# Examining the Facilitating Role of Mindfulness on Professional Identity Development Among Counselors-in-Training: A Qualitative Approach

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Professional identity development is crucial for counselors-in-training, as it provides a frame of reference for understanding their chosen field and contributes to a sense of belonging within the professional community. This qualitative study examined the impact of mindfulness on professional identity development among counselors-in-training. Participants reported that mindfulness, along with experiential learning and mentoring, served as a facilitator in completing the transformational tasks in the process of professional identity development. The preliminary results from this qualitative study warrant further research to examine and validate the impact of mindfulness on professional identity development among counselors-in-training.

*Keywords*: mindfulness, professional identity development, transformational tasks, counselors-in-training, experiential learning

The counseling profession has emphasized the importance of developing healthy professional identity among counselors-in-training (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2011; Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016; Granello & Young, 2011). Gibson, Dollarhide, and Moss (2010) defined professional identity development (PID) as the "successful integration of personal attributes and professional training in the context of a professional community" (pp. 23–24). A strong sense of professional identity provides an individual with a frame of reference for understanding his or her chosen field, contributes to a sense of belonging within the professional community, and helps to develop competency and an allegiance to the profession (Elman, Illfelder-Kaye, & Robiner, 2005; Pistole & Roberts, 2002). Conversely, a lack of professional identity may have negative consequences, such as detriments to the quality of counseling services (Pistole & Roberts, 2002) and role confusion among beginning practitioners (Studer, 2006).

Moss, Gibson, and Dollarhide (2014) and Gibson et al. (2010) proposed a transformational model in describing the development of professional identity across time among counselors-in-training and counselors. Specifically, the researchers reported that counselors passed through several transformational stages, including moving from idealism to realism, burnout to rejuvenation, external validation to internal validation, and separation to integration into the professional community, as they became more advanced. Additionally, counselors developed an internalized definition of counseling over time (Moss et al., 2014).

Developing professional identity can be a daunting task. On one hand, counselors-in-training and new professionals experience a variety of challenges in the course of PID. Some of these challenges include demanding academic and clinical work (Aponte et al., 2009), contradictory or ambiguous experiences triggering self-questioning and identity reshaping (Adams, Hean, Sturgis, & Clark, 2006; Slay & Smith, 2011), and a tendency to be self-critical and evaluate oneself primarily based upon external standards (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001). In addition, counselor trainees tend to have an unrealistic view of their roles and capacity as a counselor (Thompson, Frick, & Trice-Black, 2011). These challenges may hinder the process of PID.

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On the other hand, PID is a complicated process that involves transformational aspects such as cognition, behavior, and affection. A counselor-in-training or a new counselor develops a sense of oneness with a profession while addressing difficulty in balancing personal identity with professional identity (Goltz & Smith, 2014). Additionally, intense emotional interactions with clients and supervisors, such as constant exposure to professional evaluations, require consistent broadening and review of internal boundaries and perceptions (Birnbaum, 2008). Without successfully balancing these academic and professional requirements and expectations, counselors-in-training may encounter burnout. Thus, it is important for counselor educators and supervisors to assist trainees in the development of their professional identities (Auxier, Hughes, & Kline, 2003; Brott, 2006; Levitt & Jacques, 2005).

Most current approaches to PID focus on cognitive and behavioral aspects through experiential learning, continuing training, and supervision (Limberg et al., 2013; Zakaria, Warren, & Bakar, 2017). However, the aspect of affect also is of great significance. Several researchers have identified the significant impact of an affective component in the development of professional identity (Clouder, 2005; Mayes, Dollarhide, Marshall, & Rae, 2016). For example, Clouder (2005) stressed that affect development, which is highly associated with mindfulness (Schroevers & Brandsma, 2010; Snippe, Nyklíček, Schroevers, & Bos, 2015), should be integrated into PID.

**Mindfulness and PID**

Mindfulness is instrumental in affective development through emotional regulation (Hill & Updegraff, 2012; Hülsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013). Mindfulness is a complex construct with several definitions. According to Kabat-Zinn (1994), mindfulness is conceptualized as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.4). Similarly, Bishop et al. (2004) defined mindfulness as a two-component model, involving the "self-regulation of attention" and "a particular orientation towards one's experiences in the present moment . . . that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance" (p. 232).

The benefits of mindfulness practices have been found in many areas, such as preventing and reducing burnout (Epstein, 2003; Rothaupt & Morgan, 2007), enhancing counseling competency (Campbell, Vance, & Dong, 2017; Greason & Cashwell, 2009), and fostering acceptance of one's challenging thoughts and feelings as opposed to encouraging one to alter or control them (Davis & Hayes, 2011). In addition, Snippe et al. (2015) examined the temporal order of changes in mindfulness and affect and found that the changes in mindfulness seemed to predict and precede the changes in affect. The characteristics of mindfulness and its impacts on affect could potentially facilitate the transformational process in PID, which requires not only clinical and cognitive competence, but also affective and reflective capacities.

Although several studies have been conducted in the fields of social work, nursing, and psychology that have supported the relationship between mindfulness and PID (Birnbaum, 2008; Jacobowitz & Rogers, 2014; Martin, 2014), there is a lack of research exploring this relationship in the field of counseling (Beddoe & Murphy, 2004; Birnbaum, 2008; Louchakova, 2005). Furthermore, no study has focused on exploring a possible link between mindfulness and the transformational tasks in the process of PID. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how mindfulness may relate to the transformational tasks of PID (idealism to realism, burnout to rejuvenation, external validation to internal validation, and separation to integration) through the perspectives of mental health counselors-in-training.

# Method

The qualitative approach for this study was informed by phenomenology and qualitative content analysis (Cho & Lee, 2014). Phenomenology was used as a framework to gain an understanding into participants' experiences of PID through the potential impact of mindfulness among counselors-in-training. The qualitative content analysis offers a systematic method for identifying key themes among mindfulness and transformational tasks within the PID process among participants.

## Participants

The participants in this study were master's-level counseling students enrolled in two sections of an internship class during the last semester of their mental health counseling program (spring 2015) at a CACREP-accredited program of a Research I university in the southeastern United States. Six out of 16 students in the internship classes participated voluntarily in this study, with a participation rate of 37%. The sample included four Caucasian and two Hispanic participants, with four identified as female. The sample size of a qualitative study should be based upon goals and purpose of the study (Starks & Trinidad, 2007) and the depth of interviews—for more in-depth interviews, fewer participants are needed (Patton, 2015). Starks and Trinidad (2007) stated that the typical number of participants in a phenomenological study range from one to 10.

The participants conducted their internships in various settings, including an inpatient behavioral health center, a university counseling center, local community agencies, youth and family services, and low-income community services.

## Procedures

The first author of this manuscript offered the internship course in which mindfulness-based practices and activities were discussed, demonstrated, and practiced. The mindfulness activities included meditation practices, readings regarding mindfulness, and weekly reflections on mindfulness practices for participants at their internship sites (mindfulness instructions and procedures can be obtained by contacting the first author).

The first author informed the students about the availability and voluntary nature of this study. The second and third authors (two doctoral-level students in the counseling program at the same university as the first author) came to the internship class and introduced the study, its purpose, nature and procedure, format, and the voluntary nature of participation. During that time, the course instructor (the first author) left the classroom. The students were informed that they would be invited to participate in this study via emails by the two doctoral-level investigators. Should students in the class agree to participate, the two doctoral-level investigators and the students would schedule a time to conduct interviews. All interviews were conducted by the second and third authors.

Prior to conducting the interviews, the doctoral-level investigators presented the interviewees with an informed consent form and told the interviewees that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Whether interviewees would participate or withdraw from the study would not be known to the course instructor and would not affect their grades for the class. In addition, data analysis was conducted after the end of the semester, when all the participants' final grades had been submitted through the university's grade submission system.

Each interview lasted about one hour and took place during the last four weeks of the spring semester of 2015. The interview included four open-ended questions, with two of these questions having additional probing questions. The semi-structured interviews served to better answer the research

question. The interview began with questions regarding the participants' professional development, including questions relating to internship site expectations, capability as an effective counselor, and the relationship between personal and professional identities. Next, the participants were asked questions pertaining to their experience in the internship class and internship sites, including questions about in-class mindfulness activities, internship site expectations, client interactions, and changes in professional identity. In addition, participants were asked about their self-care and mindfulness activities outside of the classroom. The interview concluded with a discussion about the factors that would aid participants to reach the next stage of their PID.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the second and third authors. The transcripts were kept in a password-protected file and accessible only to researchers of this study. All identifying information was removed prior to data analysis. The audio recordings were deleted once all of the transcripts were cross-checked by the second and third authors to ensure the accuracy of the audio recordings and transcripts.

### Qualitative Content Analyses

We used a qualitative content analysis approach to identify transformational tasks in PID and explore the potential impact of mindfulness on facilitation of completing transformational tasks. According to Cho and Lee (2014), qualitative content analysis is flexible in utilizing inductive or deductive analysis: codes or themes are directly identified from the data in inductive approach, whereas deductive approach starts with preconceived codes or categories derived from prior relevant theory.

We started the coding and data analysis process after all interviews had been completed, as suggested by Seidman (2013). In order to reduce or minimize the effect of our biases and preconceived assumptions on our interpretation of the meaning of the data, we engaged in bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) by reading the transcripts multiple times with the goal of embracing the participants' perspectives while reducing the researchers' preconceived notions on the topic (Hycner, 1999). Both the verbal and nonverbal (e.g., fillers and silences) content of the interviews were included in the transcripts.

The content analysis approach requires the researchers to review the data to ensure a thorough and integrative analysis. First, we carefully read each transcript and made notes identifying relevant information related to the research question. Second, we read the notes and listed the types of information found, then categorized interview content and notes in a meaningful manner. Third, we identified if connections between categories could be found or themes could be observed. Finally, we compared and contrasted various major and minor categories. The same process was repeated for each transcript. After analyzing all the transcripts, we identified themes and examined each in detail and considered if they were appropriate. Once all the transcripts were carefully examined and categorized into themes or subthemes, we reviewed the data to ensure that the information was categorized and described appropriately. Finally, we reviewed the transcripts and ensured that all relevant information was examined and categorized (Neuendorf, 2016).

Triangulation is the process through which a researcher gains confidence and assurance that their findings and interpretations of the data are reflecting what is actually occurring in the data (Stake, 2006), and it provides a check on selective perception and illuminates blind spots in an interpretive analysis (Patton, 1990). Content analysis with multiple researchers in this study offered opportunities for cross-checking and analyst triangulation. We each coded the interviews independently, and compared and contrasted categories and comments under each theme. When different opinions occurred, we discussed the discrepancies and brought light to data through multiple perspectives. The first author has research and clinical experiences related to mindfulness and PID, and past

experiences in qualitative content analysis. The second and third authors have relevant research experiences in mindfulness and training in qualitative research.

## Results

The results section describes the tasks in the transformational model of PID and their relationship to mindfulness based upon the participants' responses. Under each transformational task, results are presented in two categories: (1) the transformational model of PID tasks, and (2) the impact of mindfulness on the transformational tasks.

### Burnout to Rejuvenation

**Transformational model of PID task.** According to the results of the interviews, participants described being at different points on the burnout–rejuvenation continuum. Most commonly, participants noted multiple sources of burnout that accompanied their training experiences. These sources ranged from the nature of the work itself to an inability to cope with stress and multiple demands. For example, a male participant from a low-income community agency indicated nervousness at the prospect of being adjudicated as the result of a client complaining. In contrast, participants also cited their work as a means of rejuvenation. When given the opportunity to apply the knowledge that trainees had learned in class, participants often cited their practicum experiences as sources of excitement. One female participant from youth and family services and university services stated, "I'm excited and I want to get out there and see more and do more."

**Impact of mindfulness.** A common theme emerged illustrating that participants viewed mindfulness as a strategy for reducing burnout and facilitating movement toward rejuvenation while developing their professional identities. Through building awareness of their internal and external experiences, participants noted a transition in the energy that they felt for their work. Specifically, participants noted initially feeling tired, stressed, and overwhelmed by their work. However, attending to these feelings, focusing on the here-and-now, and accepting the experiences nonjudgmentally helped participants manage feelings of burnout and ultimately feel an increased energy for their work. Participants perceived mindfulness as facilitating awareness of their internal and external experiences. One female participant working with an inpatient psychiatric hospital highlighted how mindfulness served as a facilitator for awareness of internal experiences: "I try really hard to focus on myself throughout the day using mindfulness, especially when I became overwhelmed where I could feel my body reacting, and that helped professionally because I could prepare for those situations." In addition, a female participant from youth and family services noted that mindfulness served as a facilitator for awareness of external experiences, "[being] more mindful about where I was in the situation with a client so [I would not] get attached and bring that [vicarious trauma] home with me."

Participants also noted mindfulness as facilitating acceptance of their internal experiences when faced with external stressors. For example, one female participant working at an inpatient psychiatric hospital and prison noted, "I mean deep breathing, especially when I'm feeling anxious . . . even when you're just . . . feeling depressed, is nice to just [say] okay, 'this is maybe just a phase I'm going through, it's a normal reaction to everything that is happening.'" Furthermore, bringing awareness to all aspects of the internship through mindfulness activities helped relieve burnout and increase energy for work. For example, one participant working with an inpatient psychiatric hospital stated: "Really stopping and looking at the good times and the energy . . . in (the) workplace . . . and looking at the good things that happen really changed my view."

### Idealism to Realism

**Transformational model of PID task.** Participant responses revealed a pattern of adopting an idealistic perspective of the counseling process or outcomes, as well as unrealistic expectations of the counseling workplace. Responses demonstrated that some novice counselor trainees believed their roles were to "fix" or "save" their clients. For example, one participant at youth and family services noted, "a lot of the kids I have seen have been raped or sexually abused, neglected, abandoned. . . . I want to save every kid and I want to take every one of them home with me because I can feed them." Other participants demonstrated having unrealistic expectations about the counseling workplace. Among responses collected, many participants defined counseling as "sitting there and listening to people" and noted beginning their internships with an idealistic perspective. For example, a female participant working with an inpatient psychiatric hospital stated, "Before, you have this idea of a counselor, sitting in a room with books around you and asking, 'How do you feel about that?'" Many participants began with idealistic perspectives of their clinical skills and transitioned to more realistic expectations. For example, one female participant from a youth and family agency indicated that she had not anticipated the need to develop skills in helping, communicating, and connecting with parents prior to her internship, but had developed a more realistic expectation of her role in working with the parents of her clients.

**Impact of mindfulness.** Participants' openness, awareness, and acceptance of experience are instrumental in the facilitation of realism in PID. Through an openness to experience in their internships, these novice counselors began to note a transition in their conception of the profession. Specifically, participants demonstrated attention to the here-and-now while engaging in their clinical experience, thereby allowing their understanding of the profession to be malleable to their therapeutic practice. One female participant from a youth and family agency noted that attending to the moment, rather than overpreparing, allowed her to remain open and flexible in her work with clients. Additionally, the participant stated mindfulness helped her with "being okay with not being okay . . . being more aware of my own feelings, accepting [clients] more, and dealing with [clients] in a better way than I normally would have."

Furthermore, the participants were open to and accepted their experiences as opposed to rejecting their experiences because they did not fit with their pre-existing perception. Through the acceptance of their experiences, participants were able to begin to broaden their definition of counseling to a more realistic view. For example, a male participant from a low-income community agency noted, "we integrate counseling along with some aspects of basic-level social work case management; sometimes we are doing advocacy, sometimes we are doing a multitude of other things where counseling skills are helpful, but the counseling is not your direct . . . objective."

### Separation to Integration

**Transformational model of PID task.** With regard to separation to integration, participants at the beginning stages of training often viewed their professional identity as a separate entity from their personal identity. Many participants reported sustained effort in keeping their professional and personal identities separate when beginning their internship. For example, one participant reported "learning that it's [her] identity as a counselor and not who [she is] as a person," and further reported concerns about "bringing everything back home with [her] at the end of the day."

In contrast, participants at the later stages of their training often perceived their professional and personal identity as one and the same. In this study, four of the six participants noted that their personal and professional identities are intertwined. For example, one male participant at a university counseling center stated, "I feel like I identify a lot with that [counselor] role. Sometimes it's . . . hard to differentiate

between taking off my counselor hat and keeping it on, even in some interpersonal . . . relationships."

**Impact of mindfulness.** Responses from the participants also revealed that the integration process helped energize them. For example, one female participant at an inpatient psychiatric hospital stated, "Before, when I had jobs, I would separate myself. Because my career is so closely aligned with my personality, I feel like it's the same. The way I am at my job energizes me; it makes me who I am."

Additionally, some participants also indicated feeling comforted and integrated into the professional counseling community through accepting who they are and interacting with both peers and supervisors. For example, one female participant at youth and family services noted "knowing other resources to give clients and walking through the process of this is all that we can do with them . . . and then knowing that we did all that [we] could and that was okay."

Similarly, there was one participant who noted that becoming integrated within the professional community helped with regard to becoming more internally validated. A female participant working in an inpatient psychiatric hospital noted that "things were finally starting to click into place where I was a part of the team . . . that was when my professional identity started to grow—when I see me as a professional instead of an intern."

### External to Internal Validation

**Transformational model of PID task.** Naturally, novice counselors experience doubt about their skills and capabilities in serving clients in a therapeutic capacity and often look to other more experienced professionals or resources for validation. Participant responses indicated that they were self-critical and looked toward others for validation of their experience. For example, one male participant from low-income community services indicated that when using professional manuals as an ultimate reference at the beginning of their training, "I didn't trust myself to go off the manual . . . I was so concerned [about], okay did I cover this step, did I cover this step, did I cover this step."

As the counselors-in-training developed their professional identity, there was a movement from external validation to being able to internally validate themselves. For example, the participant from low-income community services stated, "I am just now starting to trust myself to use the manuals as a base and then apply my own clinical judgment."

**Impact of mindfulness.** One's level of self-acceptance and tendency to not judge oneself is the key to the ability to validate oneself internally. Through nonjudgmentally accepting and evaluating oneself, participants were able to trust and internalize their own strengths and abilities. One male participant from a university counseling center stated, "I learned to accept the current level that I'm at, not being so critical on myself about what I should or shouldn't be doing, or should and shouldn't know . . . and that's been helpful."

Within this study, mindfulness appears to contribute to one's willingness to expand the personal comfort zone and explore new and creative approaches, both of which facilitate development toward becoming an effective counselor. A male participant from the university counseling center stated, "It [mindfulness] helped me . . . step out of my comfort zone and try different things with clients, it's been well received [and] really helpful in terms of feeling more competent [and] confident."

Mindfulness assisted participants with accepting and trusting themselves, which develops internal confidence and validation. A male participant from low-income community services stated, "The basic concept of stopping yourself, examining in the moment, and saying okay . . . trusting myself

that I could find the answer . . . if I allowed myself to relax, it made the client less agitated and less frustrated."

## Discussion

This qualitative study explored how mindfulness facilitates the transformational model of professional development (Gibson et al., 2010; Moss et al., 2014) in master's-level counselor trainees. Although the extant literature within the field of social work has examined the role of mindfulness in PID (Birnbaum, 2008; Jacobowitz & Rogers, 2014; Martin, 2014), no research to date has examined this relationship within the counselor education field. This study employed a qualitative method, which offers contextual data on the experiences of counselor trainees' PID. Thus, this exploratory study serves to address gaps in the literature by offering an understanding of how mindfulness may foster growth in counselor trainees' PID.

The results of the study supported the transformational model of PID proposed by Gibson et al. (2010) and Moss et al. (2014). Indeed, participant responses supported each of the transformational tasks and seemed to hint that this process occurs as a continuum. Although participants were all master's-level internship students at the completion of their program, each student demonstrated being in various places on the continuum on the four transformational tasks. For example, although some participants indicated a need to keep their professional identity and personal identity separated, others demonstrated beliefs that the professional and personal are intertwined, indicative of separated and integrated identities, respectively. Furthermore, participant responses alluded to change in their professional development over time, further validating the process of growth through the transformational tasks.

The emphasis of the current study was to examine how mindfulness may facilitate growth in PID through the aforementioned transformational tasks. Participant responses seemed to support that some participants found components of mindfulness assisted in their PID. The results showed that specific mindfulness facets associated with acceptance and a here-and-now orientation of internal experiences (e.g., thoughts, emotions, perception of self) and external experiences (e.g., internship experiences) contributed to more sophisticated PID perspectives.

The findings of this study support existing literature on mindfulness in counselor education. Wei, Tsai, Lannin, Du, and Tucker (2015) found that hindering self-focused attention, the antithesis of self-acceptance, led to diminished self-efficacy in counselor trainees. As this relates to the current study, many participants noted experiencing greater internal validation as a result of learning to accept their shortcomings as a counselor trainee. Similarly, participants indicated that self-acceptance yielded a greater propensity for rejuvenation. As suggested by Masicampo and Baumeister (2007), one's acceptance of difficult thoughts and feelings allows for the development of affect tolerance. However, when counselor trainees are unable to accept their internal experiences (i.e., experiential avoidance), the negative emotional impact may be excessive and garner feelings of exhaustion and result in further manifestation of those avoided internal experiences (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999) or burnout. Indeed, the current research also suggests that self-acceptance played an important role in developing more realistic perspectives of their abilities and the profession. Corroborating evidence for this finding suggests that mindful acceptance and attention to the present moment allows counselor trainees to separate from the need to control themselves and their environment, thereby allowing themselves to be in the here-and-now with their clients and themselves (Christopher & Maris, 2010). In doing so, it is thought that individuals are able to see their abilities and profession as they are, thus developing a more realistic perspective.

In addition to mindfulness, participant responses also indicated a myriad of other experiences that contributed to their PID. Specifically, participants cited sources of growth such as experiential learning and field experiences, research, colleagues, supervisors, and coworkers. This finding is well supported in the literature on mental health counselors' PID. Specifically, research on PID indicates that experiential learning; faculty, mentor, and supervisor relationships (Limberg et al., 2013); professional peer relationships (Murdock, Stipanovic, & Lucas, 2013); and professional organizations, such as the American Counseling Association (Reiner, Dobmeier, & Hernández, 2013), are all helpful in developing trainees' professional identities, as they serve to validate shared experiences. Additionally, participant responses indicated that these sources of growth assisted many counselor trainees in becoming more integrated into the professional community.

An unexpected result was the various understandings and opinions regarding mindfulness expressed by participants. It was derived that some participants viewed mindfulness as a set of techniques and strategies (e.g., mindful breathing), whereas others considered mindfulness more as a state of being. For those adopting views related to the latter, responses indicated the acknowledgement of how awareness and acceptance of one's internal and external experiences initiated progress in their PID. Although most participants adopted a positive view of mindfulness, perhaps because of their voluntary participation in a mindfulness study, a minority indicated that mindfulness was not personally beneficial to them, as they disliked using mindfulness techniques. Although there is a dearth of literature on the topic of those who do not benefit or dislike the use of mindfulness, La Roche and Lustig (2013) posited that the individual and the intervention that is being employed by the individual must match if it is to be effective. Indeed, it is possible that participants who did not find benefits from mindfulness maintain personal assumptions that are inherently distinct from, and perhaps incompatible with, basic tenets of mindfulness. In other words, the participants' culture must be assessed and considered when attempting to employ mindfulness strategies in counselor trainees (Hyland, Lee, & Mills, 2015).

## Limitations

Although this study provides a contextual understanding of how mindfulness may impact the PID of counselor trainees, it is not without limitations. The study implemented a convenience sampling procedure, recruiting counselor trainees from two sections of a course offered at one southeastern university. The final sample size was relatively small, including only six master's-level trainees out of 16 students in the course, and was predominantly female (66%). The participants' motivation to apply mindfulness practices and their knowledge of mindfulness could be different from that of their peers who did not attend the study. As such, the findings are limited to the sample used in the study and cannot be generalized to counselor trainees attending other universities or degree programs. Additionally, although the interviewers attempted to create a warm, nonjudgmental, welcoming environment, it is possible that participants may have felt hesitant to share their true experiences. Furthermore, all of the transformative tasks outlined in Moss et al.'s (2014) model were supported by the data; however, the use of a deductive approach may have led to confirmatory bias. Lastly, given the qualitative nature of this study, no causal inferences can be made with regards to the impact of mindfulness on PID.

### Implications for Counselor Education and Further Research

The results of the current study indicate that mindfulness may contribute to the PID of counselor trainees through a variety of different mechanisms. As such, counselor educators may better assist counselor trainees in addressing barriers to PID through incorporating mindfulness-based approaches into curriculum and experiential activities. Counselor educators should work collaboratively with site supervisors to incorporate mindfulness into the supervision and field training experiences of counselor

trainees, while also gathering feedback on the PID of counselor trainees over time. Furthermore, as some counselor trainees in this study demonstrated a superficial understanding of mindfulness (e.g., mindfulness as purely an intervention technique), students may benefit from the addition of a course focused on mindfulness and the PID process as a means to facilitate a deeper understanding of the philosophy and practice of mindfulness while fostering PID. Overall, counselor trainees may benefit from developing an understanding of the PID process and the benefits of mindfulness in facilitating both professional and personal growth.

Further research should incorporate larger sample sizes, varying degree programs, and multiple universities to develop a more general understanding of mindfulness and PID across counselor trainees. The impact of mindfulness on PID may be further examined using experimental and longitudinal research designs. For example, examining the impact of a mindfulness-based intervention on the PID of counselors-in-training, using pretest and posttest measures, and using a control group for comparison would add to our understanding of these phenomena. In addition, developing an understanding of mindfulness and PID may require moving beyond the self-report measure often used in social science to incorporating the feedback and observations of supervisors overseeing the work of counselor trainees within the clinical setting. Given the parallels between mindfulness and professional development (Beddoe & Murphy, 2004; Birnbaum, 2008; Louchakova, 2005) in other fields, as well as the findings of this study, deriving a mindfulness-based model of PID may prove beneficial for deepening the understanding of the connection between these two processes both in research and practical setting.

The complex and ever-evolving nature of PID is an area ripe for further exploration and discussion, particularly among counselor educators and trainees. The results of this exploratory qualitative study revealed that mindfulness facilitates engagement in the transformational tasks (i.e., burnout to rejuvenation, separation to integration, idealism to realism, and external validation to internal validation) in the process of PID for counselors-in-training. Considering the significance of PID and preliminary results in this study, further research is needed to examine and validate the impact of mindfulness on PID.

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