

Work Values, Occupational Engagement, and Professional Quality of Life in Counselors-in-Training: Assessments in a Constructivist-Based Career Counseling Course



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In this investigation, a sample of counselors-in-training's (CITs) work values, occupational engagement, and professional quality of life were explored at pre- and post-completion of a career counseling course. In relation to work values, participants highly valued balance, support, helping, and honesty within their careers, while power, competition, and risk-taking were least valued. Overall, participants increased their levels of occupational engagement from pre- to post-assessment over the span of the career counseling course. Finally, participants experienced moderate levels of compassion satisfaction and experienced low levels of burnout and compassion fatigue in relation to their professional quality of life. Implications of these findings for counselors, counselor educators, and CITs include: (a) incorporation of constructivist pedagogy; (b) discussion of essential counseling-related factors (e.g., burnout, compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction); (c) the importance of wellness support; and (d) incorporation of assessments in counseling classrooms.

Keywords: career counseling, assessment, work values, occupational engagement, professional quality of life

Work is a necessary and pervasive aspect of human life, and in many perspectives, “life-career development is a universal process that cuts across gender, ethnic, religious, spiritual, geographic, and other demographic categories throughout developed nations” (Engels, Minor, Sampson, & Splete, 1995, p. 134). An individual’s career path can bring joy and purpose, as well as negative components such as stress, challenges with decision making, financial concerns, identity crises, and burnout (Engels et al., 1995). Further, the type of career one pursues may come with specific job-related risks (Lawson & Myers, 2011), and there is a link between career concerns and overall wellness and happiness (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Yakushko & Sokolova, 2010). Assessing variables related to selection of a career plays an important role in the development of self-knowledge and knowledge of the world (Herr, 1989; Hinkelman & Luzzo, 2007; Krumboltz, 1993; Pipkins, Rooney, & Jaunarajs, 2014; Rath & Harter, 2010). As such, a career focus should be part of the counseling profession, in which we work holistically with individuals of varying backgrounds, who inevitably experience career as an integral, necessary, and esteemed aspect of life (Flores & Heppner, 2002; Lara, Kline, & Paulson, 2011; Lent, 2001).

Further evidence of the interrelated nature of career and personal counseling can be found within helping professional ethical guidelines. A number of associations and codes of ethics highlight the importance of career and career counseling. For example, the preamble of the American Counseling Association (ACA) *Code of Ethics* (2014) reads: The ACA “is an educational, scientific, and professional organization whose members work in a variety of settings and serve in multiple capacities. Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals” (p. 1). Additionally within the context of the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) is the mention of the importance of career assessment (E.1.a.) and career advising

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(F.8.b). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2016 *Standards* (2015) also include career-based specifications for counseling students. Finally, the American Psychological Association (APA) includes the Society of Vocational Psychology, which is specifically designed to encompass the career components of the profession and includes goals supporting the study and practice of vocational and career-based psychology (Society for Vocational Psychology, 2017). Thus, career development and career counseling are intertwined throughout the helping professions, and it is imperative for counselors-in-training (CITs) to integrate a career lens into their practice, regardless of population and setting. However, the majority of master's counseling programs generally have a single career training course for students, and few accredited programs have faculty on staff with a career counseling specialty (Hoppin & Goodman, 2014).

Limited training of counseling graduate students on issues related to work leaves many new professionals unprepared to handle the career counseling concerns of their clients. A number of studies point to incompetence or perceived incompetence of CITs around the specific topic of career counseling (Bjornsen, Blount, & Moore, 2018; Lara et al., 2011). In a recent qualitative study about CITs' attitudes toward experiences with their career counseling course, it was found that students did not feel adequately prepared to deal with client issues related to work and career based on their minimal training within their master's program (Lara et al., 2011). The literature also indicates a subjugation of career within the profession, as if it is an entirely separate entity from mental health counseling instead of an integral component of a holistic approach to mental health care (Hartung, 2005; Tinsley, 2001; Watts, 2005). Furthermore, CITs' perceptions of career counseling are often low and the specialty is often undervalued (Hartung, 2005; Lara et al., 2011; Warnke et al., 1993; Watts, 2005).

In addition to feeling underprepared or incompetent in providing career-sensitive counseling, CITs may perceive work-related issues as irrelevant or uninteresting in counseling. A recent qualitative study by Bjornsen et al. (2018) revealed similar findings regarding low perceptions and the undervaluing of career counseling among CITs. Bjornsen et al. also found that student perceptions positively changed throughout the duration of the course, which parallels the findings set forth by Lara et al. (2011). A number of themes emerged from survey results, and although students reported an improvement in both their attitudes and competence, they also indicated a desire for more development, increased competence, and experiential learning (Bjornsen et al., 2018). The researchers found that nearly 67% of participants ($n = 16$) expressed that, as much as their knowledge grew through taking the course, it was not adequate to effectively perform career counseling work in the field or make informed personal career choices. Typically, participant reflections on lacking competence related to either the need for applied experience or the need for more exposure to career-related assessments. Over 70% of students ($n = 17$) specifically noted the need for more exposure to career assessments in order to increase competence (Bjornsen et al., 2018). In summary, the lack of experiential learning and lack of exposure to assessments can leave students in career counseling courses especially vulnerable to incompetence. As a result, CITs are in need of an active and engaging classroom environment in which they can not only learn about career development through experiential activities, but can increase personal career-related awareness through career-related assessment during the process.

Constructivist-Based Pedagogy

The aforementioned findings substantiate the need for a constructivist pedagogical approach when teaching a graduate-level career counseling course—students want applied, interactive experience to help them more effectively understand the application of course material to practice (Dillman

Taylor, Blount, & Bloom, 2017; Young & Hundley, 2013). The constructivist approach postulates that hands-on teaching methods are superior to lecture-based methods in regards to the growth of the unique skills and knowledge needed by CITs to be effective future practitioners (Dillman Taylor et al., 2017; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000; Young & Hundley, 2013). A constructivist educator creates a classroom environment involving active student engagement in order to promote students' personal and professional development (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000; Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2011). From the constructivist perspective, exposure and applied experience provide the best learning opportunity, and practice with career assessment is no exception. By taking career assessments, students become exposed to new content, partake in self-exploration, and gain practical knowledge about how to administer assessments as well as how to interpret and apply results. As students learn to examine their own career-related constructs, they learn the parallel process of helping clients do the same (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011).

An advantage of the constructivist approach lies in the personal relevance of the constructivist paradigm to career counseling students. As there is a cost to caring as a helper, counseling students aspiring to their own careers (which are often value-driven and engagement-focused) could end up placing them at a higher risk of emotional burnout (Blount & Lambie, 2017; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). This personalized dimension brings the material alive and makes the career counseling content more understandable (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Thus, students' experience and practice with assessment tools will promote further inquiry and future application as new professionals (Peavy, 1994; Sangganjanavanich & Headley, 2014; Walker & Peterson, 2012). As students and educators enter the classroom with (a) expectations, (b) prior knowledge, and (c) different ways of thinking and acting (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011), it is crucial for counselor educators to model a safe, growth-promoting environment that parallels the counseling session and therapeutic relationship (Dillman Taylor et al., 2017). Using a constructivist-based paradigm in a career counseling course supports a platform for CITs' experiential learning through utilization of career development assessments.

Importance of Assessment in Counseling

The importance of assessment training for counselors is documented in the literature (Elmore, Ekstrom, & Diamond, 1993; Goldman, 1984; Tymofievich & Leroux, 2000). One study investigated test use patterns relative to selecting, administering, and interpreting assessments in counseling in a sample of practicing counselors who were members of both the American School Counseling Association and the Association for Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development (Elmore et al., 1993). Involvement in testing was high for this sample, with 62% indicating responsibility for test selection, 82% indicating responsibility for test administration, and 91% indicating responsibility for test interpretation. Although these results cannot necessarily be generalized outside of a school counseling population, they support the assertion that training in assessment is imperative for many CITs.

In the profession of counseling, it is important to distinguish between psychometric and edumetric models of testing. Whereas the former emphasizes the sound reliability, validity, and norming procedures necessary for standardized and high stakes testing, the latter reflects the growing constructivist focus in education and counseling that emphasizes a more phenomenological approach that acknowledges the thoughts, feelings, values, and perspectives of clients (Tymofievich & Leroux, 2000). Specific to a constructivist model for counseling, the use of an edumetric model for assessment emphasizes collaboration between client and counselor in fostering self-awareness, encouraging discussion and exploration of issues salient to the client (Tymofievich & Leroux, 2000). Counselor

educators must strive to ensure that CITs are adequately prepared to engage in test use informed by a developmental and constructivist approach to assessment in both personal and career counseling (Tymofievich & Leroux, 2000).

As CITs often struggle with the use of assessments (Elmore et al., 1993; Tymofievich & Leroux, 2000), challenges are often exacerbated when the assessments are career-focused or include career-related variables (Bjornsen et al., 2018; Lara et al., 2011). This concern is of importance as CITs frequently cite that they do not receive experiential training in administering assessments (Bjornsen et al., 2018). As such, it is imperative that CITs not only receive training in taking assessments to promote self-assessment, but also take part in experiential training through administering assessments with career-focused variables. Career-related assessments, including work values, occupational engagement, and professional quality of life, might be especially important in counseling training programs, as they offer a glimpse into personal career outlooks, as well as client career-related life.

Work Values

Part of effective career planning involves assessing (formally or informally) skills and abilities, as well as interests and values, in relation to work life. Value systems play an integral role in career choice and can influence level of work satisfaction (Chow, Galambos, & Krahn, 2017; Zunker, 2016). Work values are defined as the traits or qualities people search for in their occupation or career (Zunker, 2016). Further, work values describe the attitudes, beliefs, and feelings individuals may have in regards to work and toward specific occupations (Ros, Schwartz, & Surkis, 1999; Super, 1995). According to Wong and Yuen (2015), the concept of work values encompasses traits such as prestige, job security, work environment, colleague relationships, and personal qualities (e.g., teamwork, integrity, dependability, motivation). Career counseling has a history of recognizing individuals' work values as influential in their career decision-making processes (Carruthers, 1968; Chow et al., 2017; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Super, 1995). Thus, work values are often assessed prior to providing career guidance.

Occupational Engagement

The construct of occupational engagement is defined as "taking part in behaviors that contribute to the decision-maker's fund of information and experience of the larger world, not just the world as processed when a career decision is imminent" (Krieshok, Black, & McKay, 2009, p. 284). Occupational engagement allows students to learn about themselves, as well as gain knowledge about the world and their relationship with the world (Kim et al., 2014; Krieshok et al., 2009). According to Krieshok and colleagues, occupational engagement allows students to gain recognition of likes, dislikes, strengths, limitations, values, and skills, and learn about career-related opportunities. Further, supporters of occupational engagement have argued that career counselors should emphasize facilitating work engagement in their clients and de-emphasize helping clients make decisions (Cox, Bjornsen, Krieshok, & Liu, 2016; Cox, Krieshok, Bjornsen, & Zumbo, 2015; Krieshok et al., 2009), putting occupational engagement at the forefront of career-related decisions.

Professional Quality of Life

Professional quality of life relates to individuals' psychosocial reactions as a result of their work as helping professionals (Stamm, 2010) and is often referred to as a helper's quality of work, with both negative and positive features influencing overall work quality. Risks to professional quality of life include compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and burnout (Lawson & Myers, 2011). Generally, professional quality of life focuses on compassion fatigue, which involves a reduced capacity to be present with clients, feelings of powerlessness, isolation, and confusion as a direct result of working

with clients who have experienced suffering (Figley, 2002). Compassion fatigue is influenced by: (a) self-care, (b) unresolved trauma, (c) inability or unwillingness to control work stressors, and (d) a lack of work satisfaction (Figley, 1995; Turgoose & Maddox, 2017). Compassion fatigue can be characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion, withdrawal, stress, a reluctance to discuss or address the issue, and irritability both in and out of the work environment (Turgoose & Maddox, 2017).

On the opposite end of the spectrum, professional quality of life includes compassion satisfaction, which involves the pleasure derived from doing work well (Stamm, 2010; Turgoose & Maddox, 2017). Compassion satisfaction is often an overlooked component of professional quality of life and is viewed as mitigation to compassion fatigue. The key to preventing compassion fatigue lies in counselors detecting and reinforcing the sense of satisfaction they derive from working with clients (Figley & Stamm, 1996). To remain effective and vital in their work, counselors must be able to recognize and find joy in their ability to help others.

Purpose of the Study

We chose to assess a career counseling class for a number of reasons, including (a) career education requirement(s) outlined in ethical codes and professional mandates within the helping professions; (b) the general consensus that students dislike the career topic compared to other counseling classes; (c) the idea that CITs have low levels of perceived competence in relation to career topics, specifically assessment; (d) the value of experiential or applied learning in the development of competence; and (e) to assess student career values, career engagement, and quality of life. By assessing students' work values, occupational engagement, and professional quality of life, students can explore their own experiences and professional wellness, while also gaining competence in career assessment for later application in the field. By evaluating personal variables (e.g., career values, engagement, quality of life), CITs might be more equipped to discuss similar variables with clients in the future. The aim of this study was to extend the literature on CITs' career values, engagement, and quality of life, specifically within the context of a career counseling course.

In addition to simply exposing CITs to career-related topics through taking assessments, the questions that guided this investigation included: (a) What are the highest ranked and lowest ranked (top three and bottom three) work values of counseling students, and is there a statistical difference in scores at pre- and post-assessment? (b) How occupationally engaged are counseling students, and is there a statistical difference in scores at pre- and post-assessment? and (c) What are the levels of burnout, compassion satisfaction, and compassion fatigue in a sample of counseling students, and is there a statistical difference in scores at pre- and post-assessment?

Method

Participants and Procedure

The researchers implemented a pre- and post-assessment cross-sectional research design (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007) for assessing participants' change during their time in a career counseling course. Participants included CITs at the clinical level of their counseling program (e.g., in practicum or internship) from a large Midwestern CACREP-accredited university. Specifically, students ($N = 24$) in a career counseling course met the requirements for participation, which was active enrollment as a degree-seeking student in counseling, enrollment in the required career counseling course during the Summer 2016 course section, and at the practicum or internship level in the counseling program.

Students completed the instruments as part of a lecture on career theory and assessment, and in this sense, participation was a part of their course experience. However, all participants had the option of having their assessments removed from data analysis; no participants chose to do so. Participants included 21 Caucasian students, two African American students, and one Hispanic student, with six students identifying as male and 16 students identifying as female. Program tracks included Clinical Mental Health Counseling ($n = 12$), School Counseling PK–12 ($n = 11$), and Student Affairs in Higher Education ($n = 1$). Students in a career counseling course were specifically selected by the researchers in order to support the theory and methodology behind the investigation. Participants were assessed via paper-and-pencil, on a pre- (prior to course participation) and post- (following course participation) timeline. All participants qualifying for the investigation completed pre- and post-assessments, leaving researchers with an overall response rate of 100%.

Measures

This investigation involved three measures to explore the research questions. The measures used in this study include: (a) the Work Values Inventory (WVI; Super, 1970); (b) the Occupational Engagement Scale (OES-S; Cox et al., 2015); and the (c) Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL; Stamm, 2010). A brief demographics questionnaire was utilized to collect respondent demographics (e.g., age, gender, and ethnicity). The following section describes the measures used in this study.

Work Values. The WVI (Super, 1970) is a 45-item measure assessing 15 work values orientations (subscales) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *unimportant* to (5) *very important*. The subscales are further categorized as extrinsic, intrinsic, and concomitants, and sample items include: “My core values that are important to me in my life are . . .” and “I value work environments that are . . .,” followed by qualifiers (e.g., achievement, balance, independence, respect, location, quiet). Cronbach Alphas for the WVI subscales range from .42 to .90 (Wong & Yuen, 2015).

Occupational Engagement. The OES-S (Cox et al., 2015) is a 9-item assessment measuring the occupational engagement of college-age students. Items include actions that are regularly available to college students, and participation in those actions increases personal awareness and awareness in their work arena. Sample items include: “I talk about my career choices with family or friends” and “I visit places I’m interested in working so I can learn more about them.” Internal consistency reliability for the OES-S is around .80 (Cox et al., 2015).

Professional Quality of Life. The ProQOL (Stamm, 2010) is a 30-item self-report assessment that measures Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue. Compassion Fatigue is further divided into two subscales, including Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress. Thus, the ProQOL consists of three subscales, including: (a) Burnout (10 items), (b) Compassion Satisfaction (10 items), and (c) Secondary Traumatic Stress (10 items). Participants report the frequency of experiences on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). Sample items include: “I am happy” and “I feel trapped by my job as a helper.” Internal consistency coefficients range from .78 (Burnout) to .80 (Compassion Fatigue) to .84 (Compassion Satisfaction; Lawson & Myers, 2011).

Data Analysis

Data were cleaned and screened for outliers prior to the application of statistical analysis, and it was determined that there were two instances of assessments with missing data in the post-test battery of assessments. Because of the small amount (e.g., four questions missing in total across the entire sample), the researchers decided to average the responses of all participants and fill in the missing data (as per Pallant, 2013). To examine the research questions related to this investigation, assumptions

were established (i.e., continuous dependent variable; independent variables are categorical and related; no significant outliers; normally distributed sample). Thus, we used dependent samples t-tests to assess possible significance between participant pre- and post-assessment scores on the ProQOL, WVI, and OES-S. The dependent t-test was utilized to compare the same participants at two separate time intervals (Pallant, 2013).

Results

Work Values Inventory

Four categories were explored via the WVI: (1) core values, (2) work environment, (3) work interactions, and (4) work activities. For the purpose of this investigation, the most valued and least valued work values were explored based on participants' self-reported importance level, ranging from *not important* to *always important*. The three top-rated values for the pre-test results were: Balance ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .204$), Support ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .000$), and Helping ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .000$). The three lowest-rated values were: Power ($M = 1.35$, $SD = .476$), Competition ($M = 1.21$, $SD = .415$), and Risk-Taking ($M = 1.42$, $SD = .583$). For the post-test analysis, results were similar with Honesty ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .000$), Support ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .204$), and Helping ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .000$). The three lowest-rated values in the post-test analysis were: Power ($M = 1.21$, $SD = .415$), Competition ($M = 1.17$, $SD = .381$), and Risk-Taking ($M = 1.46$, $SD = .658$).

A dependent samples t-test was used to explore possible significance between pre- and post-assessment in each value category (i.e., core, work interactions, work activities). For the top ranked core values (Balance and Honesty), we found no statistical significance: $t(23) = -1.00$; $p = .328$. For the lowest ranked core values (Power), we found $t(23) = 1.27$; $p = .216$. For the work interactions top ranked value (Support) we found $t(23) = 1.00$; $p = .328$, and for lowest ranked value (Competition), $t(23) = .371$; $p = .714$. Finally, for the work activities top value (Helping) we found no difference (values were the same pre- and post-assessment) and for the lowest reported value (Risk-Taking), $t(23) = -.296$; $p = .770$. The work environment category was not analyzed, as participant rankings were consistently toward the median and therefore did not make the top three highest or bottom three lowest self-reported scores.

Occupational Engagement Scale

To calculate a total score of the OES-S, the original items were recoded and summed, resulting in a range of possible scores from 0 (lowest possible occupational engagement) to 36 (highest possible occupational engagement). However, in looking at the combined averages between pre- and post-assessment, participant scores at pre- ($M = 23.79$) and post-assessment ($M = 25.79$) showed a statistically significant increase: $t(23) = -2.519$, $p < .019$. These results indicate that participants were moderately engaged and increased their engagement throughout the duration of the career counseling course.

Professional Quality of Life

A review of the measures of the results for the pre-test ProQOL (Stamm, 2010) and its scales indicates the participants reported moderate levels of Compassion Satisfaction and low levels of Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress (within the Compassion Fatigue realm). Specifically, the results for the pre-test were: (a) Burnout (10 items; $M = 20.78$, $SD = 3.78$), (b) Secondary Traumatic Stress (10 items; $M = 21.14$, $SD = 4.14$), and (c) Compassion Satisfaction (10 items; $M = 41.10$, $SD = 5.26$). The results for the post-test were: (a) Burnout (10 items; $M = 20.15$, $SD = 3.86$), (b) Secondary Traumatic Stress (10 items; $M = 20.86$, $SD = 4.12$), and (c) Compassion Satisfaction (10 items; $M = 42.67$, $SD = 4.48$).

A dependent samples t-test (paired samples) was utilized in order to assess potential significance within the ProQOL subscale pre- and post-assessment results. For the Burnout subscale, we found no statistical significance: $t(23) = .767, p < .51$. For the Secondary Traumatic Stress subscale, we found no statistical significance: $t(23) = .283, p < .78$. Finally, for the Compassion Satisfaction subscale, we again found no statistical significance: $t(23) = -1.598, p < .124$. Effect sizes were calculated and analyzed using Cohen's d , and it was found that Burnout ($d = .17$), Secondary Traumatic Stress ($d = .07$), and Compassion Satisfaction ($d = .32$) all had small effect sizes between pre- and post-assessment.

Discussion

In this investigation, career assessment variables of work values, occupational engagement, and professional quality of life of participants in a career counseling course were examined and potential statistical significance between participant scores pre- and post-course was assessed. Regarding work values, participants initially stated having Balance ($M = 2.96, SD = .204$), Support ($M = 3.00, SD = .000$), and Helping ($M = 3.00, SD = .000$) as their most important work-related values, which is aligned with the career choice of becoming a counselor (Consoli & Williams, 1999). Further, the three lowest ranked values, Power ($M = 1.35, SD = .476$), Competition ($M = 1.21, SD = .415$), and Risk-Taking ($M = 1.42, SD = .583$), could be viewed as areas of low value within a helping-related field (Consoli & Williams, 1999). In the WVI post-test assessment, however, the value of Balance fell from the top three values and was replaced with Honesty ($M = 3.00, SD = .000$). Overall, the findings suggest there was no statistically significant difference between the top three valued traits and the lowest three valued traits at pre- and post-analysis. Furthermore, taking a deeper look at the assessment, the Environment category had no participants scoring its traits as either highly valued or lowly valued, which was dissimilar to a former investigation utilizing the WVI that found counselors valued the Environment, but it was dependent upon counseling track (Busacca, Beebe, & Toman, 2010). Thus, our participants may not have been interested in or valued their work environment as compared to their work activities or core work values areas. Furthermore, because our participants were CITs rather than practicing counselors, they might not yet value their "work" environment, as they have yet to experience it outside of a training-supported venue. Busacca and colleagues (2010) also found that counselors valued their coworkers highly, something that was not highly valued in our investigation, again possibly because our sample was still in a novice stage of their counseling career endeavor and have fewer work experiences in counseling settings.

Relative to occupational engagement, we found that participants were moderately engaged (participant scores at pre- [$M = 23.79$] and post-assessment [$M = 25.79$]) during their career course throughout the semester, and showed a statistically significant increase in scores from pre- to post-assessment: $t(23) = -2.519, p < .019$. Thus, participants slightly increased their engagement throughout the semester. These results were interesting in that students in the career counseling course appeared to become more engaged from pre- to post-assessment. The participants may have increased their engagement because of their participation in the course, partaking in the constructivist-based course experiences, and possibly from gaining more knowledge on counseling and career counseling specifically. As such, students would be well served by counselor education programs making occupationally engaging activities part of their curriculum as well as following an experiential, constructivist format. These activities could include job shadows, volunteering, informational interviews, conference presentations, and student-led course discussions, in order to facilitate a more engaging experience. Further, increasing engagement in a career course could help mitigate the effects of CITs devaluing career topic(s) as well as their incompetence and/or perceived incompetence in the subject matter (Bjornsen et al., 2018; Lara et al., 2011).

In terms of professional quality of life, we found that participants at pre-assessment reported moderate levels of Compassion Satisfaction (10 items; $M = 41.10$, $SD = 5.26$) and low levels of Burnout (10 items; $M = 20.78$, $SD = 3.78$) and Secondary Traumatic Stress (10 items; $M = 21.14$, $SD = 4.14$), which was similar to Lawson's (2007) investigation which found that counselors scored lower on the Burnout and Compassion Fatigue (e.g., Secondary Traumatic Stress) dimensions and higher on the Compassion Satisfaction realm than the general population. For the post-test analysis, participants reported similar results with moderate Compassion Satisfaction (10 items; $M = 42.67$, $SD = 4.48$) and low levels of Burnout (10 items; $M = 20.15$, $SD = 3.86$) and Secondary Traumatic Stress (10 items; $M = 20.86$, $SD = 4.12$). When we assessed potential significance on the subscales between pre- and post-assessment, we found no statistically significant changes for Burnout, Compassion Satisfaction, or Secondary Traumatic Stress. It is promising that our participants showed low levels of Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress, as they are early in their career, and it is imperative to commence one's helping career in a healthy way. Further, the moderate level of Compassion Satisfaction is promising as well, as CITs are entering into a helping profession and deriving satisfaction through the role of a helper, which is indicative of an optimal person–environment fit.

Implications for Counselors

The findings from this study have several implications for CITs and counselor educators. First, counselor educators may want to intentionally incorporate constructivist-based experiences in their courses in order to boost student engagement in their curriculum (Dillman Taylor et al., 2017; Emmett & McAuliffe, 2011; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Further, counselor educators could integrate discussions related to burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction throughout the counseling training program in order to support CITs' progression from novice learner toward professional counselor. Discussing the aforementioned factors might help mitigate the occurrence of negative consequences of helping (e.g., burnout and stress), as well as help maintain or increase the moderate amount of compassion satisfaction we found in our CITs.

Because wellness can mitigate the effects of burnout and other repercussions of being a helper (Blount & Lambie, 2017; Puig et al., 2012) and overall wellness translates to higher levels of professional quality of life (Lawson & Myers, 2011), CITs might benefit from assessing negative consequences of helping (e.g., burnout, stress) as well as positive results (e.g., wellness). There are several measures (both formal and informal) that could be employed to evaluate these variables in CITs. Specifically, Blount and Mullen (2015) proposed a Starfish wellness activity, in which participants can informally assess wellness areas. Further, participants could incorporate Wellness Plans (Granello & Young, 2012) into their training as another informal way of prioritizing wellness. To formally assess wellness, the Five Factor Wellness Inventory (5F-Wel; Myers & Sweeney, 2005) or the Helping Professional Wellness Discrepancy Scale (HPWDS; Blount & Lambie, 2017) could be utilized to increase overall wellness awareness and promote a healthier professional quality of life in helping professionals.

Finally, as previous studies have found that exposure to constructivist-based activities can increase competence within the content area (Bjornsen et al., 2018; Dillman Taylor et al., 2017), counseling programs could incorporate assessments in a career counseling course as a way to: (a) engage CITs; (b) increase in vivo experience with assessments (i.e., learning by doing); (c) increase competence in administering and reviewing assessments; and (d) increase basic knowledge in the content area. Further, giving assessments such as the OES-S, ProQOL, and WVI could provide CITs with a look into their future lives and careers, and increase overall engagement within the course and counseling program in general.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This investigation offers an initial look at CITs' work values, occupational engagement, and professional quality of life at a pre- and post-career counseling course assessment and provides a look at a constructivist-based career counseling course. However, this study is not without limitations. First, as the sample size included one career counseling course, we are limited with $N = 24$ participants, which limits the power and generalizability of the findings. Even so, the course is a representation of course sample sizes within the counseling program in which this data was collected. Regarding participant demographics, this study involved primarily Caucasian, female CITs; therefore, the results may be limited when applying to diverse populations.

Future research to explore and replicate these findings with a larger, more diverse sample is merited. Additionally, researchers should examine whether results on the WVI, ProQOL, and OES-S change as CITs transition into professional counselors. Perhaps as counselors progress in the profession, their work values, levels of engagement, and professional quality of life would evolve. In addition, as burnout and compassion fatigue are common within the helping professions (Lawson & Myers, 2011; Stamm, 2010), CITs might show drastic changes on their ProQOL scores as they progress into and through the counseling profession. Ultimately, future research could compare work values, occupational engagement, and professional quality of life of counselors to helpers in other fields (e.g., psychology, nursing, sociology) and assess any discrepancies or similarities present.

In summary, CITs' work values, occupational engagement, and professional quality of life at pre- and post-participation in a career counseling course were explored. Overall, participants experienced moderate levels of compassion satisfaction and experienced low levels of burnout and compassion fatigue (at both pre- and post-assessment), which is promising given the early nature of their counseling career. In addition, participants valued balance, support, helping, and honesty within their careers, while power, competition, and risk-taking were least valued. Finally, participants increased their levels of occupational engagement over the progression of the career counseling course—something for which we think the constructivist/experiential nature of the course is at least partially responsible.

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