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**Understanding Identity Development: A Longitudinal Study of Professional  
Identity Development in Educational Psychology Graduate Students**

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**Understanding Identity Development: A Longitudinal Study of Professional  
Identity Development in Educational Psychology Graduate Students**

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**Report**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**May 2016**

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this master report to God and the Lord who have guided and supported me always on my life journey.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would also like to thank my wife Mihee Park and adorable son Sol Park; this project would not have been possible without you guys.

I would like to thank my advisor, mentor, and good friend, Dr. Schallert for her passion, knowledge, care, and encouragement.

Finally, thank you also to Dr. Borich for his wisdom, guidance, and support on the program evaluation project.

## **Abstract**

### **Understanding Identity Construction: A Longitudinal Study of Professional Identity Development in Educational Psychology Graduate Students**

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This study highlights how graduate studies involve students in building their professional identity by social roles, positions, and discourse skills in the process of professional training. The research question addressed in this study is whether the new roles and situations encountered by graduate students bring constraints and expectations. I was hoping to contribute to the literature on understanding how graduate students build new identities as researchers, and at a more theoretical level, to developing insight into the connection between identity and professional identity construction. The result presented as the central phenomenon of a grounded theory model, professional disciplinary enculturation was influenced by previous job and education experiences and current academic and personal relationships. The disciplinary training influenced by coursework, and research and writing projects seemed to support the students' identity development, even as the enculturation process was experienced as emotionally taxing to different degrees and required the (re)shaping of identity and discourse practices.

*Keywords:* professional identity development, identity construction, graduate student well-being, grounded theory.

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## Introduction

In this project, I explore new conceptions of identity that have portrayed the process as multiple, fluid, laminated, and negotiated by investigating how individuals construct a new professional identity. The research on identity/identities has proliferated in several different fields, including psychology, anthropology, literacy, education, sociology, communication, and business, among others. Each field has provided different perspectives on what identity is and how it evolves (Gee, 2001). Such diversity of views can make it challenging to respect different schools of thought on the central and peripheral phenomena associated with identity and its development, and the definition of identity and description of its construction and development have remained underdeveloped.

Historically, two different approaches on identity/identities have been pursued: developmental and socio-cultural. As a central figure of the developmental approach to identity, Erikson (1959) introduced the concept of chronological developmental stages in identity construction. His theories on identity development focused mainly on the adolescence period because this stage is a transitional period of development following childhood to adulthood and includes interesting processes. Erikson posited that when individuals go through each stage, they may go through different psychological crises. Another developmental psychologist, Marcia (1966) focused on a view of identity that characterized it as involving four statuses (instead of stages), namely *identity diffusion*, *foreclosure*, *moratorium*, and *identity achievement*. These ideas of identity were taken up by a long line of researchers and thinkers providing further characterization of these perspectives on identity and self-concept (Berzonsky, 1988; Kroger, 2000; Schwartz, 2001; Sokol, 2009;).

By contrast, the socio-cultural view of identity was introduced by such researchers as Mead (1934) and Merton (1957) who emphasized identity as a social product. This perspective on identity has also been pursued by many researchers in different fields, and it may be on the ascendance when compared to the developmental perspective. For example, in the field of education, Vygotsky (1932) introduced the idea of the development of mind as embedded in a child's culture and subcultures, and of the tool-mediated development of individual characteristics. In this view, learning occurs in the zone of proximal development (Wertsch, 1985, 1991). According to Vygotsky, the development of mind is an interaction between individuals and surrounding cultures through the mediation of cultural artifacts such as discourse practices. Schallert et al. (2009) postulated that identity is a core factor to learning and to what makes for development or growth in a particular discipline. At the same time, disciplinary practices influence identity so that identity and disciplinary activities have a reciprocal relationship. In addition, Wenger (1981) also posited that identity formation is significantly associated with disciplinary practices. He claimed that when individuals are joining a community of practice, they develop a new identity as they try to acquire the core disciplinary skills of the community.

As another contribution to a social-cultural view on identity, Bakhtin (1981) provided a description of the relationship between identity and discourse practices. He mentioned that individuals are intuitively inspired to expand their social boundaries by discourse interactions with others, so that individuals acquire different perspectives and resources as they develop new identities. Individuals' identities develop and are maintained by continuing discourse processes.

Providing a way to synthesize these two historical lines of work on identities, the developmental and socio-cultural, Moje and Luke (2009) summarized different perspectives on

identity/identities into five metaphors, with two (identity as self and identity as difference) reflecting the developmental perspective and with three metaphors (identity as narrative, as mind, and as positioning) reflecting the socio-cultural perspective. They also emphasized the characteristics of identity as multiple and fluid. In other words, individuals are said to possess many different identities that they project differently in different situations they face (Gee, 2011). Sometimes, individuals have to negotiate between different identities and may come to reject one identity (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008).

After reviewing different perspectives on identity, there are two reasons why I think professional identity research would contribute to a synthesis of understanding about the concept of identity and its construction. First, as I briefly mentioned above, identity construction can be seen as the result of disciplinary enculturation processes. I postulate that this identity formation process can be seen clearly when individuals are going through new professional disciplinary experiences. The process of professional identity development may be thrown into relief as compared to other identities such as gender roles, position of caretaker, and ethnicity that may develop a longer time and be more diffuse (Moje & Luke, 2009). Second, among many identities that an individual possesses, one's professional identity is usually a central identity because it provides a socially respected position, agency, and power, in a discourse community and in the physical world as well. Moje and Lewis (2004) introduced the idea of a relationship between identity, agency, and power, stating that identity development is influenced by the agency and power that individuals acquire over time and through their experiences in different events.

In addition, considering the significance of acquiring agency and power, which may create or enhance one's professional identity, investigating the process of acquisition of

professional identity and discourse skills in a community of practice would help to elucidate the mechanisms of identity formation and development in general. For example, fluency in discourse practices such as writing, reading, and communicating with other colleagues is one of the foundational professional skills that graduate students must acquire while they are in most academic graduate programs in order to become researchers practitioners and future faculty members (Noll & Fox, 2003). This disciplinary enculturation process most likely and eventually provides agency power and position to graduate students. Further, Ducheny, Allertzhauer, Crandell, and Schneider (1997) explained professional identity as a sense of empowerment and an appreciation for the multidimensional nature of growth and advancement in a profession. In other words, the term *professional identity development* describes the process of maturing and evolving as a professional in one's field.

Below, after reviewing the literature on identity and professional identity development, I propose a study of educational psychology graduate students as they develop their identity and professional disciplinary practices. I propose that identity research applied to professional training can contribute to a better understanding of identity formation and negotiation mechanisms because individuals in graduate school must go through intensive identity construction processes in a short time period of professional training.

Three major questions are addressed: (1) How do graduate students construct their professional identity during their graduate program? (2) What are the positive or negative influences on graduate students' building of their professional identity? (3) What is the role of disciplinary practices in developing a professional identity?

In this project, the focus is on students in an educational psychology research graduate program that includes one sub-program in a professional areas (counseling psychology) and one academic program (development, learning, and cultural sciences).

I am hoping to contribute to the literature on identity construction and development by emphasizing the professional identity aspect in an investigation of how educational psychology graduate students build their new professional identity as researchers or practitioners.

The next section provides a review of the broader literature and research on the constructs of identity, identity construction as an enculturation process, and professional identity formation. Furthermore, the focus is on professional identity construction processes within graduate studies and how this process is influenced by and internally associated with individuals' identities. The third section presents a study growing out of the literature with research questions, the rationale for an investigation of professional identity development, and methodological justification and procedural details. In addition, trustworthiness issues are addressed acknowledging limitations and possible biases. The last section presents results and conclusions from a small preliminary data collection project.

## Literature Review

This section will review the current theoretical and empirical literature and research on identity and identity construction, as well as the work on professional identity formation with an emphasis on disciplinary practices. I end the literature review with a section on the research on the unique training environment and process of graduate studies and how this environment and process may enhance and/or hinder individuals' professional identity construction. Before reviewing these bodies of work, however, I begin by considering definitions of several related terms.

### Dealing with Terms

There are three clusters of terms that need to be addressed: *self-concept* and *identity*, *identity construction* and *identity development*, and *professional development* and *professional identity development*. For the first pair, self-concept theory and research proliferated from the 70s until the 90s mainly in the fields of psychology, sociology, and psychoanalysis (Rosenberg, 1986). The construct of self-concept refers to “the totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings with reference to the self as an object” (Rosenberg, 1986). The concern with the self-concept is closer to a developmental perspective on identity than to a social-cultural perspective. Some of the research related to the self-concept has been done on (a) methods for changing an individual’s self-concept, (b) learning and reinforcement, (c) determinants of the self-concept, (d) types of evaluation strategies for the self-concept construct, and (e) the dimensionality of the self-structure (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Marsh, 1990). For example, Marsh (1990) presented a multidimensional model of the self-concept made up of 13 factors, including mathematics, verbal, academic, problem solving/creativity, physical abilities/sports, physical

appearance, relations with same sex peers, relations with opposite sex peers, relations with parents, religion/spirituality, honesty/reliability, emotional stability/security, and a general self-concept (Marsh, 1990).

However, even though the multidimensional perspective on the self-concept, first introduced by Marsh and O'neill (1984), provided a way to introduce social influences on the self, the social aspects were nevertheless not emphasized, and the perspective of others and acknowledgement from others were underemphasized in these views. In contrast to the self-concept, the construct of identity emphasizes both personal perceptions of the self and social perspectives on the self (Schwartz, 2001). In other words, *identity* includes a broader meaning than the self-concept, and it defined as a person's perceptions of himself/herself, developed by experience and one's interpretation of messages about the self, coming from one's environment. Interestingly, the distinction between the constructs of self-concept and identity was not made clear until most recently. However, recently, more researchers from many different fields have included as critical the social influence and recognition of the self, thus distinguishing identity from self-concept.

A second terminology issue is the distinction between *identity construction* and *identity development*. Identity construction is often used interchangeably with identity formation, and both are distinguished from identity development. Identity construction is described as a single event or moment that impacts and contributes to an individual's identity whereas identity development refers to change across a period of time during which individuals experience different events of identity construction (Sokol, 2009). In other words, identity development has a broader meaning than identity construction (Sutherland & Markauskaite, 2010).

A third terminology issue that needs to be addressed is associated with the terms *professional identity* and *professional development*. The term *professional identity* has been used variously to describe professionalism, professional development, professional identity construction, and professional socialization (Ducheny, Allertzhauer, Crandell, & Schneider, 1997). For this reason, *professional identity development* has often confused with the concept of *professional development*, which is widely used to describe the importance of continuing one's training and familiarity in a specific field, the influence of a supportive peer group or mentor, the organization of development into stages articulated by formative events, or level of training (Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2006). By contrast, another meaning of professional development refers to the changes that occur when individuals enter a professional field such as training to be a medical doctor, nurse, or graduate studies for future researchers, scientists, and faculty members (Smith & Robinson, 1995). The second meaning of professional development is closer to the meaning of professional identity development because *professional identity* has commonly been defined as an individual's professional self-concept and social recognition based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, specialized experiences, skills, and education that are associated with a particular field (Brott & Myers, 1999; Ibarra, 1999; Smith & Robinson, 1995).

The development of a professional identity requires combining one's personal identity made up of one's personal beliefs, values, goals, life experiences, different roles, and more, with new professional discipline-specific experiences (Healey & Hays, 2012). Because influences on professional identity development are varied and complex, it is necessary to address the current conceptualization of *identity* and *professional*. In this study, professional identity development will be investigated from the perspective of *identity development* that is different from *professional development*.



## The Construct of Identity from Different Perspectives

As I addressed above, because the construct of identity is complex, it is necessary to address the different conceptualizations of identity and its formation that have been advanced. In this section, the construct of identity from the perspectives of different disciplines such as human development and discourse practices as well as identity as a product of sociocultural disciplinary enculturation are discussed.

According to Gee (1996), there are four ways to view *identity*: identity as nature, institution, discourse, and affinity, and each approach has different power sources. For example, identity as nature is a state that develops from natural and biological factors. *Nature identity* can be explained as a matter of nature unfolding, and has less to do with what individuals have done and more to do with what they inherit at birth. *Institution identity* is identity that emanates from institutions to which an individual belongs, and power comes from one's position in the institution. Gee's third perspective on identity is discursive or *discourse identity*, identity that is from the recognition of others, and it can be explained as ascription of an achievement. Gee explained that discourse is the key to gain and sustain recognition from others so that continuous development of discourse practices is mandatory for maintaining institutional identity as well. This perspective on identity can be linked to identity as narrative from Moje and Luke (2009). The fourth view on identity is *affinity identity*, which is identity emanating from individuals' own experiences and/or distinctive practices within affinity groups. *Affinity groups* are groups of individuals who share particular interests or who practice certain skills. Affinity groups allow members to have affiliation. Social identity (Tajefel & Turner, 1993), collective agency (Bandura, 2006), and community of practice perspectives (Wenger, 1998) seem related to this

perspective. Finally, Gee emphasized that the four different identities (natural, institutional, discursive, and affinity) are mutually interconnected and influence each other.

Further, Moje and Luke (2009) introduced five metaphors to describe different perspectives on the construct of identity: as difference, as sense of self, as mind or consciousness, as narrative, and as position. These metaphors can provide conceptual frameworks for understanding identity as the construct has been approached from two major perspectives, developmental and socio-cultural (Moje & Luke, 2009). In the next section, I first introduce the two major approaches on identity, the developmental and socio-cultural approaches. I then move to three related areas relevant to identity study, the work on social identity development, the research on how discourse and identity are related, and finally the perspective on how identity development can be seen as a more specific variant of the broader process of learning.

*Identity from a developmental perspective.* Identity development from a psychological and developmental perspective is attributed to Erik Erikson (1951) with his theory of developmental stages of human life from birth through adulthood. Erikson claimed that identity development begins in childhood and gains prominence during adolescence because this stage of life includes physical growth, sexual maturation, and impending career choices. In addition, in this stage, adolescents must accomplish a dominant identity by integrating their prior experiences and characteristics before entering a stable identity. A developmental psychological view presents the components of identity as a sense of personal continuity and uniqueness from others. Individuals also desire to acquire a social identity based on their membership in various groups such as familial, ethnic, and occupational groupings. Erikson (1959) claimed that these identities formed by belonging to certain groups satisfy the need for affiliation, and help individuals define

themselves. Erikson's approach to identity development was linear along a timeline so that it can go forward or stop and rest, and this identity formation process eventually settles down when one has reached a fully mature stage as a human being. According to Erikson (1968), there are several factors that contribute to identity development, including one's cognitive skills, physical abilities, increasing independence, and interactions with one's neighborhood, communities, and schools. This approach emphasizes identity as formed through developmental stages rather than the fluidity and multiplicities of identity represented in later perspectives on identity.

Another developmental psychologist, Marcia (1966), saw identity as personal ego and proposed that it can affect an individual's cognitive performance, aspirations, self-esteem, and occupational commitment. His view of identity is distinguished from Erikson's theory in that, instead of chronological stages, identity development is characterized as involving four statuses, namely, identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement. First, in the diffusion state, individuals have no clear idea of their identity and make no commitment or experience crisis in this state. Second, identity foreclosure means that individuals blindly accept a new identity and values as given by others. In this state, individuals will commit to an identity without searching for different identities or experiencing crisis. Third, identity moratorium is the state in which a person is going through an identity crisis, and commitment level is low. Lastly, the identity achievement state is one in which the person develops well-defined personal values and self-concepts. Individuals will have a strong sense of ego identity with high commitment, and crisis will also exist. Marcia (1993) claimed that identity construction begins during childhood by developing skills, beliefs, and identifications with social groups, and it has a continuity with the past and direction for the future.

Lastly, Markus (1977) approached the idea of identity as an individual's organized, summarized, and explained behavior resulting in a cognitive framework about the self that can be called the *self-schema*. This conceptual understanding of identity is based on the idea of past social experiences that organize and generate self-related information to an individual. Markus suggested that one's self-schema can affect an individual's performance on cognitive tasks in cross-situational conditions. This developmental perspective on identity is somewhat close to the self-concept that focuses on an inner self with little consideration of social perceptions of the self.

*Identity from a socio-cultural perspective.* Another approach to describing identity construction is that of a socio-cultural perspective on identity. Mead (1934) claimed that the formation of the self depends on interactions with others so that it is unpredictable. In his view, the self is a product of social interactions such as feedback from others, taking the attitude of others, and adjusting one's self to social expectations. Mead added that significant symbols such as gestures and language enable social exchanges among individuals, stimulating thought and consciousness. Merton (1957) mentioned that assigning a person to a social position occurs when the individual is assumed to possess certain characteristics that he or she may not yet possess. As others treat the person as though he or she possesses these characteristics, this treatment causes the person to exhibit the very characteristics he or she was assumed to possess in the first place. From the 1970's onward, identity scholars began to see identity as both the product of individual cognitive processes and also influenced from socio-cultural surroundings (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Further, Gee (2001) introduced the situation-specific aspect of identity that referred to multiplicity of identities. In other words, there are multiple dimensions of identity, and these are projected differently in different situations.

Moje (2004) described the concept of identity as enactments of individuals in specific situations influenced by cultural, racial, social class, and gender differences. This perspective is aligned with the later work of Moje and Luke (2009) who explained identity as dynamic that can be produced, generated, developed, or expressed over different situations. Moje and Luke also introduced the idea of identity conflict and negotiation with one's subjectivity when an individual's core identity does not match the current situation. In addition, Woodruff and Schallert (2008) also investigated this characteristic of identity, showing that when students built a new identity in a new role or position, their new and old identities may conflict, and individuals may experience some strong emotional difficulties. This may occur because a person's beliefs or identities are not perfectly matched at the beginning with the new task and activities that the person must undertake, and this mismatch may affect the individual's motivation for new social roles and responsibilities. In addition, identity develops from the perceptions and recognition by others built from an individual's own perceptions of others' expectations that affect his/her own cognitions and behaviors (Gee, 2001). Markus and Kitayama (1991) explained identity as constructed within the self, and claimed that it may significantly differ by culture. In addition, they pointed to the element of the peripheral or public self-identity shaped by relationships with others in different social situations and by encounters with cultural differences. Further, different kinds of relationships between the self and others in specific cultural domains make for differences in identity between individuals. They added that individuals in different cultures have different construals that influence and are influenced by individuals' experiences, cognitions, emotions, and motivations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Another social cultural perspective on identity is from micro-sociology that links individuals' attitudes to role relationships and behaviors (Desrochers, Andreassi, & Thompson,

2004). According to a micro-sociological view, identity can be defined as one's answers to the question "Who am I?" and the answers are related to individual's different roles such as being a parent and occupational positions at work (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Desrochers et al. claimed that different roles affect identity formation and behaviors. In addition, the concept of identity salience is important because individuals balance and prioritize between different roles. Stryker (1968) mentioned that various identities are contained in a hierarchy of salience, and when two different roles conflict, individuals may experience negative emotions such as frustration and confusion.

*Social identity.* Another line of identity research is in the area of social identity. One's social identity includes aspects of ethnic, religious, and gender identities and represents some of the identities individuals develop (Gee, 2001; Moje & Luke, 2009).

From the developmental perspective on identity, individuals can acquire social identities in two ways. First, in general, individuals gain race and gender identities by birth. Second, individuals can develop social identities by joining affinity groups such as religious groups and soccer teams (Gee, 2001). According to Tajfel and Turner (1993), individuals tend to join groups with whom they share interest in certain topics. Individuals create their social identity by participating in social groups.

In addition, Cross (1971), Atkinson (1993), Helm (1990), and Phinney (1993) specifically focused on studied ethnic identity development among other social identities. Cross introduced the idea of stages in racial identity development for African-Americans involving pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and commitment. Atkinson (1993) expanded Cross' model to explain not only African-Americans' ethnic identity development but also Latino-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Native-Americans.

By contrast, a more social view of social identity would claim that individuals' social identities such as their ethnic, religious, and gender identities are constructed by social pressure (Bandura, 1989). Bandura claimed that social identity produces agency and power that will provide advancement of an individual's identity. In the socio-cultural view of social identity, if a socio-cultural environment requests certain behaviors and attitudes from individuals, individuals are confronted with such appeals and may follow without resistance in the beginning or they may resist to different degrees.

Further, ethnic identity development would be related to natural, affinity, or institution identity by Gee (2001), and as difference by Moje and Luke (2009). For example, graduate school can be a place where students build a social identity while formulating their professional identity (Ducheneay, et al., 2001).

Social identities, such as ethnic, religious, national, and gender identities, are an important part of one's identities. Further, individuals' different social identities are mutually intertwined and influenced each other (Gee, 2001), and may influence the development of professional identity and produce hybrid identities (Moje & Luke, 2009).

*Identity from a discourse perspective.* Several researchers have argued for the importance of a consideration of discourse practices as critical to identity development (Baxter, 2004; Gee, 2001; Moje & Luke, 2009; Moss, Gibson & Dollarhide, 2014; Schallert et al., 2009). Reflecting on Bakhtin's (1953) conception of dialogue as a manifestation of individual dispositions, goals, and social locations, Baxter (2004) proposed that communication is a discourse practice that functions to express the self's beliefs and attitudes to others so that the self is understood and influenced by others' actions and beliefs as well.

I achieve self-consciousness, I become myself only by revealing myself to another, through another and with another's help... Cutting myself off, isolating oneself, closing oneself off, those are the basic reasons for loss of self. (Bakhtin, as quoted in Todorov, 1984, p. 96)

In Baxter's perspective, dialogue is foundational to identity construction as well as to sustaining an individual's identity. In other words, individuals are motivated to expand their boundaries by discourse interactions with others so that they acquire different perspectives, resources, and identities. Recognizing differences in the other increases the potential of individuals, and individuals can develop and maintain their identities by continuing this process (Baxter, 2004). In their essay on the five different perspectives on identity, Moje and Luke (2009) posited that one way to portray identity is as social practices in which individuals construct their identity by the texts they read, write, and talk about, claiming that the establishment of individuals' identities depends on what they read and write. In addition, particular kinds of literacy practices that relate to identity can be significantly important in an individual's life. However, because interpretations of texts can vary, the same text can influence individuals differently. They added that this perspective views identity as stories that individuals have created for themselves through social interactions. In other words, identities are stories individuals tell themselves about themselves, narratives, or histories of the past. Lastly, in this perspective, identity is not a single stabilized entity that individuals will acquire at one point of life; instead, one might enact different identities throughout different stages of life. This multiplicity of identities can be fluctuating from morning to afternoon or even moment to moment (Mishler, 2004).



Finally, Norton and Toohey (2002) introduced an important relationship between language learning and identity. They mentioned:

When a language learner writes a poem, a letter, or an academic essay, he/she considers not only the demands of the task but how much of her history will be considered relevant to this literacy act. Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice in which the value and meaning ascribed to an utterance are determined in part by the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks. (p. 115)

Norton and Toohey (2011) went on to investigate how identity influences the process of second language acquisition by bringing in the construct of investment in imagined communities and identities. The idea of imagined communities and identities represents how individuals' hopes for joining a target language community in the future are reflected in learners' current identities. In other words, the target language community that individuals desire to join is historically constituted but it offers possibilities for a range of identity options in the future. As a result, the imagination of belonging to a future community can provide imagined identities that can provide motivation for certain practices or behaviors. Norton (2001) argued that individuals' imagined community creates imagined identities that can influence students' academic engagement and performance. Kanno and Norton (2003) also posited that one's imagined community enhances language learning and identity. Second language students' affiliation with imagined communities such as through joint activities with native speakers may affect their motivation to practice and may lead to new identity consolidation. They added that an imagined community provides a powerful vision and sense of direction as well as educational goals.

However, an imagined community should not be a fantasy or withdrawal from reality but part of current identities, affecting the change or negotiation of current identities.

Further, Street (2009) claimed three characteristics of academic writing relate to identity formation. First, academic writing involves the articulation of a particular position that is both meaningful to the writer and recognizable by readers. Second, the ability to take, communicate, and defend a stance contributes to identity as built from differentiation from others as addressed by Moje and Luke (2009). Lastly, text represents an author's devices to help others make their own way. In other words, writers convey themselves into texts to express their values, credibility, and relationship to ideas in order to influence others. This writing process shapes authors' identities, and the produced text influences readers' identity formation. When applied to graduate students' reading and writing of published papers, proposals, or conference papers, this experience can be seen as one of ultimate identity construction as researchers.

*Identity construction as a learning process.* In this section, how learning as an enculturation process is related to the identity development process will be discussed. Ligorio (2010) suggested the general framework of socio-cultural constructivism in order to understand the relationship between identity and learning. He mentioned that socio-cultural constructivism recognizes identity as being closely dependent on context and as the outcome of a knowledge building process. In addition, Jorgenen and Keller (2008) claimed that learning involves human resources development and a process of negotiating meaning. Negotiation of meaning refers to the instrumental adaptation between individuals and culture that surpasses time and space. Further, when individuals are negotiating meaning, they also negotiate their identities. Jorgenen and Keller added that identity formation implies a trajectory that connects individuals' past, present, and future. They extended the idea of community of practice and identity to the

possibilities and development potential at the individual level as well as organizational level. This perspective is based on identity formation as a process of the mutual constitution of community and individuals.

In addition, Wenger (1991) posited the idea of the individual as learning by participation in the social world. In his work on identity and community of practice, Wenger claimed that communities of practice are informal and pervasive, and enhance individuals' learning experiences through a process that directly influences their identity. Wenger (1998) introduced the idea of a relationship between community of practice and of learning and identity with four components: meaning, practice, community, and identity.

Wenger (1998) posited that learning and development should be seen as an integral part of participating in a community of practice. These processes cannot be separated from practice, community, and meaning. Identity formation thus becomes a process based in the mutual constitution of the community and individuals. He proposed five characteristics of identities being negotiated experience, established in the membership of the community, connected to learning trajectory, reconciling memberships of different communities, and a relationship between the local and global. Wenger added that identity provides individuals three modes of belonging to a community such as engagement, imagination, and alignment. Engagement is direct involvement in mutual processes of negotiation of meaning. Imagination is the process by which images of the world are created and connections through time and space are made by extrapolating from one's own experience. It refers to an ability to connect experiences and the future to more global ideas that are not directly connected to local engagement. Alignment refers to the coordination of current energy to fit broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises. This notion denotes how individuals incorporate and negotiate the past and the future

in the present. The enculturation process is affected by past experiences, the present, and an imagined future as well as by the construction of the connection between those dimensions. I am hoping with my study to provide a clearer understanding of this particular reflective identity formation by investigating professional identity development.

Further, Moje and Lewis (2007) explained learning as situated participation not only within synchronous groups but also in ideational discourse communities that surpass time and space, and share various ways and forms of knowledge. According to the view of identity development as an enculturating learning process, identity can be shaped by not only face-to-face interactions but also formed by the discourse community in which the individual is participating. These perspectives provide a view of learning as an enculturation process that links to identity formation. As learning makes change, individuals' identity is constantly changing, and this changing process can be tacit and incidental as well as conscious and intentional.

In sum, I have presented how the literature has conceptualized different perspectives and theoretical frameworks such as identity as individual construction and identity as a process of enculturation by an individual through social and discursal interactions (Baxter, 2004; Gee, 1996; Moje & Luke, 2009). Identity, and its formation, is both an individual constructive process as sense of self, mind, consciousness, and from nature, as well as formed from the influence of an outside world as individual difference, position, institution, discourse, narrative, and affinity. Furthermore, identity processes contribute to individual life satisfaction, motivation, cognitive learning process, learning, and even job performance (Deci & Ryan, 1990; Marcia, 1966; Markus, 1977; Moje & Lewis, 2007, Oyserman & Destin, 2010).

## **Professional Identity Construction**

*Professional identity* can be defined as an individual's self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, specialized experiences, skills, and education associated with his/her work or professional career (Ibarra, 1999). Brott and Myers (1999) addressed that professional identity is the result of a developmental process that leads individuals to understand, practice, and participate in their profession. In conjunction with one's own self-concept, a professional identity allows a person to articulate a discipline-specific philosophy and to associate appropriately with others within or outside the discipline.

Research supports the claim that formation of a professional identity can be enhanced in two major ways. First, professional identity can be developed through a socialization process (Hall, 1987). For example, when individuals participate in meetings or conferences that relate to their professional field, they acquire related information that influence their own identity. Second, Schein (1978) suggested that individuals' priorities and self-understanding are influenced by their work and personal experiences. Professional identity can be acquired by discipline-related experiences. These experiences give power of agency, that is, they help individuals change their circumstances in the social structure formed by others. Both agency and structure contribute to one's construction of identities (Layder, 1994). Because of the multiplicity and fluidity of identity, professional training contributes to identity development.

In the next sections, the relationship between professional identity and human agency and the view of professional identity from a disciplinary perspective are discussed. In addition, a specific example of professional identity development is introduced, that of counseling graduate education. The latter has received a substantial amount of interest in the literature.

*Professional identity and human agency.* Several researchers claimed that human agency may be an essential element of identity development. In Wenger's (1998) view, the essence of identity is agency. The concept of human agency originates in the work of Marx (1845) who referred to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choice, whereas *structure* refers to those factors (such as social class, but also religion, gender, ethnicity, and subculture) that seem to limit or constrain the opportunities that individuals have. In addition, Bandura (1989) introduced four properties of human agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. *Intentionality of human agency* means individuals pursue actions based on their own interest, and they create action plans. Bandura claimed that human agency is different from free will because agency refers to the autonomy to make constructive contributions to the structures created by other agents. He added that *forethought of human agency* refers to how individuals visualize future goals and anticipate outcomes. *Self-reactiveness* refers to how individuals react to circumstances and environments. Lastly, *self-reflectiveness* refers to how individuals have their own meta-cognitive system with which to evaluate what they are doing.

These concepts are founded in social cognitive theory, which is also the ground for efficacy beliefs posited by Bandura (1989). In his view, there are three modes of human agency: personal agency, proxy agency, and collective agency. *Personal agency* is the capacity of individuals to make decisions independently and to contribute to the social structure to which they belong such as organizations, religion, and ethnicity. *Proxy agency* refers to situations when individuals do not possess the power to make impact on the structure, and yet, they would like to convey their voice through those who do have power. Lastly, *collective agency* is agency coming from a group of individuals. According to Atewologun and Singh (2010), professional identity

has a higher salient rank than other identities such as gender and ethnic identities because professional identity contains the agency with associated power to protect the self. In other words, when individuals negotiate to choose to reflect an identity among several different identities (e.g., gender, race, and professional identity) in a certain situation, their professional identity is likely to rise to the forefront because it takes on a stronger position through identity negotiation.

*Professional identity from a disciplinary perspective.* Identity development can be seen as the process of enculturation by specific disciplinary practices (Cross & Strauss, 2003; Moje, 2004b; Wenger, 1998). In this section, I describe work on professional identity development as a disciplinary practice and the enculturation process into specific professional fields.

Wenger (1981) posited that identity formation is significantly influenced by disciplinary practices. He claimed that when individuals are joining a community of practice, as they try to acquire the core disciplinary skills, they develop a new identity. He added that in order for this process to happen, individuals must gain permission to participate in the community of practice. This is called *legitimate peripheral participation*. Once individuals enter a community of practice, their enculturation begins and is speeded up when compared to remaining on the outside of the community boundaries. Professional identity development occurs as a process of legitimate peripheral participation, contributing to individuals' core identity and adding a professional identity to other identities that the individual has acquired such as gender, ethnicity, and religious identities.

For example, there is a line of research on professional identity development in the area of counseling psychology. Investigating professional identity development is especially important in the field of counseling psychology or any other healthcare field because individuals

possibly will make critical decisions for their patients, and their decisions about clients/patients are influenced by their professional identity (Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010).

In the field of counseling psychology, professional identity development is defined as the progressive commitment to the counseling profession and the solidifying of individuals' identity with the profession (Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014). The process of professional identity development is grounded in the successful integration of personal attributes, including values and beliefs, and professional training in the context of a professional community. In addition, several researchers in the field approach professional identity development as the integration of the professional self and personal self (Healey et al., 2010, Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003).

Several factors that may influence professional counselor identity development have been introduced. First, individuals must establish a clear foundation and construct a professional philosophy as counselors that clarifies and distinguishes the counseling profession from other vocations (Healey & Hays, 2012). Moss et al. (2014) identified client experiences as significant to the progression in counselors' professional identity development across the career lifespan. In addition, these researchers reported that external validation of counselors' professional identity come from experienced guides and from clients. As counselors received external validation from an experienced guide or a client and gained additional knowledge, they were able to enhance their professional identity. For the novice counselor, learning new techniques, taking classes, or making a change in one's counseling approach were also significant contribution to developing professional identity. As counselors progress in their career, experiences of success or failure will be another factor to build their professional identity along with positive feedback (Ronnestad & Skovhlot, 2003).



Moss et al. (2014) reported that belonging to the professional community includes joining professional organizations, licensing boards, and credentialing bodies, and accrediting agencies enhance counselors' professional identity. They stressed that participating in professional organizations provides learning experiences about the culture of the counseling profession to counselors that advance their professional identity.

Coll, Doumans, Trotter, and Freeman (2013) mentioned that for beginning counselors, specific counseling classes during their graduate school influence the progress of professional identity development. Gibson et al. (2010) explained that new counselors relied on external references such as textbooks and other colleagues for understanding their own professional identity as counselors, whereas advanced counselors incorporated more personal attributes into their professional identity.

Lastly, Healey and Hays (2012) reported that self-efficacy was highly associated with individuals' own perceptions as counselors and engagement in the counseling profession. In other words, as I addressed earlier in the sections on agency power and professional identity, individuals' professional discipline-specific competency and level of engagement with the profession is related to their professional identity (Bandura, 1989). In the field of counseling psychology, engagement means professional activities such as seeing clients, publishing in the field, attending conferences, and obtaining licensure.

Thus, professional identity development is a lifelong process. As counselors gain awareness of this process, they can be more effective and experience greater job satisfaction (Moss et al., 2014). Novice counselors who have not developed their professional identity may think of counseling as something separate from other aspects of their lives. Moss et al. found that novice counselors wanted to keep their professional and personal lives separate in order to have

balance whereas expert counselors merged their professional and personal selves to create a congruent self in which life experiences and professional experiences were both balanced and valued. However, expert counselors were aware of their limitations and experienced freedom in knowing their limitations. In other words, as professional counselors move along in their career, their professional identity and commitment to the profession move from an external to an internal locus of evaluation, and from a reliance on experts to reliance on their own experience and training, including their professional development over a lifetime (Healey & Hays, 2012).

Even if these studies are not rooted in the foundational identity construct, many aspects are aligned with the framework of identity development. Literatures on professional identity development in the field of counseling psychology provided a clear view of professional identity development. In addition, the emphasis on the relationship between self-efficacy and professional identity development is also found in several studies (Healey et al., 2010, Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003).

### **Professional Identity Construction in Graduate Programs**

Among different professional areas, graduate programs have special characteristics for an investigation of professional identity development due to the diverse multidisciplinary environments, the significance of social influences, and the requirement of certain skill sets before students may graduate and work in the field (Ducheny, Alletzhauer, Crandell, & Schneider, 1997).

For these reasons, some professional identity development researchers have given attention to this participant group. Ducheny and colleagues (1997) suggested that graduate student professional identity development typically includes three primary elements: (a) the importance of continuing training and familiarity with relevant research, which is the most

commonly mentioned component of professional development, (b) the influence of a supportive peer group or mentor, and (c) the organization of professional development into stages articulated by formative events and level of training. For example, most doctoral students go through a qualifying process, a dissertation stage, and a job searching process. These stages can be explained as a progression of professional development through a series of stages that contain significant task completion requirements or critical, identity-relevant events. In addition, individuals' beliefs, values, areas of interest, and their professional and personal needs are essential components of professional development as graduate students (Miller, 1992).

Gazzola, Stefano, Audet, and Theriault (2011) investigated what experiences and conditions do counseling psychology doctoral students perceive as contributing to their professional identities. The results showed that experiencing negative views of the profession, disappointment with institutional training, and internal conflicts such as worry about completing their graduate program hindered students' identity development. By contrast, positive experiences with clients during clinical training and achievements in the program crystallized their views of their professional selves. The results also showed that institutional training was the most significant element in cultivating their professional identities. Interestingly, participants had moments when they needed to adjust and balance between the personal self, and usually the new professional self and profession become a confident priority (Moss et al., 2014). In addition, their values and beliefs were mostly consistent with those traditionally adopted by the field of psychology. Such congruence may simply be the result of students choosing to join a program with careful consideration of whether they match well with institutional philosophy. Over time, their growing expertise signaled a shift from the role of student to someone with professional knowledge and expertise.

Similarly, Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann (2006) studied the role of work and professional identity development among medical residents. They reported that professional identity construction happens when the residents are acquiring work competence with different patterns of identification constructed by their specific medical professions. The study emphasized the importance of the relationship between "doing" and "being" among professionals. In other words, when residents faced a conflict between their work and professional identities, they rectified this violation by customizing who they were to match what they did. Furthermore, Kaplan and Flum (2012) claimed that academic learning cannot be divorced from students' development of their values, goals, social roles, and worldviews, when mode of knowledge construction and accessibility to different types of knowledge are rapidly increasing and diversifying. These authors synthesized previous work on professional identity and what affects its development. Additionally, they also highlighted how graduate students build their social roles, positions, and identities in the process of their professional training. They addressed the research question of whether a person adopting a new role in a new situation experiences constraints in his or her behavior by the expectations associated with the role of becoming a graduate student. Students' cognitive ability such as this decision-making showed evidence of being influenced by these expectations and the role enactments they elicited (Kaplan & Flum, 2012).

Additionally, Dean and Jolly (2009) studied identity construction and disengagement in learning situations. The study demonstrated that students sometimes rejected learning opportunities, experiencing disengagement from learning activities that challenged their identity. In other words, some learning activities can trigger elements of students' identities, forcing a

cognitive dissonance confrontation. Dean and Jolly (2012) argued that consideration of students' identity engagement will increase the benefits they gain from learning experiences.

In particular, fluency in the disciplines' discourse practices such as writing, reading, and communicating with colleagues is one of the main professional skills that graduate students should learn along with research design skills while they are in a graduate program. Writing as a tool to express insights to interpret data may reflect graduate students' emerging identity as a researcher, fueling their identity formation. Carter (2007) suggested that writing in one's discipline is different from writing out of discipline, and is affected by disciplinary practices through apprenticeship in the discipline's discourses. The distinction between inside and outside of a discipline reflects the difference in prior knowledge, which is an important source of identity. In other words, in the process of developing conceptual knowledge and procedural knowledge, students' professional identity develops. In addition, as it bridges the conceptual gap between knowing and doing, writing acts as a way to solidify students' domain knowledge and their professional identity in the discipline. Furthermore, the work on discipline-specific practices from Bazerman (1985) showed how individual purposes and prior knowledge affect the writing, thinking, and reading in the discipline. In Bazerman's study of physicists, professional purposes that represented their individual values and beliefs influenced their construction of meaning significantly as well as their writing practices. In addition, their prior experiences affected their comprehension and current decision-making as well. This study provided a new view of how professional identity can affect or be affected by specific disciplinary practices such as writing and reading. As well, previous experiences and domain specific knowledge can play an important role in forming or developing professional identity even as they affect individual

purposes and decision-making. Thus, disciplinary enculturation involves a change process, and this process can be explained as a learning process.

In addition, because most graduate programs are designed to train researchers who can conduct sophisticated research in the field within a few years, students undergo professional discipline training by participating in research teams or in professional conferences. Because students have to write about their studies whether it is for their dissertation or submission for journal articles, this process often happens with faculty advisors (Noll & Fox, 2003) In fact, in a few years of training, students must be able to acquire abilities to produce quality papers within their professional area. Over this period, students develop professional identity and identity is constructed and changing through these discourse practices (Burgess & Ivanic, 2010).

Burgess and Ivanic (2010) highlighted writing as an act of identity construction because when individuals write a particular type of text, they must use particular media, materials, resources, and particular discourse and generic features, in particular contexts. In addition, these authors suggested the importance of the relationship between timing and discourses, and identity development in timescales. In other words, identity continuously changes over time so that timing is central to processes of meaning-making in certain situations. Burgess and Ivanic's study presented an important aspect of writer identity development in the consideration of timescales, addressing the question of how identity is developed through acts of writing and reading and is consolidated over time. As mentioned above, a person's multifaceted identity is constructed through interactions with others and his/her socio-cultural context so that the resulting identity should be reflected in the writing, and the way in which the writer is able to convey a certain persona to readers.

Thus, writing is one of the key professional practices that graduate students must develop while in their program (Noll & Fox, 2003). Noll and Fox explained that beginning graduate students participate with faculty members or advanced graduate students on studies so that they can experience the nature of research and become co-authors. In this case, individuals express their collective values and ideas on the topic in their writings, and it becomes a significant contributor to identity construction in their graduate student life. For example, they learn to write project proposals, lab reports, grants, and various assignments in the form of written language (Carter, 2007). In order to write these various written products, graduate students must experience some decision making such as how to identify, define, and analyze issues, determine what information is appropriate to solving a problem, and then find the information, assess its authority and validity, and learn how to use it effectively.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, there is a significant amount of work that has been done on the construct of professional identity and its formation in different fields in the past decades. In addition, there have been some efforts to understand professional identity formation that involves professional enculturation and domain specific practices. Further, some researchers have worried about graduate studies in terms of impact on identity development. However, most studies approached the construct of professional identity development not from a fundamental understanding of the construct of identity construction. My study synthesizes the work on professional identity construction of graduate students and their development from a perspective of the literature on identity by answering questions about how graduate students construct their professional identity during their graduate program and what are the positive or negative influences on their building of their professional identity. This study will contribute to the literature on identity construction

and development by emphasizing the professional identity formation aspect through investigating how educational psychology graduate students build a new professional identity as researchers and practitioners.



## **The Study**

In this section, I describe a study that is based on the literature reviewed above with rationale for selecting a graduate program to investigate professional identity development as well as for using a longitudinal grounded qualitative research approach ending with research questions. I then describe the particular details of the study in terms of participants, procedure, and data analysis. In addition, I address trustworthiness issues as well as acknowledging limitations and possible biases. I end with a brief report on some preliminary findings.

### **Rationale for the Study**

This study is focused on the construction and development of professional identity. An educational psychology graduate program is selected for the study for several reasons. The particular program includes two practice-oriented areas, including one on counseling psychology, and two academic research-oriented areas including one on development and learning. This program highlights the importance of continuing training and familiarity with relevant research. It also encourages the influence of a supportive peer group and mentor-student relationships. The graduate program involves a cyclical set of experiences as an individual acquires new characteristics and develops discourse practices. Thus, this graduate program seemed appropriate for an investigation into professional identity development because students experience different disciplinary enculturation by stages as they become practitioners, researchers, and writers in their fields.

Beyond context, there are two rationales for this study: theoretical and methodological. In terms of the theoretical contribution of this study, after reviewing different perspectives on identity, I identified two reasons for investigating professional identity. First, I chose graduate students because graduate studies involves students in highly intensive professional training that

may cause more intensive identity growth as compared to other identities associated with gender roles, position of caretaker, or ethnicity. Second, I hypothesized that among many different identities that an individual possesses, their professional identity may be a core identity because it provides the person with position and agency power in a community of practice. This study of professional identity development may verify these ideas about agency and power.

The significance of acquisition of agency and position power that may create or enhance professional identity supports the need to investigate the process of acquisition of professional skills in a community of practice along with discourse practices to shed light on the mechanisms of identity formation and development in general. Identity research during professional training can contribute to an understanding of identity formation mechanisms because individuals must go through intensive identity construction processes in a short time period during professional training. Among many possible kinds of professional training, this study is focused on educational psychology graduate students based on the perspectives of the literature on identity and professional disciplinary practices.

The second rationale for this study comes from its methodological significance. This study focuses on developing a central phenomenon by finding a balanced interplay between systematic and constructive grounded theory approaches. Historically, most identity research has been done using quantitative methods that may have some limitations in capturing complex identity construction processes that usually occur across multiple events over extended time periods. Even if there have been some qualitative investigation of identity, data were collected generally through one time interviews, which also has limitations in an investigation of disciplinary development processes. For these reasons, this study is designed as a longitudinal grounded theory qualitative study. Data will come from different sources such as multiple

interviews over two to three years, peer testimonies, field observations from research meetings, social gatherings, conferences, and classroom observation, among multiple data sources.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

This study builds on a synthesis of the work on *professional identity development* among educational psychology graduate students and their development from the perspective of identity development and disciplinary discourse practices and socialization. I will be guided by the following questions: (1) How do graduate students construct professional identity during their graduate program? (2) What are the positive or negative influences on graduate students' building of their professional identity? (3) What is the role of disciplinary practices in developing professional identity?

### **Methodological Overview**

Major characteristics of a grounded theory will be incorporated. First, I will investigate identity construction processes by shadowing students in enculturation activities such as content classes, research meetings, social gatherings, and professional conference participation according to distinct stages that occur over time. For example, a grounded theory of professional identity development may show how graduate students are acquiring necessary skills over time, by specific resources, and by specific actions taken that enhance their identity as researchers (Creswell & Brown, 1992). In order to investigate these identity construction processes, a grounded theory approach seems appropriate to capture the detail and sequential unfolding of processes.

In addition, participants in this study will all have experienced many similar academic enculturation processes, and the development of a grounded theory on identity may help explain practices or provide a framework for further research into professional identity development.

Grounded theory will allow the construction and generation of a general explanation of identity development components, related actions, or social interactions shaped around a central phenomenon related to professional identity.

There are two different approaches to grounded theory: the *systematic* approach of Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) and the *constructivist* approach of Charmaz (2005, 2006).

Although most grounded theory studies have been done using the systematic approach, the newly developed constructivist approach offers some interesting supplements to the more classical approach. The systematic approach aims to develop a theory that explains process, actions, or interactions around an emerging central phenomenon, identity construction in my case. For this approach, a researcher collects data by conducting interviews and then forms codes and categories with more data added until no more categories are needed. Each category represents a unit of information composed of events, phenomena, and incidents (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

For this grounded theory approach, participant interviews are theoretically selected for sampling and are coded for categories in order to conduct a constant comparative method of data analysis. Major categories of information are constructed by two coding processes, *open coding* and *axial coding*. The process needs to be conducted by going back to the original data a few times to construct conditions and to identify a central phenomenon. In this study, the core phenomenon is likely to be professional identity development, and the conditions are likely to include details about the social environment and disciplinary practices that enhance or hinder identity development.

In addition, in the systematic approach, strategies, contextual and intervening conditions, and consequences of the core phenomenon can be described as a result of this coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The next step is *selective coding* that develops and describes

propositions or hypotheses that connect different categories around the core phenomenon in order to develop a theoretical model (Creswell & Brown, 1992). In addition, Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested another step called a *conditional matrix*. A conditional matrix is helpful in order to see the interrelationships among the macro and micro conditions that influence the core phenomenon. For this study, a conditional matrix might reveal how moment-by-moment identity construction will eventually influence the macro concept of professional identity.

A second approach to grounded theory is the *constructivist grounded theory*, developed by Charmaz (2006). Constructivist grounded theory identifies a more flexible role for the researcher than the systematic approach. In this approach, the researcher requires a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences in order to detect and interpret subtle, embedded, hidden networks, situations, and relationships among participants. In other words, researchers should have a good understanding of the lives of their participants and should develop a closer relationship with individuals in order to analyze the data appropriately (Charmaz, 2006).

In this study, because I myself am going/went through similar identity development processes and will participate in informal social gathering even as I collect observational data, I will be able to capture and interpret data in the ways described by the constructivist approach. In addition, Charmaz (2006) emphasized that this approach is appropriate in order to develop a theory on the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals. For these various reasons, the methodology of this enculturation study will include both systematic and constructivist approaches to grounded theory.

### **Recruitment and Participants**

Educational psychology graduate students who are in different sub-programs, counseling psychology and human development, will be recruited by invitation and by flyers posted on

bulletin boards in the College of Education. I will systematically select participants who are at different stages of their academic progress. The first group is new graduate students who have just entered the graduate program. The second group includes students who are about to undergo or are going through their qualifying exams. The final group is graduate students who are in various states of the dissertation from proposal, to gathering data, analyzing data, writing the final version of the dissertation, and now anticipating the next step in their career. There will be at least three students at each stage from each of the two programs that I have selected in educational psychology.

When participants agree to participate in the study, an electronic version of the consent form will be given to them. When they arrive at the first interview session, two copies of the consent form will be provided. Participants will be told that they should read the form, that it is a consent form that describes their rights and responsibilities as participants in the study, that they may choose to withdraw from the study at any time simply by telling me, and that they should ask any question or express concerns about the study at this time. Once questions have been answered, the participants will be directed to sign the consent form before we proceed; the signed consent forms will be collected immediately, and participants will be told to keep the other copy for their records.

### **Program description**

*Counseling psychology program:* Unlike the academic areas in the educational psychology graduate program, the counseling psychology has two different goals for students partially represented by their self-chosen label of *scientist-practitioner*. First, students are prepared to become researchers who apply research to practice and contribute to psychological and educational knowledge through research. Second, students are trained to work as counseling

psychologists serving the educational, health and psychological needs of children, adolescents, and families. Both aspects of their training help students apply relevant legal and ethical principles, as well as cultural sensitivity and self-awareness, to their research, teaching, professional service, and practice. Because these students have to build two different professional skills sets, they tend to struggle when deciding their future path more than students in other educational psychology programs. However, most entering students arrive with some sort of relevant experience in related venues, and they often emphasize practice more than research.

The counseling psychology program is APA-accredited, with the American Psychological Association dictating many of the details of the students' training. The counseling psychology website introduces the rationale for the program as "striv[ing] to enhance the student's professional development through identification with Counseling Psychology as a professional specialty and incorporation of APA ethical principles and standards for practice." Interestingly, the website addresses professional development through identity.

There are several milestones for counseling psychology students. For example, students are required to take core classes before they can begin practicum experiences. They must also fulfill a specialized competency requirement, defined as a paper presentation at a national level conference or publication in a peer-reviewed journal (should be first or second authorship), a minimum of four semesters of practicum, participation in a supervision seminar, as well as successful completion of the qualifying process that includes a document, and written and oral exams. Students must successfully present a dissertation proposal in order to be allowed to apply for the one-year-long internship that is the final capstone of the program. The dissertation may be completed (data collection, data analysis, writing a document, presenting it to the committee, and

successfully completing a final defense oral exam) before, during, or after the internship is completed.

*Human development program:* The human development program's stated goal is that the area aims "to stimulate discussion, inquiry, and curiosity among faculty and students concerning a myriad of questions regarding psychology as applied to education at all levels" (program website). The students' primary goal is to develop an ability to design research and produce quality papers, while understanding theory and scholarship that will allow them to contribute to the field broadly conceived. Knowledge, skills, and abilities for working with human diversity are emphasized at all levels of training. Graduates of the area contribute to the field of educational psychology primarily through teaching and research. The contexts in which they work include educational institutions (primarily colleges and universities), k-12 school support agencies, educational research laboratories, and human service delivery organizations.

Milestones of the program include completion of coursework and a pre-doctoral research project, successfully completing the qualifying process that involves submission of a written document and written and oral exams. Finally, students should develop a dissertation proposal, present it to their committee at a proposal defense oral, submit their dissertation document to their committee, and successfully pass the final dissertation oral.

## **Procedures**

This study will involve a qualitative investigation of graduate students as they become immersed in the discipline they are studying. Data sources will consist of at least three sets of interviews, supplemented by observations during informal gatherings, research meetings, and classroom sessions. Initial interviews will not last longer than approximately 40 minutes and will be audio-taped and transcribed. These interviews will be guided by a set of questions regarding



the participant's life as a graduate student and retrospective reflections on their life before joining the graduate program. Questions will be open-ended and ask about their past and current experiences, and plans for the future.

Follow-up interviews will be scheduled at the students' convenience over the next two semesters. The follow-up interviews will last no longer than 45 minutes as well. The questions for the follow-up interviews will be derived from the first interview. These interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed for data analysis. For any one participant, there will be at least two interviews that will last no more than two hours in total.

For the classroom and social gathering observation data, I will ask each participant to give me permission to be in the class he or she is taking, and I will participate in any formal or informal social gathering and/or research meeting, either with the advisor or with fellow students only. I will shadow the participants a few times to the degree that participants allow.

### **Data Sources and Analysis**

The primary forms of data will come from the interviews and the secondary data will come from field observations from social gatherings, research meetings, and classes. In addition, member checking and peer debriefing data will be added. Then the last interview will be conducted as a text-based interview in which I and the participant will take a look at an earlier (at least one year ago) writing project to see what the participant sees in his/her emerging disciplinary writing skill.

Data will be continuously compared and contrasted between the two different groups to develop categories and the core phenomenon. Axial coding and selective coding will be conducted for detailing additional and intersection of the categories. Data analysis may lead to a diagram of a model connecting different categories together by implicit meanings of each

category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Because of the nature of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) method, data analysis must be less structured and based on the emerging theory.

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

I am currently a graduate student, and the participants for this study are either my cohort fellow students or other graduate students in the same department. I have been taking classes with some of them, doing homework and class projects with them, and often talk with them about faculty members and departmental requirements. Sometimes, I have invited my peers to my place to have dinner. Some of them are my co-workers as assistant instructors, and we have regular group meeting regarding various student issues. For these reasons, I have already heard and know about their perspectives on certain experiences such as their advisors, the program, relationships with other students, and personal struggles and challenges.

Thus, I have to acknowledge that my previous information and relationships with potential participants may influence the interview process and color my interpretation of data. This researcher bias can be a factor when investigating the central phenomenon of identity formation. For these reasons, I know that I need to be very careful about what I hear and what I say to my friends and faculty members because it may unexpectedly affect relationships with them. I should remind myself that they are my friends before they are my participants, and that I am conducting this research to benefit not only my scholarly curiosity about identity development but also to help my fellow graduate students and faculty members by providing a better understanding of the enculturation process involved in graduate studies.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

Participants will be referred to by pseudonym. Participants will be informed at the initial phase while signing the consent form that I will interview them. I will also at that point let them

know that if they want to quit, they can quit at any time during the interview, or if they do not want to answer any interview question, they are free not to answer. The audio files and observation notes will be kept on a secure laptop, and files will be downloaded to a password secured external hard drive.

The audio recordings will be labeled by pseudonyms. The data will be stored and locked inside my home office. All identifying names will be stripped from the data, and transcripts will immediately incorporate pseudonyms rather than the participants' own names. The audio files will be reviewed, transcribed, and analyzed only by me, and they will be kept for three years. Consent forms will be also securely stored in my office, separated from transcripts of the audio files, and kept for three years after the study is finished.

### **Trustworthiness Issues**

For this study, the strategies provided by Strauss and Corbin (1998) will be carefully observed. Specific strategies to respect trustworthiness of the data interpretation are discussed below. As in any qualitative research, there are several features that give validity and reliability to assure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data. Maxwell (1992) provided five categories of trustworthiness in qualitative research: descriptive validity, interpretive validity (what facts mean to participants), theoretical validity (consistency of concepts and relationships), evaluative validity (researcher's interpretation), and generalizability (meaning the extension of research from the study population to other settings and populations). In addition, Strauss and Corbin (1998) provided four areas for evaluating grounded theory research. First, are the data valid, reliable, and credible? Second, are the constructs credible? Third, is the process through which the theory was generated valid? Lastly, are the results, a generated theory, grounded in data? For this study, the first form of trustworthiness will come from member checking with participants.

After an initial interview or observation, I will check whether my coding and understanding about the participant's retrospective experiences, comments, and behaviors are in line with his/her own views. Relatedly, a second form of trustworthiness will come from having more than one data source to address the research questions. I will check whether the responses from the initial interview and follow-up questions after one or two semesters make sense together. I will participate in some social gatherings, research meetings, and classes to collect observational data. In addition, I will review participants' writing work such as proposals, conference papers, and journal manuscripts, and I will analyze their interview comments about this writing to verify my interpretation of their experience in academic writing. These data sources will allow for a thorough triangulation of the core phenomenon.

A third source of trustworthiness will come from checking and double checking codes and interpretations as I make several passes through the data. For early coding sessions, I will review raw data thoroughly to identify a central phenomenon, and after certain time interval from the early coding, I will begin to identify emerging themes around the central phenomenon. For the second data analysis, I will code and re-code particular participants so see if my initial coding and second coding match.

As I stated in an earlier section, the grounded theory approach was chosen for this project because of the philosophical and methodological fit for research on professional identity development. The characteristic and significance of using grounded theory methods regard to the generation of new theory. As Corbin and Strauss (1990) described, this approach involves simultaneous data collection and analysis, using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify categories, concepts, themes, and the relationships among them. Credibility of the

resulting theory will be supported through procedural rigor, field notes, memos, and member checking process.

### **Limitations**

As with any study, this one has limitations, with three that are relatively more important:

(a) limitations coming from restrictions on the sample; (b) limitations due to restrictions on my resources; and (c) limitations arising from the fact that I am a fellow student to the participants.

First, because participants are recruited from one disciplinary field, results need to be applied and generalized with caution, as the process of professional identity formation may differ to different degrees in different disciplinary practices such as engineering, performing arts, and liberal studies. Second, because this study is a graduate student independent project, I face limitations of time, ability, and energy for one person to conduct interviews, participate in social gatherings, transcribe interview data, and analyze data by myself. It is ideal to verify data coding with other researchers; however, I will be limited in this case.

Finally, a certain degree of researcher bias can be another limitation for this study. As I mentioned in the section on researcher subjectivity, interpretations of participants' experiences may be colored by perspectives that I have built from interacting with them as a friend. In addition, because the main data source is from interviews, participants' mood on certain topics at that moment may influence what they tell me. For example, if a student is having a bad day, it may affect his/her testimonies about other aspects during the interview.

## **Pilot Study**

Nine educational psychology graduate students representing different stages of their academic program were selected. Three students were just entering their graduate programs in the fall of 2013. A second group of participants ( $n = 5$ ) were about to undergo their qualifying exam in the spring of 2014. The final group ( $n = 5$ ) was represented by graduate students who had finished their proposal process, and who were gathering data, analyzing data, writing the final version of the dissertation, and anticipating the next step in their career.

Several categories of influence on graduate students' development of a professional identity and disciplinary discourse practices emerged. These categories worked together both to facilitate and challenge the student's progress toward professional disciplinary development.

### *Social Relationships*

All participants testified that social relationships were key for success in a graduate student's life. These included relationships with same-year peers in the program, other newer or more advanced students, students from different subprograms, the advisor, other individuals in the field, and family members. I observed, and students reported, that they often socialized with each other, simply to relax but also to obtain information regarding program and professional milestones. For example, Sean (fourth-year) stated that it was not possible to have come this far without his fellow students' support because "others always know what I don't know." Sandy (third year) saw social relationships as built from attending professional conferences.

In addition, participants were unanimous in mentioning that the relationship with their advisor was an important factor, although not all saw it as positive or as central. For example, Eunyoung (fourth year) had a great relationship with her advisor. She appreciated that her advisor had introduced her to famous researchers and helped her improve her writing skills

dramatically. By contrast, Sean had undergone some emotionally difficult times because his research interests did not match his adviser's. He had decided to move to a different university midway through his program, a move he knew would add several years before graduating. When students' research interests matched their advisers', socialization processes involving learning content and improving discourse practices (proposal writing, designing research) seemed smooth. They saw their advisors as role models through whom they could envision the field and themselves in the field. However, if students struggled with their advisers in some way, the relationship seemed to hinder the professional identity development process.

Lastly, all graduate students who had spouses or children mentioned that having a family affected their graduate student life tremendously. They reported facing many decision points when family responsibilities and school schedules conflicted, so that the management and balancing between two different roles presented physical and emotional challenges. These participants addressed that they "never had enough time" to socialize with other students and often struggled when trying to collaborate on research projects. Sam mentioned that when he did not have enough time to prepare for class because his two-year-old daughter was sick, he felt "really horrible," afraid that he would fail the course and afraid he was being uncaring as a father.

#### *Coursework and Research Projects*

All participants mentioned that their coursework was a main source of content knowledge and skills in the field. Four students mentioned that content knowledge contributed to building their identity as researchers in the discipline. The students mentioned three different types of coursework in their programs: core content courses, research methodology courses, and skills-based practicum courses. For example, Cody (first year) did not have much background related

to educational research, and one of the first classes he took, “Psychology of Learning,” provided background information as well as assignments that helped him improve his academic writing. Eunyoung reported that statistic classes were very helpful because she did not know much about research methodology. She also described how class projects forced her to work on her writing skills, and when she read research articles, she paid attention to the style of writing. Third-year student Kurt mentioned that he had acquired information in the field through his cohort and felt most like a researcher when talking to peers about research topics and projects. Most third and fourth-year students reported that they acquired hands-on experience about methodology skills and theoretical constructs by writing conference proposals and publications.

### *Previous Work Experience*

One of the significant influences on participants’ identity development was whether they had worked professionally before beginning graduate school. The first group included students who had previous work experience that related to their program and the second group had no such related experiences. Students with previous work experience commonly testified that they had a difficult time accepting the role of student again. Sean said that it was very difficult “to put his head down to someone” again. Also, students who had work experience usually had a better grasp of the program; at the same time, they had more expectations about the program. When their expectations were not met, they tended to struggle even more than students who had no previous job experience. Students who had previous work experience usually could find research interests faster than other students could, but if their interest did not match their advisor’s then problems ensued.

### *Challenges and Corresponding Emotions*



Students reported different kinds of negative emotions associated with challenges they encountered as they progressed in their program. Most challenges lasted more than a year. Even the task of choosing an advisor was fraught with worry about whether one would find an advisor, the advisor would be interested in one's incipient interests, the advisor would have a working style that matched the student's, and so on.

## **Conclusion and Study Significance**

Graduate students are involved in an identity project of professional identity development. I anticipate that their experiences such as previous jobs or education, and social relationships, both academic and personal, coursework, and research and writing projects will play key roles in professional identity development. I also expect to find the process to be emotionally taxing to different degrees and will always require the (re)shaping of new discourse practices and identity work.

## Program Evaluation Addendum

### Description of the program

This project is a longitudinal qualitative evaluation plan of a school psychology graduate program in large department of educational psychology in a southwestern U.S. university. This evaluation project will be a value-oriented evaluation, with some aspects of decision-oriented evaluation that relate to school psychology students' self-regulation skills as a first order outcome and their professional identity development as a second order outcome.

Dollarhide and colleagues (2009) introduced several factors associated with graduate students' professional identity development, including their disciplinary skills development; development of professional values, beliefs, and philosophy; professional socialization; and the development of self-regulation skills. They claimed that all these requirements are essential to the development of graduate students' professional identity.

Dollarhide et al. (2009) explained that graduate school is a place in which individuals acquire professional skills as well as appropriate dispositions to be professionals in their field. They added that self-regulation skills are mandatory, such that graduate students should already have or must acquire better self-regulation skills along the way in order to complete their program. Schunk and Zimmerman (1994) explained self-regulated learning as self-directed cognitive and behavioral learning processes that include goal-setting strategies, metacognitive self-reflection, and motivation. Another self-regulation researcher, Weinstein (1978) claimed that it is necessary to have "self" knowledge in order to be a self-regulated learner. She explained *self knowledge* as understanding one's own preferences in a learning environment, physical limitations of the self, and own values and goals so that appropriate goals can be set for the future. Second, Weinstein addressed the importance of understanding one's socio-cultural

environment, meaning that one is aware of one's different roles from other parts of life and of stakeholders in one's personal and academic life. She claimed that one's goal setting and motivation are highly related to the social context. Weinstein (1978)'s explanation is very appropriate to understanding graduate life that requires a student to play multiple roles, including working as a TA, GRA, and AI, as a member of research teams, and as a learner, not to mention roles outside of academia such as being a parent. Graduate students should be aware of the multiple roles they need to handle and should make appropriate commitments according to their values and ability.

Moss and Gibson (2009) also explained the importance of self-regulation for graduate students' development of their professional identity. In addition, Morita (2004) mentioned that graduate training provides opportunities to students to be ready to join a disciplinary community by acquiring content knowledge, positioning in disciplinary discussions, as well as self-regulation. Further, Duff (1998) addressed that professional socialization and participation in the community are important components of development of professional identity. This claim is aligned with Bandura's (2006) social context as an important factor of self-regulation. In other words, graduate students need to build professional relationships with others, and their social and self-regulation skills are continuously enhanced by their participation to the community of practice.

The second order outcome that I would like to look at is graduate students' professional identity development, where *professional identity* is defined as an individual's self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, specialized experiences, skills, and education associated with his/her work or professional career (Ibarra, 1999). Professional identity is associated with individuals' competence in professional disciplinary practices including counseling skills,

researcher design skills, and discourse skills, development of values and beliefs, and socialization within the discipline domain (Moss & Gibson, 2011).

Brott and Myers (1999) claimed that professional identity is the result of a developmental process that leads individuals to understand, practice, and participate in their profession. In conjunction with one's own self-concept, a professional identity allows a person to articulate a discipline-specific philosophy and to associate appropriately with others within or outside the discipline. In sum, it is possible to claim that self-regulation skills and development of professional identity have important interconnections.

### **Narrative Overview of the Program**

The main purpose of the program evaluation is to evaluate a school psychology program in terms of how well it fosters graduate students' professional identity development and self-regulation strategies/skills. According to official objectives of the program, the expected outcome includes professional assessment and counseling skills as well as a professional commitment to develop one's professional identity. Further, school psychology graduate students are annually evaluated by faculty members of their program on certain categories including performance in coursework, research, and practicum experiences. The program website states that students are required to possess/acquire certain attributes in order to be successful in the program: professional skills, mental and emotional abilities, professional performance skills, and scholastic performance. However, there are no clear training criteria regarding how a student might acquire these mental attributes and self-regulation skills. Further, these attributes and skills are likely to be foundational to fulfilling the program's objectives.

In addition, the program's website states the following goals:

The program requires students to demonstrate a strong commitment to the goals of the school psychology program and the ethical standards of the counseling profession, as specified in the APA Code of Ethics. Students are required to show a commitment to the essential values of the school psychology program that include respect for the dignity and worth of every individual and his/her right to a just share of society's social justice. In addition, students should exhibit conducts that are in compliance with program requirements, institutional policies, professional ethical standards, and societal laws in classroom, and community.

There are several units of activities in this program such as coursework (content area, methodology, and practicum), research, and clinical practicum. Further, doctoral students need to complete a qualifying process, dissertation, and job searching process successfully. These stages can be explained as milestones of the program and as representing a progression of professional development.

*Program stakeholders and participants in the program evaluation.* Stakeholders in the program are graduate students, faculty members, and practicum supervisors. In this project, approximately twenty school psychology graduate students will be interviewed.

*Constraints on the program.* There are two main constraints in this program evaluation. First, *participant constraints* refers to graduate students' background and experiences related to the domain, values associated with school psychology, individual interpersonal skills, motivation, ways to deal with role conflicts between school and personal life, self-regulation skills, and relationship issues with service providers.

Second, there are organizational systemic constraints that come from human service delivery individuals' motivation and skills. In other words, faculty members, and practicum

supervisors' desire and ability to guide students and their experiences in the field act as constraints on the program as well.

### **Natural Language Questions and Data Analysis Procedures**

In terms of what are the *first natural language* questions, the following questions come to mind: How graduate students develop their self-regulation skills and professional identity during their graduate program? What kinds of units of activity contribute to students' self-regulation strategy development?

- a. Constructs to be pursued and assessed: students' self-regulation skills and their professional identity.
- b. Sample questions used to assess these constructs (influenced by and adapted from Gibson et al., 2010):
  1. What kinds of activities in the graduate program helped you to improve your professional skills?
  2. What kinds of factors (environment or persons) influenced you to see yourself as a professional in your field?
  3. Did you notice any changes within you while going through graduate school?
  4. What do you think about the importance of self-regulation skills to be a professional psychologist? Where are you in your own acquisition of self-regulation strategies?
  5. How does your professional training influence your personal attributes?
- c. Data Analysis  

Qualitative grounded theory methodology (see previous section for more details of how I intend to conduct data analysis).

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