with several students who I recommended not passing their practicum to be able to move on to internship, or pre-prac into practicum and things like that. It definitely depended on the faculty for how that situation was handled.

Layla also described the cognitive dissonance created by seeing two different groups of faculty:

I think I've observed some faculty not take it as seriously and my bias is that the older they are and the closer to retirement they are, they don't recognize how important it is anymore or they don't prioritize it. So they got to get into this automatic routine about a class. They're not thinking about if they're a gatekeeper, if they're ready and that's what I feel like happened first time. And then the second, it was a younger, like newer faculty, they're not tenured. They had three people in that class of remediation plan and I don't even remember the last time I was in a practicum class but had a remediation plan so it was very active.

This dissonance also overlaps and interacts with Institutional Power Dynamics and Hierarchies, which can be frustrating and confusing for students who are instilled with the ethical responsibility to gatekeep but see departmental politics interfere with that goal.

There is an ethical impact in that insufficient gatekeeping can lead to gate slippage. Layla expounded on how a discrepancy in gatekeeping by faculty, even a few faculty, can eventually lead to gate slippage:

I would say I have seen some people uphold it really well, so they practice what they preach. And then I would say that the ones who don't really talk about gatekeeping are
the ones that aren't really doing gatekeeping. I wouldn't call them hypocrites. I would say that if they're mindful of it, probably doing it and if it's not in the forefront of their mind because they have a lot of other things to do and they're not really sharing it with the doctoral students, then it's probably on the forefront of their mind and they're also not really doing it for students either.

A faculty which does not gatekeep its gatekeepers directly contributes to producing trainees who harm clients and the profession, as noted by Firefox:

The faculty members didn't feel like that was a need, there was a need for remediation or even a need for a talk. Those students went on to do really bad things within a counseling field, and so I felt like there was just a very low bar set. It wasn't followed through on, so it was this idea that wrong gatekeepers, but then nobody's really following through on it because there's so much time invested in the actual action of gatekeeping in the student. That most faculty members are just too busy to do it, and so the bar is really low.

Gary similarly described how client harm could result from the failure of faculty to monitor their gatekeeping efficacy and how it lowers the overall bar for competence assessment in the program:

Realistically, it feels to me like, as long as no one is getting hurt, they're fine, and just keep going. So, just setting the bar so low, like bare minimum of, ‘Let's make sure nobody's getting hurt. Anything beyond that dispositionally, you can bring it up to us, feel free to send us your concerns, but don't expect it will go anywhere,’ is essentially how it feels. And it feels very much more like, to some extent ... especially with this COVID-19 stuff going on, it feels very much more like babysitting, rather than
supervising or gatekeeping. It's very much more like, ‘Let's contain the situation. Let's make sure that our supervisees aren't panicked. And let's just move on and get through.’

Lowering standards for assessment and gatekeeping can also occur due to programmatic failure to align with gatekeeping goals.

As described in Institutional Power Dynamics and Hierarchies, ethical codes and standards may be contrary to administrative institutional demands. Retention, quotas, and profit are common motivations which can lead to a pressure for faculty to choose quantity over quality. Laura mentioned this ethical dilemma and the impact of allowing gate slippage:

What is articulated is to follow the ethical code, that our clients are first, that it's our responsibility to be graduating ethical, well-trained counselors. One conflict that I've seen is the political and number-based conflict of how many people need to pass the class? What does it mean if a certain class section is not passing or gatekeeping a certain number and another professor is known to never gatekeep. So, the role that, that can have on selecting courses, on the program's reputation, how bad is conflicts and is it an ethical dilemma that comes right against the ethical code, I think.

Clyde also identified how gatekeeping begins at admissions and that conflicts can also occur in that early stage:

I actually am not sure that it's something that all doc programs are talking to people about. Like all doc students are having good deep conversations about it. And partially because, this is going to sound bad, I guess from my perspective and what I've seen, it doesn't seem like all programs take gatekeeping very seriously or have done any real gatekeeping at all beyond who they admit in their program or not although some programs seem to admit mostly everybody as well.
Clyde further illuminated how institutions prioritizing return on investment from number of students and faculty may be busy with the tenure and promotion process:

I also sense that some supervisors I've had when that topic comes up, want to shy away from it because there are faculty members that are busy teaching and supervising and doing research and we're at an ROI institutions where research always comes first and there's a little bit of getting into the personal dynamics of what gatekeeping is and how it affects individuals. There's almost always personality factors tied into it as well. I guess could be seen as a bit of a nuisance to have to deal with that when I've got to get these revisions for this article submitted by the end of the week or something like that.

Doctoral students, though distressed or disapproving of the issues that arise when gatekeepers are not gatekept themselves, offered unique perspective on how to prevent gate slippage and improve gatekeeper training.

Gary directly appealed to faculty with his advice being to involve doctoral students directly in the gatekeeping process, providing them with support and mentorship:

Honestly, I feel like my advice at this point would be more for faculty members, to please be transparent. Please incorporate doc students, even if it's not necessarily weighing their voice in your decisions. Give them a seat at the table so that they can see what that looks like, and you can model for them appropriate gatekeeping and remediation, and whether that be informal or formal.

Gary further advised that faculty clarify expectations and roles for the doctoral students they are working with and mentoring, as doctoral students are often the first to encounter and report gatekeeping issues:
I guess I've seen the role of doc students in my particular program as more of like initial whistleblower slash ... to some extent, someone who follows up and keeps track of concerns. But not necessarily someone that is having conversations with faculty about real ... trying to look for the right word ... an actual gatekeeping issue, like in actually having some semblance of power. Or being brought in on the conversations so that that can be modeled for me. Realistically, I see my role as being someone who's going to raise the flag first. Faculty are taking care of it. And then I'm being told to just monitor and then continue to provide updates.

Mercedes suggested that faculty be more mindful of the consequences and intentions of gatekeeping:

And that's a lot of where the politics comes in. So that has been a really difficult experience to feel the school, the program, and the faculty are safe and are doing the job that they're charged with doing all of the time. And I can respect that there's differences of opinion. I think that that's part of what makes academia and higher education, it's important to have that diversity of opinion. But I think also the ways that you go about things and that the issues that you bring up need to be thoughtful and meaningful. I think all the way around, the consequences need to be considered. Just like when you're considering the consequences for clients in terms of letting master students work with clients. I think all of the consequences need to be considered when we're working and gatekeeping at the doctoral level. And I think that my experience is that I question whether all of those consequences were considered, and that that upsets me.

Supportive role modeling and mentorship are important elements in gatekeeper development, but also have practical implications for gate slippage. Role modeling as a form of learning provides
the opportunity to observe and see examples directly from faculty acting as gatekeeper, but doctoral students may also learn from more indirect observations and examples as well.

**Sub-theme 5d: Observations and Examples**

This last sub-theme in Ways of Learning encompasses learning that does not come directly from conversation or in-person role modeling, but indirect observations or examples. This sub-theme includes watching or discussing peers’ gatekeeping (i.e. supervision of supervision), seeing peers being gatekept, or case examples of gatekeeping and remediation; the doctoral student is not directly involved as the gatekeeper but may learn from the examples of others. Alternatively, this sub-theme includes the lack of examples or observations, often due to feelings of stigma or nebulosity of gatekeeping, and witnessing gate slippage instead of gatekeeping. This sub-theme primarily addresses research question two and also connects to research questions one and three. Finally, this sub-theme, both positive and negative learning examples, was mentioned by all fifteen participants.

Doctoral students often mentioned interest in examples of gatekeeping to give them a sense of what it might look like. Laura expressed an interest in case studies: “I think it would have been super beneficial to go over some examples of when people have had to gatekeep before, what that experience was like, the feelings behind it. I don't think we learned anything like that.” Trent suggested faculty or programs share examples or cases that they have worked with: “I think having like a true, this is what fully happens, and not just from a professor perspective but from a full program perspective. That would be nice.” Jessie echoed the value of insight into actual gatekeeping cases that programs see as it would better prepare her to be a future counselor educator:

I think having more insight into how our department handled it could be really helpful.
Knowing that it might look different at whatever institute we're going to once we graduate, but to at least kind of all be on the same page of what to expect. Especially if it wasn't that professional issues course, when we're in our first semester before we start doing supervision, or advanced groups or anything like that. To kind of know what those expectations might be, would have been really helpful.

Actual examples provide the opportunity to discuss how faculty and programs view and address gatekeeping, providing a type of indirect role modeling.

Additionally, doctoral students felt case studies or realistic examples could provide greater clarity on aspects of the gatekeeping role that doctoral students may not often see.

Carmen spoke to the legal concerns that are a piece of the gatekeeping role in Avoiding Legal Action and Repercussions:

    I mean it's very broad and flexible and then there's the whole legalese that comes into play. And I think it would just be nice to have some more solid way of saying this is how we gatekeep. Because from my understanding, just before I got to my program, they had to put a set of technical standards in place and that has become a part of their gatekeeping.

Daisy shared how informative her faculty’s decision to discuss the program’s experience with legal action was: “And actually, I think our department went through a lawsuit about gatekeeping... Went through the process, including lawsuit and shared their experience in class was also really helpful.” The program-level considerations, including legal implications, help doctoral students understand better how their role as a future counselor educator will look.

Some of the participants also provided suggestions for how programs might incorporate examples. Ella wanted to see more examples of evaluation and remediation: “Like looking at
some professional development plans, talking about, how often are you checking in with students? How are you measuring these things?” Daisy thought discussion or debate of gatekeeping case studies might be useful:

I would like to have a case study and have a debate on how we... And probably assign students to different parts, to different sides and ask them to debate and to create an answer so they can see there's no clear answer and how we can come together and have a rationale about our action. So I think that would be really helpful.

Gary felt curated readings or other resources would be an effective supplement:

So that, I think, has been a major barrier. I think lack of transparency in general, formal education about making things more ... education about remediation, even if we just would have assigned readings on gatekeeping, and what that looks like, and where we are now in the literature, access to workshops. Those are all additional resources that I think would be really helpful.

Though formal cases or examples were desired, other more informal discussions of gatekeeping examples were reported as helpful too.

Consultation with peers, often through supervision of supervision, was also detailed as an important supplement to learning to gatekeep. Trent said that there was such a strong call to have greater access to examples and program-level gatekeeping that faculty began to incorporate them:

So that was a shift to where we said, ‘Hey we want that.’ And then faculty obviously heard that, and before they just thought, we're bound and we can't. But then they heard our voices and said okay, let's reach out to legal people and find out what can we share. And then they realized that there were a few more things that they were able to. So that
was really nice.

Helena shared that her program provided regular meetings to discuss cases amongst peers: “…we do still have a lot of staffings based on supervisees. So being able to hear from peers and how their cases are going or their supervisors are going, I think that has been the most helpful.” Ella described how getting to hear about the follow-up was still helpful, even if they were not involved in meetings:

And then generally we get to hear some of the, this is what happened with this person, this is our plan, what do you all think? We're not generally involved in the faculty meetings, but I know that our feedback is taken there and then usually we're informed about the follow-up. I think it's actually done quite well in our program.

The involvement in some level of programmatic case examples was helpful and sought after.

Consultation with peers was also considered helpful, especially as a method to reflect on developing gatekeeping skills. Layla talked about how consultation helped her reflect on the soundness of her judgment:

And so having like consultation and making sure that your own biases about they're just a frustrating student and stuff like that. Don't cloud your judgment. Or like you don't like their personality, they don't cloud your judgment of their actual clinical skill and how they're presenting to the client or for the client. So that's the biggest thing and being self-aware yourself. You can't ask a supervisee to be self-aware if the supervisor isn't.

Daisy also said that she often relied on peers to consult, especially when she lacks confidence in her developing abilities:

I'm just imagine if I get a case right now I would definitely consult with my colleagues.

Because I don't think I'm the expert of counselor education. And I think we, each of us
also can contribute our perspective to the situation. So I will counsel with my colleagues to get their information and to see if we can come together a plan.

Many doctoral students relied on peers for support and consultation.

The most commonly shared example of peer consultation was in group supervision environments, where doctoral students have the opportunity to learn vicariously through one another’s examples and experiences. Helena elaborated on the impact of her internship class:

I do use a lot of consultation with my cohort members who are in my internship class. So during class and I was just talking about it and asking for their feedback, ‘This is what I'm seeing. What do you do to help students who are struggling with this?’

Chelsea also felt that internship group supervision was a helpful place to discuss such examples and cases:

But probably the most helpful class was in internship because myself and my cohort classmates were bringing real life examples to problem solve and to have these candid conversations versus learning about it's one thing. But hearing about true stories and seeing your colleagues kind of struggle a little bit too was helpful.

Carmen also said they appreciated the chance to discuss their own cases, hear their peers’ issues, and have a group who can empathize with their experience: “the group supervision that we have has been hugely beneficial. Whether it's another student, what they're dealing with as a doctoral student or me and being able to hear other stories and get feedback on what I have going on.”

Finally, Clyde described both the formal and informal learning provided by group supervision, highlighting that consulting with peers was a significant source of vicarious learning for gatekeeping:

Our internship class, which functions as much like a group supervision as it does to class.
I mean, there's not a ton of assignments, but we're sharing our videos of supervision work, co-teaching work, clinical work, research, all of that. That becomes a formal but also at times the informal learning process where we just learn vicariously through each other about these things. Most of the gatekeeping conversations that I had came out to that class.

Peers also provide another type of vicarious learning about gatekeeping.

About two-thirds of the participants disclosed an experience where they witnessed a peer being gatekept, at either the master’s or doctoral level. Mercedes described how she had reservations from her experiences seeing gatekeeping at the doctoral level:

I think at the doctoral level, I think that there's a lot more politics and I think that there's a lot more ideas about what makes a good doctoral graduate. And I have questioned some of the decisions and some of the motivations regarding gatekeeping that I've witnessed at the doctoral level.

Chelsea shared that, even though she had not experienced being gatekept personally, she was cognizant of other doctoral students that had:

I've heard through the grapevine that there have been people in not necessarily my cohort, but the cohort above me who have had to be kicked out of the program or didn't meet certain standards. And just failed for lack of a better word, failed out with the program. So I know it's present.

Jeff was frustrated by the lack of support he perceived from faculty when a friend of his was gatekept at the doctoral level:

As far as that, I don't know. One of my friends actually was removed from the program. So I watched him as that happened, and there are some faculty that were not engaged as
well as they should have been to see like, ‘Hey, this person who's struggling and need more help and need more guidance, and they need more engagement.’

Watching doctoral peers being gatekept often made participants more aware of gatekeeping processes than they were previously.

Some participants also shared their experiences seeing their peers gatekept while still in their master’s program. Clyde provided an example of the first time he observed gatekeeping, as a master’s student:

The best example I have of bad is actually when I was a master student, there was a cohort made, a fellow student who was clearly voicing some kind of gender bias type things. And then that snowballed into some more cultural stereotyping stuff. And when that person did not continue in the program with the rest of us in our cohort model program, I felt like that was the right decision for our program. Although as a master student, I didn't even know the word gatekeeping. I didn't know what that meant. I didn't know what it meant that this person didn't continue in the program… So that's the only one where I can say that I was seeing something where I was like, ‘This person needs to take a step back.’ And then it happened.

Daisy expounded on her experience seeing a fellow master’s student being gatekept and how she felt it may have boiled down to a lack of receptivity and professionalism:

So if I will make a call from my eyes to tell what's going on say like her professional attitude, maybe a problem like there's only so much you can do if you can make compromise. And if you're being stubborn, I think if we want to become confident we need to be flexible in some ways to meet our clients’ needs, to meet our site needs and to be open and to solve conflicts with your colleagues. And I don't think she has the ability.
Trent best summarized the impact of witnessing a peer being gatekept at the master’s level and how that informs gatekeeper development later on:

I think many of us have gone, and in particularly like doc students and faculty, because I think that we're a strong bunch. Many of us have gone through master's programs where we've kind of seen people that we've worried about. So I think, given that we all have kind of that experience I think that that's always been like a yeah, this is important because there's really an obligation to ourselves, to the program, ultimately to clients, and to the students themselves. I mean and that's something, too, that sometimes there was someone is taken out of the program, it can feel really contentious. But sometimes even the best thing for them.

Just as witnessing appropriate gatekeeping can be informative, doctoral students also spoke to the experience of witnessing gate slippage.

Much as observing appropriate gatekeeping of peers was typically a positive learning experience for doctoral students and raised their consciousness of gatekeeping, witnessing gate slippage tended to provoke more negative responses in learning. Carmen said that they were initially inspired to pursue their degrees because they were impacted by gate slippage:

I think I started this whole process as a consumer, so I've experienced counselors who weren't that great and I do a lot of volunteer work and have done before getting my master's or PhD and saw where some gatekeeping needed to happen that maybe didn't happen. And that has really been what's motivated me and driven me to do this and influenced me to do this. I've had very positive experience, very supportive experiences with my faculty, so I think that has more reinforced my thoughts on gatekeeping. But I think it really started with experience in people that I felt like needed gatekeeping and
didn't get it when they needed it.

Helena described an experience as a master’s student were she witnessed gate slippage with a peer and how it made her question the incongruence and efficacy of counselor training programs as a system:

So as a master student, I don't know all the facts because I was just not the one talking.

There was a student who did have a relationship with their client and somehow now that student is in a doc program. I don't know. That just confuses me because that person graduated, is getting their license, and now he's trying to become a counselor educator. And so that is confusing to me why these so many gaps exists. And maybe it does come down too, it's still an educational system, and there's still that, but it's very incongruent. If we're saying that these are the characteristics that a counselor needs to have and these are the things that are against our code of ethics and we're not seeing people fall or people stand by those guidelines.

Firefox also described a peer from her master’s program who was initially not gatekept and then went on to be gatekept at the doctoral level, validating her sense of gatekeeping evaluation:

But, anyways, that student finished her internship, went on to a doc program and they completely stopped her from getting and transitioning into a second year. Because they realized that she was just not a good counselor, and then was not a good teacher counselor educator. I didn't feel supported in going against her as a student because I felt like I didn't have enough knowledge about counseling, but I was pretty damn sure that there was more needed for that student.

Gate slippage both as a consumer and as a master’s student provoked disapproval, which then shaped the doctoral student later as a gatekeeper.
Participants also described the impacts of observing gate slippage as doctoral students. Helena talked about feeling justified after witnessing gate slippage with a supervisee who later was gatekept by a peer the following semester:

And what ended up happening is that next semester, one of my cohort members had her as a supervisee, we have class supervision together, so hearing the same things that I was seeing and at that point that student didn't have to get remediation plan. And so that was validating for me in a sense because I was like, ‘Okay, I wasn't making this up. There was issues there.’ But it was a terrible experience.

Though it was a negative experience, Helena felt more confident in her gatekeeping and assessment abilities. Jeff described how witnessing gate slippage increased his concern for client harm and repercussions further down the line, leaving him to feel frustrated with the system:

And that concerned me because my thought process is, okay, if you have someone that slips through the gate, and isn't fully prepared to be a therapist, and they're out in the world, and they're not really getting the respect they need, and then they start supervising people, how many other people do you think are going to slip through the gate probably shouldn't have? And that's my big concern is that, it becomes a ... The more people slip through the gate, the faster that kind of filter breaks down, because once you're on the other side of the gate, there aren't too many other gates out there. I think that that you do your supervision hours, and you become fully licensed, you're on your own. You're not really checking in with any people.

Seeing gate slippage, though it contributed to gatekeeper development much like negative role models did, was clearly met with disapproval.

Doctoral students also spoke of similar incidents of inappropriate gatekeeping and how
those were also frustrating, yet informative, for their developing view of the gatekeeping role.

Mercedes described how she felt that being excessively punitive with master’s students and gatekeeping people unfairly made her uncomfortable about her position as a doctoral student:

And in my opinion, pretty unfair. I think that's part of what I'm speaking to when I'm talking about gatekeeping falling upon, being dispersed between people is that when someone has made through nearly all of their coursework then are told that they can't continue anymore, that's a really difficult and very personally taxing issue. And it increases the sense as a doc student that I'm not safe either. So it's really difficult to navigate feeling protective over people, feeling safe around people, feeling justified.

Because there's other ways in which I don't think that what has happened is justified.

Layla shared an example of a time she felt someone was gatekept from her program due to personality differences and bias, and she too felt particularly vulnerable to this same possibility as a doctoral student:

Then another instance was a situation where like someone was kicked out of our program that I don't feel like should have been kicked out of the program and it was a lot of personality clashes and professors feeling like well, she's got a bad history with this person so all these other things must be true. That wasn't necessarily the case though. A situation happened… they considered that to be a violation and she's expelled from the program immediately kind of thing when it scared all of us. If [the same situation happens to me] are you going to kick me out in five seconds? Hurt the trust in that regard.

Daisy felt that seeing a peer being unfairly gatekept made her more aware of her responsibility as a counselor educator to provide adequate time and means to remediate trainees:

So for me, it's like a remediation plan. And they took her professional development
project… and in the same week, she was terminated from her program. The reason why I feel pretty bad is I think gatekeeping sometimes is the result of what's going on. The more I think as educators, if we have a choice, we always need to use that as the educational tool for example, creating a remediation plan and meeting with students regularly to talk about if we have any concern and how we can move forward together, not just put the burden on the students and say, ‘Okay, you have to make sure you how to figure it out.’ I think as professors we need to help students overcome those barriers. And but for my friends experience I think she just didn't give the support that she needs at that point. And she didn't get a chance to correct her problems.

Laura felt similarly, noting that she developed a heightened awareness to being clear about her expectations early on with trainees:

And then the last week of the year someone in our cohort was gatekept and really completely thrown off guard by being told that their skills weren't up to par and that they needed to complete this remediation plan. And they actually fought it because they felt that the supervisor didn't go through the appropriate steps of informing them, letting them know, or giving them an opportunity to improve upon any of the things that they were concerned about. And that really influenced my own supervision in that, I wanted to make sure I was clear as soon as possible if I had any concerns about things, and that I wanted to give my supervisees an opportunity to improve upon that, to even just gain awareness that, that's something that I'm concerned about.

Witnessing unfair gatekeeping or gate slippage both influenced doctoral students as gatekeepers, even if it created negative feelings.

Another barrier to learning and gatekeeper development is the nebulosity of the
gatekeeping process, as doctoral students may or may not have seen appropriate gatekeeping examples. Daisy described the uncertainty of gatekeeping outcomes: “gatekeeping I think is similar like we sometimes there's no clear answer. We can have a remediation plan, we can dismiss a student or we can keep the student and keep on moving forward.” Trent described this same nebulosity in his process of addressing gatekeeping issues with trainees: “So taking action is kind of nebulous, because I think there's always some action. But if you're speaking more to like formal or informal, then that might be a process that I engage in.” Clyde described that the idea of gatekeeping in general can feel unclear, despite scholarship or other content on it:

I kept bringing up in classes like our professional seminar and things like that because it's one of those things where it's like this feels nebulous, this feels like something that there's no clear lines. Even if you read what's been published in JCD about gatekeeping… it's like there's still doesn't seem to be any clear-cut lines on that, which is true of a lot of our stuff.

Helena felt that this nebulousness or complexity was best addressed through Observations and Examples gained through peers and faculty: “What advice would I give? What would I want them to know? I suppose that gatekeeping can become complex, but your peers, your faculty members are a great resource.”

Gatekeeping, often perceived as nebulous or unclear, has been stigmatized, perhaps as a result of a lack of understanding of the topic. Mercedes said: “I think sometimes that the people who make gatekeeping happen can be villainized. And I think that also kind of adds to the stress about what gatekeeping is in terms of part of my role in doing that.” This “villainizing” can also make it difficult or uncomfortable to talk about. Chelsea shared that, though she feels able to talk about it in her program, she is hesitant to bring it up with others in the field:
We talk about it pretty often in my program to be honest with you, which I'm appreciative of because I think it's one of those taboo topics. It's like everyone knows it happens, but God forbid, bring that into the room.

Trent meta-cognitively proposed that this mixed feelings about gatekeeping may actually derive from stigma surrounding gatekeeping: “I think out of like dispositional things, just recognizing that there's kind of an automatic stigma towards it, and I realize that that's probably even been present in the way that I've talked about it.” Despite this stigma, gatekeeping was described as a topic which requires more examples, mentorship, and study to accurately understand and practice so as to prevent gate slippage and promote remediation when possible.

This study’s findings detail key components of doctoral students’ perceptions of the gatekeeper role, which are consistent with ethical guidelines but also include the insight that gatekeeping as a doctoral student is distinct from their role as gatekeepers as future counselor educators and supervisors. Doctoral students’ gatekeeping processes also seemed to align with the contexts described in ethical guidelines (teaching and supervision). Their assessments of professional competence encapsulated many elements typical of the counseling profession (i.e., developmental approach, strengths-based), but revealed some subjective or practical differences in approach. Participants also indicated that, though they may have concerns about some faculty, they learned the most from their experiences acting as gatekeepers and from faculty role models.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Chapter five includes a general discussion of the results as well as position this study within the existing literature. Implications for various stakeholder groups within the counseling profession are delineated, including ideas for improving gatekeeping at the programmatic, faculty, doctoral student, and master’s student levels. Limitations and delimitations will also be discussed along with suggestions for further or future research.

General Discussion

Both in interviews and in correspondence for member checking, participants strongly resonated with the “in the middle” meta-theme. As a group caught in between different and sometimes conflicting entities, doctoral students experience pressure from several directions. Whether programs are designing gatekeeping policies and curriculum or making other decisions, it is important to remember that any impact for doctoral students will likely be situated in their experience of being “in the middle.” Decisions will impact doctoral students doubly in both their roles as students and as faculty or supervisors. Curriculum decisions in particular should factor in doctoral students’ development in the context that many feel they are more than clinicians but not yet fully counselor educators.

Given doctoral students are often in a middle position, they must navigate some of the unknown or grey areas of becoming a gatekeeper. The major distinction between “in the middle” and Navigating the Grey Space of Gatekeeper Development is that the former is more of an emotional experience of their role whereas the latter focuses more on the meta-cognitive response to this unfamiliar and mysterious process. Doctoral training needs to demystify the gatekeeping process for all stakeholders, but intentional and direct education about gatekeeping is needed. Both formal and informal education, which take into account the middle position,
power dynamics, and unique developmental needs of doctoral-level students, are important to learning to become a gatekeeper. Specifically, acknowledgement of the parallel developmental processes, discussion of how to balance support and challenge, outlining developmental assessment tools across the gatekeeping process, and boosting gatekeeping efficacy through faculty support are important facets of doctoral gatekeeping training. Discussion of both the gatekeeping role and its execution are required to better equip effective, confident, and ethical gatekeepers.

Doctoral students perceive the overall role of a gatekeeper to the profession as protecting clients from harm and thus protecting the profession as well. Additionally, participants expressed an awareness that avoiding legal issues or repercussions during the gatekeeping process was important, typically through consultation and documentation. However, doctoral students were unclear on the legal aspects of gatekeeping and programs might consider implementing formal education about relevant laws or procedures associated with litigation as a result of gatekeeping. Programs may provide education and decrease gate slippage by increasing pathways of communication and thus collaboration between all stakeholders within the department. Communicating gatekeeper expectations and policies for faculty and students as well as providing a space for all gatekeepers to bring concerns to the table will strengthen gates and provide learning opportunities for all. A more collaborative and cohesive approach across all faculty, students, and site supervisors will decrease the chance for gate slippage due to lack of communication or documentation.

Doctoral students also have the capability to become advocates and leaders for master’s students while acting as gatekeepers and most participants expressed a strong desire to support and empower trainees to develop their knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Doctoral students can
empathize and connect with master’s students on the level of role model, which strengthens
gatekeeping and may also increase retention and successful remediation. Some of the doctoral
students viewed gatekeeping as a form of leadership and/or advocacy at the individual level.
They noted that their conduct in other professional realms both informed and was informed by
their gatekeeper development. Engaging doctoral students as role models, leaders, and advocates
and reframing gatekeeping as a developmental process could increase retention and decrease gate
slippage. Faculty might include developmental and strengths-based approaches to gatekeeping,
such as the idea that gatekeeping as a form of advocacy for what is best for both the student and
profession.

As described by the “in the middle” meta-theme, doctoral students may feel caught in
between entities. A highlight from this study is the emerging discrepancy between the gatekeeper
role and expectations (both in theory and practice) of doctoral students versus faculty. The extent
to which these roles are perceived as congruent has implications for gatekeeper development and
gate slippage. Doctoral students are future faculty and often frame their gatekeeping experiences
from this lens. If doctoral students experience dissonance or significant differences in their role
as a doctoral gatekeeper versus a future faculty gatekeeper, they may feel underprepared for that
role until they become faculty themselves. Programs and doctoral students would benefit from
preparing clear expectations for doctoral gatekeepers which are consistent or closely aligned with
actual gatekeeping tasks of faculty. A progressive, developmental model of gatekeeper
development could inform these expectations to better transition doctoral students from
clinicians to doctoral gatekeepers to eventual faculty members.

Doctoral students are in a unique gatekeeping position to be the “eyes and ears” or
“initial whistleblowers” of a program as they often see trainees in many different types of roles
and settings. They are also well-located to provide additional support and remediation for trainees that might otherwise be impossible for a single faculty. It would be beneficial for programs to review whether they are using doctoral students to the fullest extent of their role, while weighing the impacts on doctoral students’ wellbeing and gatekeeping efficacy. Doctoral students’ perceptions of power also have a significant impact on gatekeeper development and gate slippage; specifically perceptions of power based in cultural dynamics, authority as doctoral students “in the middle”, and institutional power dynamics amongst faculty influence gatekeeper development and outcomes. Doctoral students who felt marginalized by their cultural identity, especially racial or ethnic identities, were more likely to feel disempowered and less authoritative as gatekeepers. Programs must address systemic racism in the gatekeeping process by providing increased training and evaluation of culturally sensitive policies, procedures, and processes. Additionally, doctoral students are already in a less equitable position in terms of power and authority relative to faculty. Faculty should be mindful of communicating and reinforcing the level of gatekeeping authority that doctoral students have to both doctoral and master’s students. Programs should identify a consistent level of authority and expectations for doctoral gatekeeping and provide support and protections for doctoral students involved in gatekeeping, remediation, and litigation. Consultation with legal representatives may provide additional ideas about the depth of involvement for doctoral students in gatekeeping, and doctoral students should be included to the extent that it is feasible.

Finally, perceptions of power across and within the faculty hierarchy must be addressed. Doctoral students were negatively impacted by poor gatekeeping role models amongst faculty and often reported perceived gate slippage due to faculty with insufficient power within the department. Many participants voiced concerns that adjunct faculty either were not given a
platform to share gatekeeping concerns, especially from clinical coursework, or were not empowered to speak up about or act on gatekeeping concerns. Similar worries were shared about untenured or newer faculty relative to tenured faculty, with doctoral students feeling that sometimes faculty were forced to choose departmental politics over ethical decision making. Programs should resolve policies or cultures which continue to reinforce such power dynamics, especially as newer faculty and adjunct faculty were often perceived as those most invested in gatekeeping and remediation.

Though doctoral students are ethically responsible for gatekeeping as both instructors and supervisors and all participants had experiences in both roles, supervision was discussed more than twice as much as teaching. This discrepancy may be explainable in several ways. Some participants noted this discrepancy and identified that gatekeeping seemed more common and important in supervision scenarios due to the increased chance or proximity to harm clients. Other doctoral students shared that they felt it was easier to assess, though not necessarily document or gatekeep, problems of professional competence in a supervision setting due to the smaller group context of supervision. It is possible that the transition from clinician to supervisor may be easier developmentally and skill-wise relative to the transition from clinician to instructor, as the small, relational, and clinically-focused format of supervision is more similar to counseling mindsets and contexts.

Perhaps it is easier to identify gatekeeping concerns due to the student-faculty ratio or the more dispositional- and skill-focused assessments. Several participants simply noted that gatekeeping in a teaching context seemed less immediate or dire and might often work itself out via grades or students self-selecting out of the program. Others felt they did not know as much about gatekeeping in a teaching role, as it felt more difficult to assess for or catch gatekeeping
issues, especially dispositional concerns, in the classroom. Programs should integrate more
discussion of gatekeeping in both teaching and supervision roles. As experience and role
modeling were the most influential learning methods, coursework in teaching could mirror
supervision classes, with a lighter pedagogy course followed by a teaching practicum. Doctoral
students might observe or serve as a teaching assistant for the first teaching course and then later
take on more responsibility in a co-teaching role in the teaching practicum. Finally, differences
and similarities in the assessment of knowledge, skills, and dispositions in the clinic and the
classroom should be considered and discussed to maximize assessment potential. All coursework
can provide the ability to evaluate master’s students with appropriate assessment and, though
clinical sequences pose greater risk to clients, gatekeepers should be monitoring students equally
for concerns in every course throughout the program.

Doctoral students used several methods to inform their assessment of master’s level
trainees. Both theoretical and practical approaches were used, often in concert with one another.
For example, many doctoral students shared that they would address an issue informally with a
student and consult with a colleague, then continue to assess and provide feedback with both
formative and summative assessments, and address the outcome of this work accordingly.
Though developmental considerations were grouped with practical approaches because they
were used regardless of theoretical orientation or formal assessment results, this holistic view of
trainee development was consistent across all participants. Faculty should consider introducing
both formative and summative methods of assessment that are developmental and atheoretical to
increase doctoral students’ repertoire of evaluation tools. Additionally, discussion of the
expected knowledge, skills, and dispositions and examples of how to address these expectations
with trainees should occur prior to experiential work. Programs may want to consider
incorporating a training, including case examples, on their gatekeeping, remediation, and retention process so doctoral students are aware. Learning how they are expected to assess trainees as doctoral students, but also as future counselor educators and supervisors is an important piece in teaching doctoral students to become gatekeepers.

The survey and interviews were consistent in identifying that doctoral students overwhelmingly felt that experience acting as gatekeepers and gatekeeper role models were the most important elements in their learning process as gatekeepers. It is important to optimize opportunities for doctoral students to be a part of the gatekeeping process in their programs where possible, and as learned with Trent, programs might consider consulting with a legal representative as they may be able to share more than they believe without fear of FERPA violations. Doctoral students wanted more knowledge early on in their training, but more experience, mentorship, and examples as they continued to develop as gatekeepers. Programs should consider including more experiential activities in doctoral coursework that could increase exposure to gatekeeping situations. Additionally, these opportunities should be structured developmentally so that doctoral students have had sufficient coursework to scaffold skills on. For example, programs could include supervision of techniques students along with supervision theories and then supervision of practicum students for supervision practicum.

**Position in the Current Literature**

Though this study is the first study to the author’s knowledge on doctoral student’s lived experiences as developing gatekeepers, there are aspects of the study that do align with existing literature on gatekeeping. The results of this study take the first steps to addressing Rapp, Moody, and Stewart’s (2018) call for more quantitative and qualitative study on the experiences of doctoral gatekeepers, as little is known about gatekeeper development. Many participants
echoed this article’s call to revisit gatekeeper training and identify standardized language and methods of said training. Additionally, the qualities that doctoral students identified as red flags or concerns for gatekeeping mirrored the five predominant concerns of Henderson and Dufrene’s 2013 article on the five most common remediated behaviors: basic and advanced clinical skills, receptivity to feedback, self-awareness, and professional boundaries. This similarity could indicate that doctoral students are well-aligned with the profession in terms of assessing gatekeeping issues and that the five issues are truly the more common gatekeeping issues within master’s level training programs. Moreover, doctoral students’ concerns about who is gatekeeping the gatekeepers and some gatekeeping experiences being marred by power dynamics within faculty echo findings published by Brown-Rice and Furr (2015). Finally, participants’ desire for more, specific resources on gatekeeping corresponds with the recent ACA publication *Gatekeeping in the Mental Health Professions* by Homrich and Henderson (2018).

This study primarily differs from existing literature in three ways. First, it explores the experiences and learning process of doctoral students with a focus on gatekeeper development as opposed to other populations who may serve as gatekeepers (i.e., master’s students, faculty). Second, this study was framed from the perspective of gatekeeping whereas previous literature typically focused on one of the roles in which gatekeeping occurs (supervisor or instructor) and gatekeeping was not the primary subject of the study. Finally, this study’s purpose was to understand and describe a sample of current doctoral students’ experiences as developing gatekeepers, and though it may provide suggestions and implications for improving gatekeeper training, it is not intended to serve as a skill resource for doctoral students.
Implications

Implications for the Counseling Profession

The primary implication for the counseling profession remains the concern about gate slippage. It appears that gate slippage is not going unnoticed within training programs or within the field. A lack of efficacy and consistency in the application of training standards by faculty and administration, as noted by several participants in the study, decreases the quality of training received by both master’s students and doctoral students. CACREP standards and Ethical Codes may require more specificity on dispositional aspects of training and assessment, as these were the most difficult to address according to participants. Additionally, CACREP standards for doctoral student development as gatekeepers and assessment for the efficacy of this development are needed. The counseling field may also require increased training or assessment to address gate slippage beyond the licensure process.

Implications for Training Programs

At the programmatic level, gate slippage as a result of a specific training program’s policies or context is also a concern. There were institutional and programmatic differences reported within the study which may indicate a lack of both doctoral and master’s level training in gatekeeping. Master’s-level clinicians often provide supervision and act as gatekeepers in that role once they have graduated but are seldom provided training in these areas. Programs may consider improving their master’s-level coursework or adding supplemental training in the area of providing supervision. For doctoral programs, there is a need for greater clarity and consistency in role and depth of involvement for doctoral students in both the gatekeeping and remediation processes. Programs should consider a collaborative and inclusive approach to training doctoral students as gatekeepers, in consultation with legal teams.
To that end, it would also be helpful for programs to thoughtfully address power dynamics within and amongst faculty and students. Doctoral students will experience increased dissonance if they observe a disconnect between faculty members or feel unheard or disempowered, so programs should endeavor to be collaborative and communicate with faculty at all levels (i.e. tenured and untenured, adjunct and core faculty). Addressing power dynamics should include increased mindfulness of the cultural dynamics present in gatekeeping. Racial or ethnic minority doctoral students expressed feeling more vulnerable and less heard as gatekeepers, so programs should consider the adequacy of the cultural competence of their policies, assessments, and personnel to identify holes where gate slippage and microaggressions may be occurring. Programs should also be clear and consistent about the level of authority of both doctoral students and faculty serving as gatekeepers, including having clear paths of communication to address gatekeeping concerns from people at all levels of the academic hierarchy. To similar effect, programs should improve coordination with on-site supervisors and increase communication and documentation efforts for gatekeeping at later levels of the clinical sequence, such as practicum and internship. On-site supervisors are also valuable stakeholders in preventing gate slippage.

For training program content, some programs may want to reconsider coursework sequencing to provide greater gatekeeping content prior to experiential coursework, for example sequencing a supervision theory course prior to a supervision practicum. Placing content coursework such as advanced content courses (i.e. multicultural, teaching theories) or doctoral-level clinical courses (i.e. doctoral counseling practicum) benefit doctoral students developmentally, but also allow programs the opportunity to better gatekeep at the doctoral level.
as well. Evaluation of doctoral students should be considered alongside coursework sequencing, again framing gatekeeper training from a developmental perspective.

CACREP standards and the Code of Ethics can inform coursework and evaluation at both the doctoral and master’s levels, but programs may need to reevaluate alignment of program or institution goals with CACREP standards and the Code of Ethics in terms of gatekeeping. Recruitment and retention expectations may be at odds with effective gatekeeping and should be considered when evaluating gatekeeping concerns. Programs will need strong communication and policies to address misalignment or conflict with gatekeeping and retention objectives.

Conversations between faculty and administrators regarding accreditation requirements and standards may be required.

**Implications for Faculty**

Faculty are uniquely positioned to address gate slippage and strengthen doctoral student development. Faculty, especially more senior, tenured, and core faculty, must be mindful of the power dynamics among them and strive for collaboration and consistency in gatekeeping. Power and cultural dynamics may influence the competence assessment and formal remediation interventions for students and lead to perceptions of inconsistent or unfair gatekeeping among students and other faculty. Faculty may choose to seek out additional training or mentorship in gatekeeping and addressing bias in assessment, as an effort to ensure that training programs are fair and that students can perceive that there is a mechanism for “gatekeeping the gatekeepers.”

It is important faculty recognize the importance of leading by example as doctoral students use them as role models, especially with respect to how they deliver feedback. Faculty must also be mindful of boundaries with doctoral students, as doctoral students often feel pressured or caught “in the middle.” Inclusion of gatekeeping and remediation case examples
and an openness to discussion and consultation about the realities of gatekeeping will best help doctoral students with less experience to conceptualize their role and to contemplate their role as future counselor educators and supervisors.

Faculty are in a unique position to be able to advocate for greater inclusion and use of doctoral students as the eyes on the ground for gatekeeping within the program. They are responsible for articulating and modeling how doctoral students can serve as gatekeepers to the field, but also differentiating expectations for the doctoral student as a gatekeeper and support for the faculty within the program. Faculty have the opportunity to directly discuss power and authority, program policy and procedures, and other expectations for the doctoral student. Open discussions on these concerns create a culture of trust, support, and empowerment, and they increase the chances for the doctoral student’s learning and growth. Keeping these lines of communication open throughout the process is also important. Additional areas to address with doctoral students through coursework or mentorship include the potential differences in gatekeeping between teaching and supervision roles. Many doctoral students are clear on their gatekeeping role and methods as a supervisor, but may be less certain or limited in how they understand their role and tools in the classroom.

Finally, faculty should be able to identify and consistently enforce developmental expectations for both master’s and doctoral students. It would be advantageous for faculty to obtain further training in gatekeeping if needed. Additionally, faculty should consider creating a space for regular review of students where they can collaborative discuss assessment options and bring concerns about gatekeeping for consultation. Gatekeeping is most effective when done collaboratively in consultation with colleagues. Faculty might also strongly consider advocating for doctoral student involvement in these meetings. Regular and collaborative discussion on
gatekeeping will also help faculty identify and address programmatic or systemic issues that may be out of alignment with CACREP or ethical standards.

**Implications for Students**

**Doctoral Students**

Doctoral students are “in the middle” in many ways, so it is important that they be mindful of the power dynamics which place them in that position. Doctoral students must learn to navigate these dynamics as well as addressing cultural dynamics, as they impact every aspect of the gatekeeping process for master’s students, faculty, and the doctoral student. In order to deal with these dynamics efficaciously, doctoral students also need to seek clarification about expectations for their role as gatekeepers both within the program and in the counseling profession at large. They will also need to be mindful and reflective of their own process as a developing gatekeeper.

Doctoral students are “in the middle” in terms of their proximity to master’s students in terms of clinical skill, psychological position, and experience, relative to the expectation that they operate from more of a faculty mindset. Doctoral students are likely to empathize with master’s students even more strongly than faculty due to this proximity and authority. This psychological middle position can make it difficult to evaluate students and may highlight the emotional pressure of shifting from a clinical mindset of nonjudgment, compassion, and avoiding advice to a supervisor or instructor mindset where support is still present, but evaluation and direction are required.

To make this transition of mindset, doctoral students must rely on role models, training, experience, and examples. Doctoral students should continue to seek out supervision and mentorship to develop and observe gatekeeper role models. Additionally, they should be able to
review and discuss both positive and negative case examples of gatekeeping, to review best practice as well as some of the realities of how difficult gatekeeping can be practically and emotionally. Coursework should provide them with a clear understanding of their gatekeeper role and expectations, with the focus being to protect clients and the profession from harm. Training for doctoral-level gatekeepers should also strengthen an understanding of gatekeeping in both teaching and supervision roles, and more focus may be needed on gatekeeping within the teaching role.

Finally, doctoral students learn best through experience acting as a gatekeeper once they are prepared with the knowledge and support to do so. Doctoral students need to seek out opportunities to gain experience or exposure to all stages of the gatekeeping process, in both teaching and supervision. They will also need experience with the remediation and dismissal process to prepare them as future counselor educators and supervisors. More knowledge and experience with the remediation process across all programs is likely needed as this is the least well understood.

**Master’s Students**

Master’s students are most often the ones being gatekept, but they play an important role in gatekeeping peers, both during their training and later in the field. Master’s students may benefit from direct and clear feedback, which is developmental in nature and balances support and challenge. Frequent and ongoing discussion of expectations normalizes the gatekeeping process and helps master’s students to better understand the role of gatekeeping and remediation. Familiarizing them with expectations and assessment early on will also lessen anxiety about performance. These expectations should be present from the admissions process so students can be clear about how they will be assessed throughout the program. In addition to discussions
about their expectations as trainees, master’s students would benefit later on as professional from training in providing supervision and gatekeeping training.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

Though the survey was national in scope, there were some limitations with the sample. Inclusion criteria for interviews required that participants have an on-site clinic associated with their training program, but this information is not catalogued within the CACREP directory. Programs were assessed for all inclusion criteria via the CACREP directory, except for the on-site clinic, which was manually researched and catalogued, thus making the target sample group susceptible to human error of omission or false inclusion. A practical limitation also includes regional distribution of eligible programs in the sample pool. The WACES region has two CACREP-accredited programs with only one of those being a traditional, brick-and-mortar program. Efforts were made to directly contact all programs meeting inclusion criteria, but not all program contacts responded. Given no survey respondents reported belonging to the WACES region, this subset of the national sample, though small, was not represented.

Additionally, the racial and ethnic diversity of the survey sample and thus the interview sample may have been limited as well. Due to the decision not to collect demographic information in the survey to increase response rate and decrease length, it is difficult to determine if the interview sample is demographically representative of survey respondents or of the target population. Though all eligible survey respondents were invited to participate in the interviews, self-selection may have influenced interview responses and the racial, ethnic, and country of origin amongst interviewees. However, gender identity, age, and year in program appeared to represent a diversity of contexts within inclusion criteria.
Finally, the recruitment for both survey and interviews may have been influenced by self-selection bias as participants chose to voluntarily complete the survey and/or interview. As such, it is difficult to know the motivations for those who did not choose to participate and any differences in representativeness of the sample from those who chose not to participate. Recruitment may also have been impacted by the COVID-19 public health crisis. Interview data collection spanned across the initial impacts of COVID-19 in the U.S. Though the protocol did not change, the speed of data collection was impacted by increased transition, stress, and workload on some participants as a result of COVID-19. Some of the interview participants also reported shifts in their experience as gatekeepers as a result of moving courses or supervision online, but no theme emerged across respondents. The few participants who expressed concerns reported worry or uncertainty about the unique impact on their ability to gatekeeping students with the shifts from in-person to online courses and supervision. Additionally, they shared concerns about how student development or remediation may be negatively impacted along with their ability and authority to assess trainees through online means.

**Future Research**

There are several areas for future research in this underdeveloped area of the literature. Further surveys are needed to better canvas a larger, national sample to represent doctoral students’ perceived readiness for becoming gatekeepers, with attention to differentiating between their preparedness and comfort to serve in that role for their program as opposed to readiness to assume that role as future counselor educators and supervisors. Additionally, surveys of subgroups within counselor education doctoral students, such as culturally diverse students, could improve understanding of similarities and differences in how gatekeepers develop. A longitudinal study or focused survey on doctoral students at various stages of their doctoral
program would also give further insight into gatekeeper learning and development, as well as trends in confidence as gatekeepers over time.

In addition to doctoral students, more information is needed on faculty and their experiences with gatekeeping. New, un-tenured, and adjunct faculty likely face different barriers than tenured mid- and late-career faculty as gatekeepers. Exploring perceptions of preparedness from their doctoral training and new faculty development as gatekeepers would add to the understanding of gatekeeper development across a counselor educator’s career. Additionally, power dynamics amongst newer, un-tenured, and culturally diverse faculty appear to impact both doctoral student gatekeeper development and gate slippage. Quantitatively focused studies that allow for comparisons between subgroups of gatekeepers, such as CACREP versus non-CACREP programs or tenured vs. untenured faculty are needed.

Further qualitative research to understand the phenomenon and experiences of gatekeepers is also needed. Phenomenological explorations of counselor education faculty as gatekeepers is lacking and would provide valuable information about similarities and differences within and among programs and might also shed light on developmental differences in gatekeeping relative to doctoral students. Interviews focused on culturally diverse students and faculty is also needed to explore the impacts of cultural and power dynamics on marginalized and underrepresented groups within counselor education. Future research must also explore the impact of doctoral students’ position of being “in the middle” to better understand and explain how evaluation and hierarchies inherent in academia and training impact their gatekeeper development and experiences. Finally, further research is needed to answer the question of ‘Who is gatekeeping the gatekeepers?’ in the counseling field as gate slippage continues to occur.
In summary, this study contributes a new perspective to the exiting gatekeeping literature with its exploration of doctoral students’ as developing gatekeepers. Doctoral students view their gatekeeping roles through the context of both their program and as future counselor educators and supervisors, and they tend to learn through and yearn for positive role models and experience acting as gatekeepers. Though more representative research is needed to more fully describe this population, including research focusing on culturally diverse doctoral students, this study provides both suggestions for strengthening gatekeeper training and directions for further study.
REFERENCES


(ALGBTIC) Competencies for Counseling Transgender Clients. ALGBTIC: Alexandria, VA.


_Counselor Education and Supervision, 48_(4), 271-284.


Gaubatz, M. D., & Vera, E. M. (2002). Do formalized gatekeeping procedures increase programs’ follow-up with deficient trainees? _Counselor Education and Supervision, 41_(4), 294._


(ALGBTIC) Competencies for Counseling with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex and Ally Individuals. ALGBTIC: Alexandria, VA.


APPENDICES

A: Survey

The survey can be viewed in its original format by copying and pasting the following URL into your browser: https://wmichcas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6McfS3ZMfjx1Gnz

Q1

Western Michigan University
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology

Doctoral Student Researcher: Diana Charnley
Dissertation Chair: Dr. Stephen E. Craig

Welcome!
You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “Counselor Education Doctoral Students’ Experiences As Developing Gatekeepers.” This project will serve as a part of the doctoral student researcher's dissertation study towards the completion of her doctoral degree requirements. Please read this description carefully and completely and ask any questions if you need more clarification.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences that current counselor education doctoral students have had with learning and applying gatekeeping during their training. It is hoped that learning more about doctoral students’ experiences with gatekeeping will provide insight on how gatekeeping is learned and how this might inform how gatekeeping is taught to doctoral students.

Those who are eligible for this study include those currently enrolled in a counselor education doctoral program. The survey is expected to take about 5-10 minutes, and those who meet eligibility criteria will be contacted via email about scheduling a semi-structured 45 to 90 minute interview to further expand on their experience. Those who participate in only the survey will have an opportunity to enter a lottery for a $50 visa gift card. Those who complete the survey and the interview component of the study will receive a $15 visa gift card.

You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. The doctoral student researcher can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions about this study or technical difficulties, you can contact Diana Charnley at diana.m.charnley@wmich.edu.
Q1
What type of master’s degree did you receive?

- Master of Arts
- Master of Science
- Master of Education
- Other (Please specify)

Q2
What is the name of your master’s degree?

- Clinical Mental Health Counseling
- Community Counseling
- College Counseling
- Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling
- School Counseling
- Rehabilitation Counseling
- Counseling Psychology
- Other (Please specify)

Q3
At what institution did you obtain your master’s degree?

Q4
Was your master's program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs at the time of your graduation?

- Yes
Q5
What doctoral degree are you currently seeking?
- Ph.D.
- Ed.D.
- PsyD.
- Other (Please specify)

Q6
What is the name of your doctoral degree?

Q7
Is your doctoral program currently accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs?
- Yes
- No

Q8
What is the name of the institution at which you are pursuing your doctoral degree?

Q9
What Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) region is your doctoral program currently associated with?
- North Atlantic (NARACES): CT, DE, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, VT
- North Central (NCACES): IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MO, MN, ND, NE, OH, OK, SD, WI
- Western (WACES): AK, AZ, CA, HI, NV, OR, WA
Q10
Are 50% or more of your courses required for your doctoral degree completed online?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Q11
Does your doctoral program have an on-site clinic used for doctoral student training (i.e., clinic located on campus where master's students complete master's practicums and doctoral students supervise them)?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Q12
Gatekeeping is defined as "the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students’ competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate" (American Counseling Association, 2014, p. 20).”

Does your doctoral program offer coursework on gatekeeping?

☐ Yes (Please describe)
☐ No

Q13
Does your doctoral program offer other formal training or professional development on gatekeeping?

☐ Yes (Please describe)
☐ No
Please indicate whether or not you have **completed** or are **currently enrolled in** any of the following types of courses during your doctoral training:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Seminar in Counselor Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Multicultural Counseling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision Theories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision Practicum</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Counseling Practicum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Theories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Practicum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship in Supervision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship in Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship in Counseling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q15
Please indicate whether or not you have **completed** or are **currently participating in** any of the following types of experiences during your doctoral training:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Assistantship or Associateship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Assistantship or Associateship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjunct Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction or Co-instruction of a Course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing Professional Clinical Supervision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q16
Overall, do you believe you are prepared to act as a gatekeeper to the profession?

- Yes
- No

Q17
Has your coursework provided by your doctoral program prepared you to be an effective gatekeeper?

- Yes
- No

Q18
Have your experiences (i.e. practica, internships, assistantships) provided by your doctoral program prepared you to be an effective gatekeeper?

- Yes
- No

Q19
What course has been the most important to your understanding of your role as a gatekeeper and why?

Q20
What experience has been the most important to your understanding of your role as a gatekeeper and why?
Q21
If you are interested in being entered in a lottery for a $50 gift card and if you are interested in participating in an interview and receiving a $15 gift card, please enter your email below:

[Email field]
B: Interview Protocol

- How do you experience your role as a gatekeeper?
  - How do you feel about this role?
  - What does gatekeeping mean to you?
- How have you experienced faculty gatekeepers during your training as a student?
- What has been your most influential experience as a gatekeeper?
  - How do you view yourself as a gatekeeper?
  - How do you assess the professional competence of trainees?
- Please provide some examples of times where you were acting as a gatekeeper.
  - Please provide an example you were you felt positively about the experience.
  - Please provide an example where you felt negatively about the experience.
- What has been the most influential part of your experience as a doctoral student in shaping you as a gatekeeper?
  - What was that like for you?
- Which courses have informed your understanding of gatekeeping?
  - How so?
  - What were they like for you?
- What types of training (outside your coursework) have you had in gatekeeping as a counselor educator and/or supervisor?
  - How so?
  - What were those experiences like for you?
- What indicates to you that a student or supervisee presents a gatekeeping issue?
  - How do you differentiate between taking action or not taking action when students or supervisees concern you?
- If you have concerns about a student or supervisee, what is your process for addressing those concerns?
  - What do you do first? Next? After that?
  - What is your final attempt before initiating remediation (i.e. failing grade, student concern form, remediation plan)?
- How has your doctoral program articulated your role as a gatekeeper to you?
  - What is it?
  - How do you experience that role?
  - Are there differences between the role as articulated by your program and your own views? What might they be?
- Tell me about your faculty role models in teaching and how they have influenced you.
  - How do you experience them as a gatekeeper?
- Tell me about your faculty role models in supervision and how they have influenced you.
  - How do you experience them as a gatekeeper?
- What is the best advice you have received about gatekeeping?
C: Informed Consent

Western Michigan University
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Stephen E. Craig
Student Investigator: Diana Charnley
Title of Study: Counselor Education Doctoral Students’ Experiences as Developing Gatekeepers

STUDY SUMMARY: This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you decide whether you want to take part in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw before completion of the survey or interview, you will not be eligible for receiving the corresponding reward. The purpose of the research is to: explain and describe counselor education doctoral students’ experiences as developing gatekeepers and will serve as Diana Charnley’s dissertation for the requirements of the Counselor Education and Supervision PhD. If you take part in the research, you will be asked to participate in a brief, 5-minute survey. Additionally, you are invited to participate in a 45- to 90-minute phenomenological interview if you meet the additional criteria of: completion of or current enrollment in at least one supervision course or experience and completion of or current enrollment in at least one teaching course or experience. An additional 30-minute or less interview for clarification may be requested. Possible risk and costs to you for taking part in the study may be time spent considering your program training or discomfort with reflecting on your own experiences with gatekeeping, and potential benefits of taking part may be an increased understanding about how to better construct research instruments for assessing gatekeeping training. Your alternatives to taking part in the full research study are to complete only the survey or not to take part in the study at all.

You are invited to participate in this research project titled “Counselor Education Doctoral Students’ Experiences as Developing Gatekeepers” and the following information in this consent form will provide more detail about the research study. Please ask any questions if you need more clarification and to assist you in deciding if you wish to participate in either or both parts of the research study. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by agreeing to take part in this research or by signing this consent form. After all of your questions have been answered and the
consent document reviewed, if you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to proceed to the survey link. Should you be eligible and choose to also participate in the interview, you will be asked to review this informed consent again and sign it.

**What are we trying to find out in this study?**

The objective of this study is to investigate and understand the gatekeeping training experiences of counselor education doctoral students. It is hoped that enumerating and describing their development process as gatekeepers for the profession will provide useful insights that could potentially improve gatekeeping training for doctoral students.

**Who can participate in this study?**

Those who are eligible for this survey portion of the study include current counselor education doctoral students at CACREP-accredited, face-to-face programs (49% or less online coursework). All doctoral student participants must also be registered in at least one credit towards the completion of their degree at the time of their participation in the study.

For the interview component, participants must meet the same criteria for the survey mentioned above and the following: completion of or current enrollment in at least one supervision course or experience and completion of or current enrollment in at least one teaching course or experience.

**Where will this study take place?**

This survey will take place through use of an online Qualtrics survey and interviews will take place by telephone or video call, depending on the comfort and preference of the participant.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**

Participants will be asked to complete a 5-minute survey online. If participants meet the additional eligibility criteria, they are welcome to participate in the interview portion as well. The interviews consist of interviews lasting 45-90 minutes, with the possibility of an additional shorter interview for clarification or follow up questions, not to exceed 30 minutes. Scheduling of these interviews will be conducted via email or telephone based on participant preference.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**

Participation both parts of this study is strictly voluntary; you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. If you withdraw prior to completing the survey or interview, you will not
be eligible for the corresponding study rewards. After agreeing to the informed consent document, participants will be asked to complete the survey. If you are interested in the gift card, you will be asked to enter your email at the end of the survey. Those who meet eligibility criteria will be contacted by the researcher following the survey by email about their interest in the interview component. For those interest, the researcher will then schedule a time to complete the interview. The interview protocol will be provided in advance. Additionally, the researcher may request a shorter follow up interview to ask clarifying questions; this possible second interview would not exceed 30 minutes. All participants will be offered the opportunity to participate in member checking after the transcription and prior to the finalization of data analysis.

**What information is being measured during the study?**

The survey instrument describes coursework and experiences relevant to gatekeeping and program characteristics. It also assesses perceived preparedness for gatekeeping responsibilities and opinions about related training. The interview protocol explores experiences, thoughts, feelings, and opinions about the participants’ experiences with becoming a gatekeeper during their doctoral program.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**

There is minimal risk in participating in this study. Some discomfort associated with talking about program training or experiences as a gatekeeper may occur. This discomfort can be minimized by choosing what you are comfortable disclosing. Additionally, data gathered from this study will either be disassociated from the participant or will be altered to conceal the identities of the participants, and confidentiality will be maintained.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**

Potential benefits to the study include an opportunity to improve understanding on doctoral students as gatekeepers and a space to reflect on training experiences relevant to becoming a gatekeeper for the profession. Participants may benefit from knowledge gained from participating in this study by using the experience to improve gatekeeping training for themselves or their program if they are inclined.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**

There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**
Participants who complete the survey can choose to enter their email to be entered in a lottery to win a $50 visa gift card. Participants who complete an interview will all receive a $15 visa gift card. Participants who do not complete the survey will not be eligible for the corresponding lottery, and participants who do not complete the interview will not be eligible for the corresponding gift card reward.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?

The researcher is the only person who will have access to your data during this study. All audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription. Transcriptions will be retained in a secure location for three years in accordance with HSIRB and federal guidelines. Those interested in the results of the forthcoming dissertation study should contact the student researcher. Additionally, the results of the dissertation study will be submitted for presentation at a professional conference. The dissertation results will also be compiled as an article and submitted for publication in a professional journal. Your identity and participation in the study will be concealed by de-identifying responses or changing identifying information and utilizing pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality.

What will happen to my information or biospecimens collected for this research after the study is over?

After information that could identify participants has been removed, de-identified information collected from the survey for this research may be used by or distributed to investigators for the purposes of meta-analysis research without obtaining additional informed consent from participants. After information that could identify participants has been removed, de-identified information collected from the interview for this research may be used by or distributed to investigators for the purposes of a systematic narrative review without obtaining additional informed consent from participants.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?

You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the student investigator, Diana Charnley at (414) 534-2218 or diana.m.charnley@wmich.edu, or the principal investigator at (269) 387-5114 or stephen.craig@wmich.edu. You may also contact the
Research Compliance Officer, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (269) 387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in the survey component of this study by clicking or copying and pasting the above survey link into my browser search bar.

________________________________________________________________________

I agree to participate in the interview component of this study by signing and dating on the line below.

________________________________________
Signature

________________________________________
Printed Name

_______________________________________
Date
D: Personal Gatekeeping Experiences

I have experience teaching and supervising master’s-level students in techniques, counseling practicum, counseling internship, group counseling, career counseling, and an online addictions treatment course. I have had gatekeeping experiences as a teaching assistant for techniques, both when students lack the skill development and when students lack dispositional or professional qualities expected of a counselor. Sabrina* was an international student who struggled to navigate the cultural barriers and personal challenges she experienced while taking the course. As her teaching assistant, I identified issues in her ability to convey empathy, avoid judgment, and receive constructive feedback. I had to work with her individually to explain more clearly what some of these expectations were, including my rationale for her grade of no credit on her first transcript. She stated that I was not being fair and left our initial meeting in anger prior to its conclusion, but she ultimately managed to adapt to the feedback that was given when it was given by the instructor, her peers, and the other teaching assistants. Another example of gatekeeping in the techniques course involves Garrett* who was retaking the course and had both unresolved personal issues and a unique personality which made it difficult for him to empathize with clients. He stated he had no empathy for his peer’s concern on the first day of class and struggled to convey warmth and understanding early in the semester. With time and practice, he was also able to build compassion for others and convey his attentiveness. I have had several other experiences where students demonstrated ‘red flags,’ but ultimately improved and were able to progress.

There have been other students in techniques that I have also seen fail to succeed in developing these skills. Brianne* was anxious and had difficulty identifying emotions in herself and others, and she often stuttered or froze when it was her turn to respond as the counselor.
Despite extra practice, she was unable to develop her skills and confidence to the point that she was able to consistently demonstrate the basic counseling skills in a mock session. She took this course as an abbreviated summer term course, which I believe contributed to her struggle, as she had half of the overall time to develop her skills as the typical fall or spring term course. I have had students like Megan* and Brad*, who were young and lacked maturity and professionalism when taking the course. They were inattentive, did not do the reading, conducted themselves without professionalism in class, and often spoke naively about their hypotheses about clients. Megan ultimately was encouraged to retake the course after she had had more time and content courses, whereas Brad was encouraged to seriously consider his fit with the profession.

My gatekeeping experiences with students that have resulted in no credit or withdrawal in the techniques course have predominantly been students who could not develop their skills in the limited time sessions or students who lacked self-awareness and did not receive feedback well. Regardless of concerns with skill, most of these students had ‘red flags’ for me in dispositional areas earlier on. I feel that all of the students who needed remediation or gatekeeping intervention have all lacked self-awareness and self-reflection abilities, such as lack of cultural awareness, immaturity, insecurity, and overconfidence. A typical course length for fall and spring semester is one three-hour course for 15 weeks, which differs from the summer term which is two three-hour classes over seven weeks and the regional intensive course which is three separate three-day weekends of 15 hours of class. When I have taught in the abbreviated formats, I have found that more students struggle to develop the skills in the shorter time span, but I also feel that students with dispositional issues stand out more in the beginning.

Clara* was a middle-aged woman in the regional intensive, who stood out immediately due to her overly-personal class introduction and matter-of-fact demeanor when answering
questions. In small groups, she struggled to avoid imposing her own values and conveyed judgment of the client in and out of session. She focused heavily on the client’s family, which was a salient personal issue for her during the course, and she did not receive feedback well from peers or me. She self-selected out of the course by choosing not to attend the third day of the first weekend where the first transcript was filmed and disclosed that she was dropping the course to address family activities. Whereas Brad*, Megan*, and Brianne* were examples of students who struggled more in understanding and implementing the feedback, Sabrina* and Clara* were defensive and unable to hear the feedback.

David*, a student I supervised in counseling practicum, was also resistant to feedback. As a white, heterosexual cis-male with a military background, he conducted himself with great confidence and demonstrated a lack of awareness about his own privileged identities. He often challenged my authority and that of my co-instructor, and he used language which was offensive to his female peers. He dressed in casual, dirt-stained clothing for supervision several times, despite being told to adhere to the business casual dress code for the clinic. He also imposed his own views on clients through use of advice or judgmental statements in sessions, but he was unable to understand the problematic nature of these comments despite evidence to the contrary. Ultimately, David was told that he was not meeting expectations after the third week of class, and I continued to provide formative and summative feedback about his performance each week until he received no credit in the course. He responded by becoming angry and tearful, and he shouted at my co-instructor and I that we were unfair, our standards were too subjective, and that he would be homeless because we chose to fail him. He also sent a lengthy email detailing his points of disagreement with our assessment, described us using profane language, and threatened to engage in an appeal or lawsuit to change his grade. David did not follow through with these
threats and we filed a student conduct concern with both the department and the university. This experience with David was what prompted me to seek out more information on gatekeeping and sparked what eventually became the idea for this dissertation. I had felt underprepared to address David’s many problematic behaviors, despite sufficient support and supervision from my co-instructor and supervisor of supervision.

Martha* was also a challenging supervisee for her lack of awareness and multicultural incompetence. She was an older white woman who had recently identified as a Christian but stated that her religion prevented her from being able to work with LGBTQ+ individuals. She was in personal counseling to address the issue, but no faculty had caught this issue prior to her practicum. I worked with her extensively to provide basic and accurate information about ethical codes, LGBTQ+ clients, and my expectations for her development to pass the course. She did work past her ethics and values conflict towards the end of the semester, but as her doctoral supervisor, I again felt underprepared to address the situation. I was worried that this student might be the next Julea Ward at first, and I sought out additional information on addressing multicultural competence with supervisees. In that same semester, I had two other supervisees who struggled with cultural competence, including David* and Brenda* who was concerned she could not assist a biracial client due to being white. In terms of skills, Becca* repeatedly failed to properly assess for suicidality despite warning signs and failed to follow up about it in supervision. I felt uncertain of how to assess these students as a gatekeeper.

I knew Martha was an obvious case for remediation and that David needed more intensive intervention, but I was not certain at what point David, Brenda, and Becca’s issues transitioned from developmental problems to problems of professional competence requiring gatekeeping. I began to realize that little training was given for these situations. I also identified
that, with David’s situation, I was not involved in any of the follow up or aftermath with his problems of professional competence. I did not know how faculty handled these situations once I had passed on my own thoughts, and at times, faculty had made decisions which contradicted my own assessment of the student. Additionally, I noticed that as a supervisor of internship students, I had to base my assessment of them on their self-report, which may or may not have been accurate. As a co-instructor of an online course, I struggled with similar concerns as I could not evaluate the student in-person, and I received emails from several students who were upset about a grade or questioned my evaluation commentary, that may have been more civil as in-person meetings. As a result, I questioned my own competence as a supervisor and instructor and went to the literature, where I did not find anything outlining doctoral students’ experiences of becoming gatekeepers or what was normal.

In my experience as a supervisor, I have also felt the impact of being a student and also an instructional team member. I feel that at times I build better rapport with the students and can better help them because they can relate to me as a student, however I also think that there have been times where they challenge me and my authority to evaluate them. Sometimes it is because of age and perceptions about competence and experience, other times it is a lack of awareness and insecurity, and still others it has been about gender and physical appearance. Though I do have the support of most of those I have taught or supervised with, I recognize that I do not have the final say, which puts me awkwardly in the middle of the master’s student, doc student, faculty hierarchy.

As a co-instructor, I also questioned my role as a gatekeeper relative to my role as a gatekeeper when supervising. I had several students who demonstrated multicultural incompetence, lack of professionalism, cheating, lack of self-awareness, or were frustrated that
they were not granted extensions or exceptions on assignments and likely constituted gatekeeping concerns. Despite these red flags, I was uncertain of my role in assessing dispositional qualities while in the role of an educator and often debated how to give feedback on such behaviors, if at all. The dynamic with my co-instructor complicated matters, as occasionally there would be a miscommunication of expectations, which could result in confusion for students or me feeling as if some of my credibility had been undermined. I realized that both the role I am in (counselor educator vs. supervisor) impacts how I see and address gatekeeping concerns, and that my relationship with the faculty I am co-instructing or co-supervising with affects my comfort with acting on the concern or how I address the concern.

Overall, I feel that my various experiences with teaching and supervision have had many instances where I have acted in the role of a gatekeeper. Some had outcomes where the student was successfully remediated, whereas others were much more complex and resulted in a negative experience for all involved. I have realized the importance of context on my role as a gatekeeper. The format of the class (i.e., intensive, online, traditional, hybrid, experiential, etc.), duration of the course, role (teaching vs. supervising), location (regional vs. main campus), individual context and dynamics (i.e., race, gender, sexual identity), developmental level of the student, severity of the problem of professional competence, relationship with the faculty, my own level of experience, and many other factors influenced how I saw my role as a gatekeeper in each scenario. Though both Jacob* and Jared* struggled to empathize with their clients in session due to their own mindsets, we dealt with their situations very differently, because each context was different.

I have learned that each scenario is unique and that gatekeeping is complex, making it understandable why my program has not included more specific training in this area. However, I
have been fortunate to have these experiences to learn from before becoming a faculty, and I know of many others who do not get that opportunity. I approach this study with an understanding of many sides of the issue, and I hope that the results of the study will provide greater understanding of how my peers learn to become gatekeepers and what more can be done to prepare doctoral students to fulfill their ethical mandate to serve as gatekeepers.

*Pseudonyms have been used to protect student confidentiality.*
Date: December 12, 2019

To: Stephen Craig, Principal Investigator  
Diana Chanley, Student Investigator for dissertation  
Jennifer Foster, Student Investigator

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: IRB Project Number 19-12-05

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Counselor Education Doctoral Students Experiences as Developing Gatekeepers” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., add an investigator, increase number of subjects beyond the number stated in your application, etc.). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation.

In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

A status report is required on or prior to (no more than 30 days) December 11, 2020 and each year thereafter until closing of the study.

When this study closes, submit the required Final Report found at https://wmich.edu/research/forms.

Note: All research data must be kept in a secure location on the WMU campus for at least three (3) years after the study closes.