The Self of the Counselor: Exploring Adult Attachment Styles in Counselors-in-Training

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Adult Attachment is a complex, rich theory describing human relationships and significantly affects various aspects of the counseling relationship. However, many counselors may not be aware of their attachment style, nor how this pattern of relating shapes their counseling practice. Critical incidents are events in which a counselor-in-training (CIT) experiences significant professional or personal growth as a result of a structured or random activity in their program of study. The purpose of this particular study was to explore how purposefully introducing adult attachment style to CITs affected their perception and interpretation of past relationship interactions in attachment terms and how the process of learning about attachment style affected personal and professional growth. The results revealed that creating awareness of adult attachment styles for CITs enhanced understanding of their personal and professional relationships and contributed to their personal and professional growth in a manner consistent with a critical incident.

Keywords: attachment, adult attachment style, patterns of relating, counselors-in-training, therapeutic relationship

Adult attachment style appears to affect human relationships, including the relationship of counselor and client. Counselor and counselor-in-training (CIT) adult attachment style influences the helping relationship, the development of counseling skills, empathy, depth of interpretation of session content, and use of self in counseling (Bartholomew & Thompson, 1995; Ligiéro & Gelso, 2002; Mohr, Gelso, & Hill, 2005; Pistole, 1999; Rizq, 2010; Romano, Janzen, & Fitzpatrick, 2009; Rubino, Barker, Roth, & Fearon,

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2000; Trusty, Ng, & Watts, 2005). Adult attachment is a valid theory of self and self in relationship to others, though counselors and CITs may not be aware of their adult attachment style. Literature suggests that counselors' attachment style may shape their relationship to clients as it informs the counselors' view of self and view of self in relation to other. The purpose of this study was to explore how purposefully introducing awareness of adult attachment style to CITs affected their perception and interpretation of past personal and professional relationship interactions in terms of their view of self and self in relation to other as well as how the process of learning about attachment style affected CITs' personal and professional growth.

The enhancement of CITs' self-awareness is an essential element of counselor education. The development of self-awareness may involve formal processes initiated by a counseling program and intended to produce awareness for personal or professional development (Donati & Watts, 2005). Other events may not have an intended or measurable outcome for competency and would be categorized as personal growth experiences. These experiences in counseling program-sanctioned events, whether measureable and purposeful or not, are known as critical incidents. Critical incidents are a vital part of counselor education, as CITs report that the experiential learning component of a critical incident is more emotively powerful in shaping them professionally than curriculum in the classroom (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Patterson & Levitt, 2011; Pistole & Fitch, 2008). Therefore, introducing CITs to their adult attachment style and patterns of relating could facilitate an emotively powerful critical incident that enhances their professional and personal growth. CITs, when made aware of their adult attachment style through formal assessment and discussion, would have a new framework to understand their previous client and personal relationship interactions. Once CITs understand past personal and client interactions in terms of their adult attachment styles, they would be able to consider how their attachment system responds to various client personalities and styles of relating, allowing CITs to monitor countertransference reactions.

Counselor Adult Attachment

Attachment theory is a complex conceptualization of the way in which we view ourselves and ourselves in relation to others. This concept includes behaviors, emotions, and thoughts within each view (Bowlby, 1969). As Mikulincer and Shaver (2003) suggested, the attachment system defines our functioning, personality development, and how we learn and work. Essential components of the patterns of relating in the attachment system include the caregiving bond between one important person, such as a romantic partner, parent, counselor or professor, and the attached person. When the attachment system is activated in the attached person, he or she seeks comfort from the important person in the form of a safe haven, which may include offering assurance, or a secure base, such as direction. The attached person can then engage in exploratory behavior, including working or learning in the presence of the important person (Pistole & Fitch, 2008).

Pistole (1999) proposed that counselors could serve as the important person, or attachment caregivers for the client because of the interpersonal nature of both attachment and counseling. Further studies found adult attachment patterns active in the counseling relationship for the counselor and the client, and securely attached counselors were more likely to be utilized by their clients as a secure base (Rubino et al., 2000; Wolfe & Wittenborn, 2012). Other research findings indicate that a counselor's adult attachment style affects concepts such as emotional empathy, countertransference, and responses to ruptures in the therapeutic alliance (Mohr et al., 2005; Rubino et al., 2000; Trusty et al., 2005). In terms of counselor education and supervision, the attachment style of a supervisee affects their perceived bond with their supervisor and can be a useful theory for a supervisor to guide a supervisee (Pistole & Fitch, 2008; Renfro-Michel & Sheperis, 2009). CITs that have a secure pattern of relating tend to be more self-reflective about their personal counseling and utilize those experiences to enhance their counseling practice (Rizq, 2010). Therefore, further studies may enhance the existing understanding of the role of attachment in counseling relationships, as well as counselor education and supervision.

The aforementioned studies regarding counselors' adult attachment style used various self-report instruments to measure adult attachment; however, none examined counselors' adult attachment style and counselors' personal and professional development from a qualitative perspective. Also, none of these studies noted the influence of the experience of CITs becoming aware of their adult attachment style as a form of professional or personal growth, or as additive to making meaning of previous personal and professional relationship interactions. Currently, CIT programs may utilize various experiences to create self-awareness, focusing on integrating the self as a part of the perception of self as counselor, making meaning of previous experiences, and adding new cognitive knowledge and competency (Donati & Watts, 2005; Patterson & Levitt, 2011). However, the literature does not mention utilizing the introduction and discussion of CITs adult attachment styles as a way to provoke a critical incident intended to develop counselor self-awareness for personal or professional development.

In order to explore how awareness of personal patterns of relating is experienced by CITs, the researchers designed a qualitative study with second year masters-level counseling students in a counselor education program. First the participants completed a self-report instrument, the Adult Scale of Parental Attachment (ASPA), which measures patterns of relating to both mother and father figures in childhood (Snow et al., 2007). The ASPA examines remembered childhood experiences before the age of 14 with both mother and father figures and reveals five primary patterns of relating. These five patterns are: (a) *safe*, a pattern of relating that provided comfort and security; (b) *dependent*, a pattern of relating that indicates a need for the parent to always be available; (c) *parentified*, a pattern of relating that indicates feeling responsible for meeting the parent's needs; (d) *distant*, a pattern of relating that indicates disappointment in the parent's support and availability; and (e) *fearful*, a pattern of relating that indicates a fear of abandonment and a belief that the parent would not be available for support (Snow et al., 2007).

The five patterns of relating within the ASPA correlate with characteristics of adult interactions with others. Dempster (2007) found that more insecure patterns of relating, according to the ASPA, were highly correlated with experiences of unwanted sex in a college population. Rayner (2008) indicated that the patterns of relating on the ASPA were predictive of maladjusted life schemas in a college population, as those with a high maternal distant pattern had a strong presence of early maladaptive schemas amongst the five patterns of relating. Yang (2011) found that the ASPA's highly parentified pattern of relating distinguished honor students from academically at-risk students.

To further explore the impact of CITs becoming aware of their patterns of relating from the results of the ASPA, the researchers generated a group of five questions designed to funnel the responses of the participants from broad responses regarding knowledge of attachment styles to more specific questions about applying their attachment styles to counseling. The research team had each question evaluated by two outside experts to reduce researcher bias. The questions were then modified as appropriate and resulted in the following: (a) What knowledge did you have of adult attachment styles, particularly your own, prior to taking the ASPA?; (b) As you look at your results, how does your perception of your relationships with attachment figures align with your results per the ASPA?; (c) How would you describe the relationship between your adult attachment style per the ASPA and the manner in which you relate to other people?; (d) How might your adult attachment style be relevant to helping you be a competent or effective counselor, particularly in regards to your counseling skills?; and (e) As you look at your results and think about clients you may already have, what does your primary adult attachment style mean about your emotional state when you are with clients?

Method

Participants

Participants were six masters-level CITs in a counselor education program at a South-eastern university with accreditation from the Council for Accreditation for Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Collectively, they represented diversity in counseling tracks (i.e., two school counseling, four mental health counseling), dimensions of age (i.e., range = 22-60), and gender (i.e., four women, two men). The focus groups did not represent racial diversity (i.e., six Caucasians). All participants were enrolled in the second year of their graduate counseling education program and were currently in their practicum experience.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers completed the data generation and collection in a two-step process that involved an administration and scoring of the ASPA, and a follow up focus group that discussed the results of the ASPA. The ASPA was chosen due to the depth of familiarity

of the participating researchers and its measurement of relationships to caregivers. Previous research studies have shown the ASPA to be a valid self-report research measure within the field of attachment (Dempster, 2007; Rayner, 2008; Yang, 2011).

The researchers adhered to phenomenology theory that each participant had encountered a unique experience with his or her caregiver growing up (Barbour, 2007). All participants discussed the relationships they had with their parent(s) during the focus groups. For example, Conner said that he experienced emotional distance from his father and abandonment from his mother. Stephanie stated that the lessons she learned from her parents during childhood became principles that she currently applies to the relationships she has with her own husband and children. This provided diversity in their childhood experiences while having a similar educational foundation with counseling and supervision.

After the university's Institutional Review Board granted permission for the study, the participants, which consisted of current counselor education graduate students at a southeastern university, were recruited via email and face-to-face invitations to take the ASPA. The researchers obtained consent from each participant, compiled the results of the ASPA and invited participants to attend one of two focus group sessions that utilized these results for discussion. As an incentive, each participant was entered into a random drawing for a gift card to a local eatery for his or her participation. They were also given the opportunity to receive an interpretation of their assessment scores by one of the group facilitators. Both focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed by the authors to document the interactions with the research participants.

A focus group was chosen over an individual interview in order to provide greater depth, with the idea that upon hearing other participants discuss their results, each participant would recall more experiences and share those with the group (Barbour, 2007). In order to provide more attention to each group member, participants were placed in one of two small groups (maximum of three group members each), with each group led by two group facilitators.

The researchers recorded and preserved all of the dialogue for transcription, as well as utilized member checking to establish trustworthiness and credibility by emailing a copy of each focus group transcript to the participants for feedback. All group members were given the opportunity to read the transcript and verify, clarify, or elaborate on their responses if they felt their statements were misrepresented. Independently, each group member verified via email that his or her statements had been properly recorded in the transcript.

The next step involved coding the data using a phenomenological framework (Patton, 2002). This method fit the primary purpose of the study, which was to allow participants the opportunity to reflect on their collective experiences and views of attachment style as well as how this style may influence their role as counselors in the therapeutic relationship. The researchers also utilized analyst triangulation in order to ensure that the data were coded in a credible manner (Patton, 2002). Triangulation entailed having each researcher independently take observational, theoretical, and methodological memos on what had occurred during the focus groups. These notes

were then turned into meaningful units through bracketing key information (e.g., common experiences of the participants), reducing this information into meaningful components, and grouping these components into themes (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1999). The researchers also sought to clarify the biases that each brought to the study by using a process of self-reflection and bracketing any pre-existing assumptions or biases (e.g., their relationships with the participants and former knowledge of attachment theory). This process was ongoing throughout the entire process, from design to publication. The research team held meetings on a regular basis to discuss their progress toward developing and agreeing upon the themes, and achieved Patton's (2002) recommendation of obtaining at least 80% inter-coder agreement.

Results

In order to protect their identities, each participant was assigned a pseudo-name by the researchers. The results of each of the participants' responses on the ASPA are indicated in Figures 1 and 2. A score of 50 denotes the mean Z score with 10 points of standard deviation. Scores on the ASPA indicate that participants have varied patterns of relating, such that scores one to two standard deviations above or below the mean indicate that the pattern of relating is significantly different from the norm and impacts a person's ways of relating to others. All of the participants scored outside of the statistical norm in at least one category. Categories included *Mother Safe, Dependent, Parentified, Fearful, Distant and Father Safe, Dependent, Parentified, Fearful, and Distant*. Based on participant scores, Tina experienced a dependent relationship towards her father and a fearful relationship towards both parents. Both Jane and Stephanie scored high in the parentified category towards both parents. John scored low in the "father safe" category. Conner's results indicated that he experienced a fearful attachment style towards his mother and distant attachment style towards his father. Lauren scored significantly lower than the mean in the "distant" category for both parents, indicating that she had a close relationship with them.

Once participants were given their ASPA score they were interviewed as members of a focus group. The focus groups elicited a multitude of thick, rich descriptions from the interviewees. Participants were in agreement that taking the ASPA was an educational experience that increased their awareness of their adult attachment styles. These descriptions can be categorized into two main themes. The first theme, *Nature and Significance of Relationships*, included two subthemes: *Parental Relationships* and *Insecurity in Peer Relationships*. The second theme, *Personal and Professional Development*, included three subthemes: the *Counselor's Role*, *Managing Countertransference*, and *Benefit of Awareness*.

Nature and Significance of Relationships

Each participant provided information about how various types of relationships, personal and professional, were influenced by both previous experiences with and perceptions of their parental caregivers. Participants noted how they were able to

construct new meaning based upon their beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and actions within the context of these relationships, indicating the existence of attachment patterns of relating.

Parental relationships. Participants discussed how they were able to take away new meaning about their interactions with their parents from the results on the ASPA. Most participants expressed having positive or negative relationships with one or more parent. Stephanie expressed a positive relationship with both parents by saying, "I really had both of my parents involved in just about every aspect of, of what I did. And uh, even as an adult, well my dad's passed now, but, even as an adult, my mom's still right along there." Conner explained that the ASPA revealed the negative relationship he had experienced with both parents when he said, "this is very true for me about certain things, particularly my mothers' abandonment, and being very distant from my father."

Lauren stated that learning about her adult attachment style allowed her the opportunity to reflect on specific experiences of her caregivers that deepened the significance of her score on the ASPA:

> My dad…he went out and worked and my mom worked raising the family, and so I think that the way that I saw that was that like whenever my mom wasn't there, which was very rare, but you know, she had something going on, like I would be in charge of like making my dad dinner, like making sure he ate something, or you know, like just taking care of like household things…

Participants also spoke about the significance of the relationship they had with their parents and how these relationships seemed to give meaning and structure to the interactions they have with others professionally and personally. Jane talked about the importance of the caregiver relationship, "the relationship you have with your parents, that's the first relationship you are exposed to because they are the first people you see coming into the world and experience, so of course that's going to affect how you are." Stephanie highlighted this point as well stating, "…friends I do have, and you know my husband, and my kids, and things like that, I really try and use a lot of things that I learned from my parents to build on those relationships because that's what worked."

Insecurity in peer relationships. Participants noted how the relationships they had with their parental caregiver influenced them to experience insecurity in the relationships they had with both friends and romantic partners as adults. For example, Lauren, in describing her friendships, the relationship she has with her parents, as well as the nature of her parents' relationship, said:

> I notice that too cause my score is like with my father is opposite than my mother, like maybe a little bit cause I've always been that type of person that kind of pushes people away you know I'll get

> to know someone and then a transition, I kind of push them away,
> a lot of the friends I have tend to be superficial or tend to be very
> few secure friendships.

Tina stated the following, specifically in regards to experiencing a similar phenomenon with her father and how this seems to influence her interactions with males. She said, "I feel safer with females than I do with males, and that's reflected from my mother/father, as well as the fearful…I'm more afraid that a male friend would leave me…like it's hard for me to know that they love me."

Personal and Professional Development

Participants discussed how learning about their patterns of relating aided them in defining their role as counselor; helping them interpret past countertransference behaviors; considering how they would manage future countertransference behavior; as well as emphasizing how they viewed this process as being beneficial to their development as a counselor.

The counselor's role. Participants discussed how knowing their adult attachment style allowed them to reflect on their past experiences and discover how these experiences have helped shape their role as counselors. Stephanie described how reflecting on her relationship with her parents helped form a new piece of her professional identity by stating "I could never be a marriage and family counselor...I don't think I could ever sit there with an entire dysfunctional family because it's so foreign to me to be in that type of situation..." Jane, upon recalling experiences that made sense of her adult attachment style and discussing her role as a counselor providing caregiving reported, "I was the little mama, but for so long that was my role, that is my role in my friendships and a lot of times that is my role in the counseling setting."

Jane also articulated how a new understanding and meaning of her role as a counselor, in light of her patterns of relating, was particularly beneficial for her effectiveness in the counseling setting:

> I can't, I just can't put it into words, but there is something that
> happened in the room that was like a miracle, this thing this mira-
> cle and now there is a change in that client and I think that has to
> do with my personality and that comes from, this "P" (parentified)
> that I'm talking about so much is a lot of that quality that helps us
> with that change that happens to that client.

Each of these examples illustrate how our focus group participants derived meaning from their role as a counselor and discovered how previous life experiences may have influenced their professional role as counselors. Additionally, participants seemed to make meaning of their choice to become counselors and about their professional

identity by processing their ASPA results. This level of personal and professional impact is consistent with a critical incident.

Managing countertransference. Data from the focus group also revealed the desire of participants to become competent counselors, as participants described how the relationships they had with their caregivers could be an important indicator of how they currently treat their clients or may potentially treat their clients in the future. Lauren speculated how her patterns of relating may affect her work with families when she said, "I could see it coming into play…if there was a family who's…mom and dad were, you know, similar to my mom and dad and I picked up on it, I would probably inherently…side with the mom." John also echoed a similar thought of how caregiver relationships may affect counseling by stating:

> If you have a parent and you have a really high score for distance and then you have a client come in and they say like my dad has never done anything for me…then as a counselor, internally, it's like "yeah," then it's like hard to probe your client in to wanting to know why they have something wrong with that parent, cause it brings up things for you.

Other participants elaborated on how knowledge of their patterns of relating has helped them derive meaning from past countertransference with clients. Stephanie said: I think for me, mine is, to where I have to back off that so much nurturing role. I have a client that I presented today that everybody wants to put in their pocket and take home. And, I don't want to give her independence. I wanna just put her in my pocket and take her home and she can live with me for the rest of her life, or my life. So um, I think I really have to, to distance my personal relationship from my professional relationship.

Tina identified a particular experience with a client after seeing how she was distant to her male caregiver, saying:

> I had a client…it was a male. I was very guarded. You know, there was, there was no open posture, you know, I was to the side, I was hiding over at my computer, and I, I just didn't trust him, you know. I didn't trust his motives. I didn't, you know, I felt like I couldn't read him. I didn't know how to read him…the females I see, you know, they're adolescents, I'm much more focused on them, and not worried about, you know, what they might be thinking…

Benefit of awareness. In addition to stating that they felt that it was important to broaden their understanding of their own attachment styles, focus group participants also described how increasing their self-awareness through the lens of adult attachment could be beneficial to them. Conner expressed a need for a greater level of self-

awareness by stating, "I don't think there is any way you could have too many activities and be trained to be a counselor and be too self-aware…so the more things you do to realize these things about yourself, I think the better." Tina expressed gratitude for the increase in self-awareness resulting from this study:

> Until tonight I hadn't labeled it (adult attachment styles) as this, I know it is there, and it is a thing I do, but I couldn't put a name to it but this is really helping me out it kind of gives it a label and say you know this is the part of me that is different than Joe, this is very good information and thanks…

Conner emphasized how understanding their patterns of relating is beneficial as it will help him monitor his responses as a counselor. Conner stated,

> We all know at a service level we've all had a different childhood, but you never think about the perception of that childhood and how that perception can affect somebody. You don't really think about that stuff, then you have a client and you hear all these different stories, and your client doesn't get along with the parent because of divorce or death, or an incident, and you think oh I've heard this before, but their perception is a little different and this reinforces that awareness and, that we've all had different childhoods and perceptions of that childhood. And it does affect you and how you go on.

In conclusion, participants articulated their view that taking an attachment-oriented questionnaire such as the ASPA helped them: enhance their self-awareness of their own attachment patterns, reflect on influential relationships from childhood, as well as emphasized how this newfound awareness may be beneficial within the counseling context. Although self-reflection occurs naturally during graduate training, utilizing a questionnaire such as the ASPA may help CITs develop greater self-awareness and affect them positively as a critical incident.

Discussion

The results of this study stress the need for future research to be conducted on the attachment styles of CITs, particularly when considering how previously established patterns of relating may continue into adulthood and influence both personal and professional relationships. According to Trusty et al. (2005), many counselors are not aware of their own adult attachment style. From the very beginning of the focus groups, participants discussed how they felt that taking the ASPA increased their own self-awareness of their patterns of relating, as well as helped them explore their childhood experiences. They discussed how these experiences could possibly influence

other personal and professional relationships and the benefit of becoming aware of such information. Since conflict with others (e.g., family members, spouse, and colleagues) is an issue for many clients, counselors' awareness of their own patterns of relating may inform their counseling work in a manner that will better serve the client. This process of learning may serve as a valuable critical incident for CITs.

Participants discussed the relationships theme within either a personal or a professional context and agreed that life experiences with caregivers affects the way they interact with friends and clients in the present. Implications from the data collected indicate that participants view their previous patterns of relating to having the power to influence the way they carry out personal relationships such as friendships or intimate relationships with significant others.

The researchers also found it interesting that two female participants indicated that their childhood relationships with their fathers led them to be insecure in their current relationships with males as friends or as romantic partners. This finding corresponds to studies conducted by Goulter and Minninger (1993) and Williamson (2004) which found that fathers play a significant role in their daughters' future romantic relationships. The researchers speculate that being exposed to a negative model by their fathers may lead CITs to develop a negative model of other men that they have romantic relationships with later on in life, and may also influence their relationship with male clients.

Furthermore, the participants indicated how learning about their patterns of relating influences their professional development. Specifically, participants indicated how former experiences with siblings (e.g., taking care of brothers and sisters) shaped their roles and interactions with clients. The researchers believe that there may be a link with participants' parentified role in their families and their experiences taking on a caregiver role in the counseling relationship. In addition, the participants indicated that understanding their patterns of attachment motivated them to try to improve their counseling skills and abilities in order to become more competent and effective counselors. These results correspond to Rubino et al.'s (2000) findings, which indicated that counselors' adult attachment style is a crucial element in CITs developing effective counseling skills and therapeutic relationships.

Implications for Practice

Although opportunities to reflect on one's attachment style may arise naturally during the supervision process, the researchers believe that offering formal, structured opportunities like the focus groups mentioned may provide CITs with a critical incident to reflect on their own patterns of relating. Providing additional support to CITs in this capacity may help them develop a greater level of self-awareness which may in turn help them become better equipped for the counseling arena.

Each participant discussed how knowing more about his or her attachment style was beneficial and that this awareness is helpful when considering their work with clients. Although only a small group of counselors participated in the current study, the researchers nonetheless believe that these findings are important for researchers to

consider when conducting future studies.

As some researchers have underscored the importance of enhancing counselors' self-awareness through formal methods (Donati & Watts, 2005) the researchers recommend that counselor educators consider providing their CITs with standardized attachment style assessments (e.g., the ASPA) that can be utilized to assess their patterns of relating to others. Using the results from these types of assessments, counselor educators and supervisors can work with CITs to better understand how their work as counselors may be related to their attachment styles. Specifically, this approach could entail a process that is similar to the one that was utilized in the current study, such as instructors: (a) giving the ASPA or other attachment instrument to CITs to complete on their own, (b) helping CITs interpret the assessment results, (c) running a focus group where students can reflect on their own experiences as well as share their thoughts regarding their peers' experiences.

Limitations and Future Future Directions

There were several limitations to this study. The first limitation was the size of the focus groups and having only six participants. Incorporating more focus group members or running additional focus groups may elicit a greater variety of descriptions regarding attachment style and its implications for CITs. The second limitation was the lack of diversity in the participant sample. The majority of participants in this study were Caucasian women in their 20's. A more diverse population of CITs may have added complexity and detail to the results. The third limitation was the pre-existent relationships between the researchers and the participants and between the participants themselves. These relationships may have prevented the participants from being as willing to share personal details and life stories as they may have been with strangers. Last, a pre- or post- measure was not utilized by the researchers to determine the level of participant knowledge of adult attachment styles. This may have helped the researchers quantitatively measure just how much participants' awareness changed over the course of the study.

Future researchers should expand on this study by broadening the participant database to see if the same patterns, categories, and themes hold true after controlling for the factors mentioned above. Furthermore, in addition to utilizing focus groups for enhancing CITs self-awareness, other opportunities for reflecting on attachment styles can include incorporating attachment assessments into class work and supervision meetings. Additionally, utilizing methods such as polling CITs at other universities about their exposure to attachment style, if they are familiar with their own attachment style, and how they score on the ASPA or other attachment assessments may help counselor educators develop a greater understanding of the level of knowledge CITs have in general regarding these areas.

Conclusion

The focus groups elicited a variety of thick, rich descriptions from our participants. These descriptions revealed themes of relationships, specifically the impact of parental relationships on the development of other peer and professional relationship patterns and behaviors, as well as personal and professional development issues, including the role of counselors. The study also highlighted the benefits of CITs becoming more self-aware of attachment style, as well as how this self-awareness may influence the counseling context. In general, CITs in this study agreed that the ASPA was helpful in developing a greater level of self-awareness of their own attachment style and that this new knowledge allowed them an important opportunity to reflect on past parental and peer relationships. CITs also seemed to agree that their experience as focus group members helped them consider how patterns of relating, in general, may influence counseling dynamics. Based on the findings, we believe that increasing CITs' awareness may ultimately lead to increasing counseling effectiveness. Future research should involve using additional participants, as well as more diverse samples to measure the impact that such an intervention may have on counselor development.

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