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COUNSELORS DUMBFOUNDED:
IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING ETHICS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Iván Emmanuel Irizarry, III

December 2021

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Ivan Irizarry

2021

COUNSELORS DUMBFOUNDED:
IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING ETHICS

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ABSTRACT

COUNSELORS DUMBFUNDED:
IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING ETHICS

By

Ivan Irizarry

December 2021

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Matthew Joseph

How counselors *should* make ethical decisions frequently differs from how counselors *actually* make ethical decisions, which is often a non-linear process. Social Intuitionist Theory (Haidt, 2003) suggests this process entails a socially influenced intuitive judgment followed by post hoc rationale. The purpose of this study was to examine whether moral dumbfounding, which entails maintaining a moral judgment without supporting reason, occurs with practicing counselors. The results of survey data and open-ended coding showed that 58.5% of counselors were dumbfounded at least once when presented with four moral or ethical vignettes. Additional analyses exploring differences in dilemma-based vs. non-counseling vignettes, moral vs. ethical framing of dilemmas, and the potential moderating role of need for cognition were non-significant. The presence of moral dumbfounding among practicing counseling has implications for counselor education, ethical decision-making models, counseling philosophy, and future research.

Keywords: Ethical decision making, counseling ethics, moral dumbfounding, ethical dilemma, social intuitionism

DEDICATION

I wish to thank God, my mother, and my father for everything.

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Chapter 1: Overview

The American Counseling Association (ACA) has put forward their ACA Code of Ethics to guide what is acceptable behavior for counselors and counselor educators (ACA, 2014). Occasionally in counseling practice, situations arise where the ethical choice is not clearly resolved by the code, and counseling principles are placed in conflict. When these ethical dilemmas occur, the ACA recommends using an ethical decision-making model (EDM) and offers one such decision-making model on their website to resolve such conflicts (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016). It is not the only model that has been developed for guiding decision making amid ethical dilemmas; but, while it is the only one on the website, the ACA refrained from endorsing a single model to protect counselors using other models from legal prosecution (Martz & Kaplan, 2014). The Forester-Miller and Davis (2016) model is intended for counselors to use when making ethical decisions, and states that the counselor will be able to give a professional explanation for the chosen course of action. However, this model does not guarantee a resolution for the issue and does not per se ensure a single correct ethical choice. This is because research shows different individuals come to different conclusions; or at the very least, experienced counselors may struggle to find clear solutions (Levitt et al., 2015). In part, this is because ethical codes offer contradictory or ambiguous guidelines for action (Kitchener, 1984). The recommendation in such dilemmas is appealing to the underlying principles. However, what determines the difference in how these principles are employed is not clear. There is limited research on how ethical decisions in counseling practice are actually made in real-world situations (Levitt et al., 2015). The process of how a therapist comes to some of the most

important decisions in counseling has not been addressed proportionally to its importance, and so how these judgments are made remains poorly understood.

The literature emphasizes theory or decision-making models, but does not often focus on how decisions are made by individuals (Burkholder et al., 2020). Decision-making models describe how ethical decision-making processes *should* be engaged, but this differs from how counselors *actually* make decisions about ethical issues (Burkholder et al., 2020). One of the two known published studies that examine moral reasoning of counselors found that counselors made decisions in a non-linear process based on four themes: personal values, client interests, transparency, and perceptions of formal training (Levitt et al., 2015). EDMs present linear steps to rationally process ethical dilemmas. Some EDMs do account for intuitive responses, but these are slightly different than the concept of intuition in moral psychology. Kitchener (1984) describes EDM intuition as an immediate pre-reflective response that is the basis for action. Kitchener explains that this intuition is followed with a critical evaluative process before taking an action. Yet researchers believe individuals vary in their ability to override their intuitions (Haidt et al., 1994; Weaver et al., 2014). There are considerable differences in individual traits and cultures that suggest not all individuals override their initial judgment (Young & Saxe, 2011). Research that argues intuitions are overridden acknowledges significant individual variation in the ability to do so (Feinberg et al., 2012). Moral identity and political affiliation also differ in disgust reactions to moral content, suggesting cultural differences in overriding responses (Inbar et al., 2009). It is not clear that all individuals are able to override intuition with rational deliberation. Also, there is some evidence to suggest that deliberative decision-making increases unethical behavior (Zhong, 2011). There is no guarantee that critical evaluative rational processes achieve ethical aims. Time and encouragement for deliberation may provide the

opportunity to engage in creative justification or to form an excuse for unethical behavior (Gino & Ariely, 2012). Current available evidence suggests that these EDMs are not consistently followed or used, even if counselors are properly trained (Levitt et al., 2015).

Training in ethics is not always consistent but is universally accepted as important (Burkholder et al., 2020). Training in ethics is prescriptive, focused primarily on protecting the profession, and based on expert consensus of content—though there is some debate about the best means to deliver the content (ACA, 2014; Burkholder et al. 2020; Kitchener, 1984). There is considerably more attention paid to the descriptive process of moral reasoning in the moral psychology literature. Some theories imply an intuitive basis for ethical decisions, leading to post hoc explanations, and so presents some interesting points of tension with the assumptions of the ACA’s EDM and Code of Ethics (Haidt, 2001).

Theories in moral psychology suggest biased or intuitive decision-making occurs (Haidt, 2003). The decision is unconscious, maintained independent of conscious reasoning as the decision, and leads to post hoc rationalization. Social intuitionism theorizes that a decision is made due to an intuitive emotional response, like Kitchener’s (1984) pre-reflective response, but then reason is used to support the emotion and action, not necessarily as a critical evaluation to determine the action. As a result, counseling’s EDM can appear to beg the question, assuming that decisions are rationally processed in steps rather than reason being applied to create justifications for an intuition.

It should be noted that there are EDMs more consistent with social intuitionism such as those found by Remley and Herlihy (2010). They list “tuning in to your emotions” as a third step, rather than the initial response, consultation as a fourth, and reasoning is included in several steps. However, Forrester-Miller and Davis (2016) did not list attending to emotions or intuitive

responses in the common themes they found. Rather it is assumed intuitions are checked and evaluated rationally in the supporting literature. Furthermore, Cottone and Claus (2000) listed nine EDMs: None featured tuning into emotions, and many did not include consultation or supervision.

There are several reasons why EDMs struggle to capture the relationship between intuition and reason for moral or ethical judgment. First, the counseling EDMs and substantial portions of counseling ethics assume a reasoned decision based on deontological-like (i.e., law-like) rules, assessing if the action conforms or does not conform to the standard (Beauchamp & Childress, 2012; Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016). It is hard to see how this is avoided; a code of ethics needs standards which can either be met, exceeded, or identifiably unachieved. This deontological basis is stated in the several sources for the EDM presented by Forester-Miller and Davis (2016) provided on the ACA website. Additionally, counseling and medical ethics are heavily influenced by deontology, a school of moral philosophy in which right action is determined by law-like universal rules (Childress, 1989). However, both of the dominant processing models in moral psychology, social intuitionism and dual process (a model which proposes people take moral positions after processing moral information through two pathways, one more law-like and the other more calculated), indicate that deontological-like conclusions are only one possibility, potentially biased, and can be manipulated (Guglielmo, 2015). The reasoned decision might simply be a justification of prior emotional responses. That is, *the counseling model makes assumptions that may not fit with how human beings make actual decisions of this nature*. It would be important to know if the underlying process for moral decisions is like how counselors make ethical decisions. Is the process like social intuitionist theory or dual process models? If social intuitionist theory is true, it requires adjustments in areas

such as model-making, supervision, and gatekeeping, to ensure ethical practice. It is possible that inappropriate understandings of emotional responses and social processes could lead to poor ethical choices.

Counseling philosophy also takes on a different tone with the contributions from moral psychology. Instead of counseling subscribing to the social constructionist philosophical orientation, in that truth is socially constructed, social constructionism may be more of a description of a social process from which ethics are derived and enforced in a social group (Cottone, 2001; Hansen, 2005). Ethical rationale may be a socially acceptable justification of an emotional response common to a specialized group. With the perspective and contributions of moral psychology, ethics can be framed as a natural process of a specialized social group. This means it is susceptible to groupthink and confirmation bias, rather than a guarantee of ethical behavior. This is not to say that counseling ethics have no value, or are necessarily problematic, but rather that they rest on assumptions that may not fit with current research in moral psychology and can be susceptible to unexpected influences and feedback loops. The present study explores this possibility.

There are numerous potential practical implications if the assumptions are unsupported. For example, what does supervision mean regarding ethics if the process of evaluating ethical practice involves whether or not the supervisee can persuade the supervisor, or the group of counselors, that an emotionally based decision was ethical? What implications does this process have for counselors and counselor educators? To begin answering these questions, it is important to see if observations from moral psychology—in particular, a phenomenon known as moral dumbfounding, in which a moral judgment is made without supporting reason (McHugh et al., 2017)—are present in counselors' ethical decision making.

Statement of the Problem

What is the role of emotion and intuition in mental health counselor's ethical decision-making? Do counselors engage in post hoc justification, make decisions due to emotional responses, or do they reason from the profession's core values? There is a question of how ethics and morals apply to counseling decisions. Are morals and ethics viewed as the same? Philosophy does not necessarily make a distinction between the two (Parry, 2014). The counseling literature appeals to forms of moral philosophy when providing rationale or decision-making models (Beauchamp & Childress, 2012; Haidt, 2001; Maxwell, 2010). How might the moral psychology literature apply to discussions of counseling ethics?

Counseling ethics assumes a deontological, cognitive, and rationalist model (Beauchamp & Childress, 2012; Haidt, 2001; Maxwell, 2010). The influence of Piaget (1932/1965) and Kohlberg (1971) on moral development, along with historical trends in medical ethical philosophy, has led to certain assumptions about how ethical decisions are made and evaluated (Haidt, 2001). Piaget was largely focused on the development of children and had a heavy cognitive emphasis, examining how children reason as they grow. Kohlberg included deontology and consequentialism in his moral developmental stages and included cognitive aspects as well. This is distinct from earlier psychological theory, which assumed unconscious motivations whether they were due to behavioral reinforcement or psychodynamic forces. Additionally, the key ethical text in medicine is based on deontology, claiming a common morality (Beauchamp & Childress, 2012).

However, it is possible that ethical decisions are made based on emotions influenced by a social group (here, the social norms of the counseling profession) rather than reasoned out, as suggested by theories from moral psychology (Haidt, 2001). On the surface, this does not fit well

with the current understanding of ethics. It may be that the social group's values come into conflict with itself or the views of others, creating a dilemma and emotional response to guide the decision. The response is deemed "appropriate" by the social group if the justification is persuasive and creates minimal dissonance, not necessarily because the decision was ethical (though it may very well be an ethical decision). It may also imply that what is discussed by members of the social group may influence the emotional response more strongly than items that remain underdiscussed. This would then create a problem: Ethical issues that are taboo to discuss may lead to poor emotional responses and poor actions by counselors, which may be detrimental to the profession.

Purpose of the Study

The overarching purpose of the study is to better understand how ethical decisions are *actually* made by counselors. The specific purpose of this study was to see if dumbfounding occurs when counselors encounter an ethical dilemma. If this were shown to be the case, it would help shed light on whether ethical decisions are strictly reasoned from counseling ethics—as is assumed by the EDMs—or are instead, at least sometimes, based on socially biased intuitive judgments where reason is applied post hoc to justify the emotion (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016). If the findings of the present work suggest socially biased intuitive judgments are at play when counselors make ethical decisions, the potential practical implications for counselor education and supervision, as well as policy implications for the larger field of counseling, could be wide-reaching and perhaps even profound.

Statement of Potential Significance

Despite this potential for profound implications, radical changes in what practical end results look like—such as a fundamental change in counseling ethics or practice—are

paradoxically unlikely; if the hypothesis of this present study—that counselors’ ethical decisions can be influenced by socially biased intuitive judgment—is correct, the processes being examined are already occurring naturally. At the same time, a paradigm shift in how to conceptualize and encourage ethical practice may be possible.

By changing how we understand the underlying philosophy and process, new methods for targeting ethical responses are possible. By knowing how the process occurs, counselors can intentionally utilize the process to encourage ethical behavior. Interventions may include targeting the intuitions and shaping the post hoc discourse of counselors around ethical issues. Interventions might include creating kinds of speech used to promote ethical behavior, attending to emotions rather than reasons in supervising ethical dilemmas, and determining how to refine and encourage professional identity adoption. There are also implications for gatekeeping and supervision, by attending to the intuitive responses more and less to the less-reliable post hoc rationale. In particular, the social influence of counselors on one another as a professional body would need to be re-evaluated. If the hypothesis is correct, it may be possible to bolster ethical practice through conscious attention to social factors. Attending to ethical discussion before decisions are made might be the best way to inculcate ethical judgments. This would not necessarily be by dialogue or persuasion but by shifting emotional responses. Subjects that are discussed by peers, and peer responses, may influence ethical judgments. Decision-making models might not be followable, but really function as clarifying tools to explain the judgment to peers.

Dumbfounding suggests that the intra-psychic process described by Cottone (2001) is less a process of knowing than of feeling as a group. This then shapes what philosophical schools are dominant. The ones that are most persuasive to peers are the ones that are later appealed to in

ethical discourse. It may mean some dialogues are not reciprocal as they appear, but are ways of enforcing ethics. The literal discussion of ethics in counselor education is an important formative experience and may be directed. The paradigm shift may further emphasize the importance of supervision and consultation as the most immediate social check on unethical behavior. Conversely, it may bring additional awareness to potential pitfalls, such as groupthink (concurrency-seeking over accurate appraisal), unexamined values, challenges to diversity, and deception in the supervisory relationship (Hantoot, 2000; Turner & Pratkanis, 1998; Yourman & Farber, 1996). This conceptualization of ethical judgment presents less of a guarantee of ethical behavior and more of a dynamic process that can move in any direction, and so needs to be monitored. It can promote ethical behavior as much as it can have negative side effects. Another way to conceptualize the issue is that counselors may influence each other's conscience in unexpected ways, and this process needs to be understood. Counselors are not necessarily constructing an epistemological reality with an intra-psychic process, but are shaping how they feel when responding to moral behaviors.

Theoretical Foundation

Social intuitionism claims that emotions and intuition are crucial parts of moral judgments (Haidt, 2001). Moral intuition is an emotionally valenced (positive or negative) kind of cognition that is not a kind of reasoning. Intuition is quick, effortless, automatic, and the process is not accessible to consciousness, though the outcome is. Reasoning is consciously accessible, takes time, takes effort, and involves steps. Most moral judgment models take a rationalist perspective, where emotional states are processed through conscious reason before judgment (Guglielmo, 2015). The social intuitionist model claims that, prior to reasoning, moral intuitions lead to moral judgment and only then are followed by ex post facto reasoning. The

reasoning is applied to the explanation offered, but the intuitive judgment has already occurred, and is not the result of this deliberative process. This ex post facto reasoning then influences the judgments of others in a social process, setting up the next round of emotional responses and associated intuitions. Ethical decisions, if like moral decisions, should be examined as a social process which shapes moral or ethical emotions.

The primary source of support for social intuitionism comes from the moral psychology literature on an effect known as moral dumbfounding. This is defined as maintaining a moral judgment without a supporting reason (McHugh et al., 2017). To detect the presence of moral dumbfounding, researchers have asked participants if a situation was wrong using specially crafted questions based on moral foundations theory. Moral foundations theory suggests cultures create moral frameworks using five to six foundations (Graham et al., 2013). Each culture uses them in differing amounts to support moral frameworks. Cultures provide explanations using the foundations to justify their moral responses. Using this theory, researchers have targeted gaps in moral frameworks, foundations that were not used by a culture, to challenge responses (Haidt et al., 2000; McHugh et al., 2017). The following vignette used by Haidt et al. (2000) provides an example of how moral foundations theory has been tested in research studies:

Julie and Mark, who are brother and sister are traveling together in France. They are both on summer vacation from college. One night they are staying alone in a cabin near the beach. They decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. At very least it would be a new experience for each of them. Julie was already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom too, just to be safe. They both enjoy it, but they decide not to do it again. They keep that night as a special secret between them, which makes them feel even closer to

each other. So what do you think about this? Was it wrong for them to have sex?

(p. 15)

Other examples of vignettes address topics such as cannibalism and eating cockroaches where harm or negative consequence had been eliminated as possibilities. Since Western Educated Industrialized Rich Democratic (WEIRD) cultures primarily relied on harm explanations, WEIRD participants were unable to respond. Participants would maintain that these were wrong, despite being unable to offer an explanation. Another example required the signing away of one's soul, with the contract including the statement the contract is not binding in any way. Individuals would often not sign the document, and their responses would be challenged. When challenged, participants often could not provide reasons why they wouldn't sign the contract. The responses show that the reasoning provided by the participants for their answers often occurred after the fact, and those individuals could maintain a moral judgment even when they abandoned their stated reason (Haidt et al., 2000; McHugh et al., 2017).

Moral foundations theory asserts that morality is innate, but that different cultures create moral frameworks based on underlying foundations (Haidt & Joseph, 2008). WEIRD societies emphasize care and fairness in their moral frameworks, which Haidt et al. (2000) considered "individualizing foundations." In these WEIRD societies, there is less of a communal or binding emphasis, so these rationales do not use as much language around what Haidt et al. (2000) called "binding foundations," such as loyalty, authority, and sanctity in their moral rationale. By selecting questions that avoided explanations associated with individualizing foundations, the authors were able to dumbfound participants, but participants maintained the moral judgment. The dilemmas used in this research were designed to eliminate explanations around care/harm

and fairness/cheating rationales when given to a WEIRD population, while still triggering emotional responses that an immoral action had occurred.

This process is challenging using counseling ethics. Often there are situations where it is hard to find the same gaps because unlike cultural norms, counseling ethical principles are designed not to impose values. One approach would be to create dilemmas between counseling principles instead of asking about gaps. If a participant responded that something was wrong or correct, they would be presented with a challenge using counseling principles likely to appear contradictory to their answer (e.g., if they stated it was not wrong due to autonomy, “do no harm” would be presented, and vice versa).

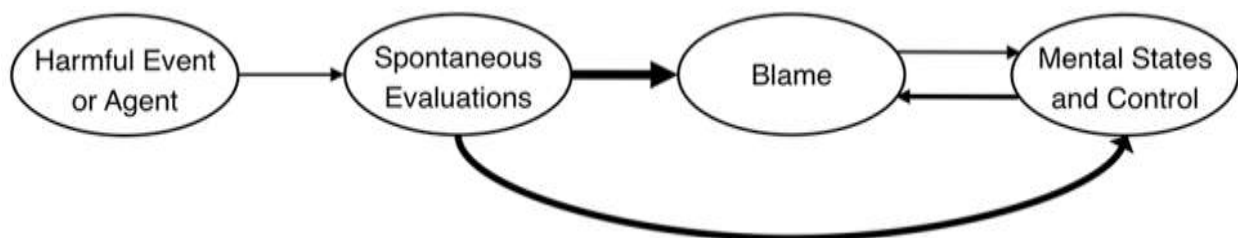
In the vignettes, the culture’s common explanations, such as care and harm or fairness and cheating, were intentionally eliminated as possible responses, yet subjects would still offer these very explanations after stating the action was wrong. When confronted with this contradiction by the researchers, it commonly led the subjects to be dumbfounded. These individuals would insist that actions were wrong but were then unable to provide an explanation as to why; further, they would not change the evaluation, expressing frustration. The initial research was never published because of difficulty coding the amount of data (Haidt et al., 2000). However, subsequent research supported the findings, replicating the findings with both in-person interviews and online surveys (McHugh et al., 2017). The results suggest that the subjects were not fully aware of the basis of their moral judgment, but were in fact responding based on intuition, and then explaining their conclusion after the fact. These findings provide support for the notion that at least some moral decisions are based, at least in part, in emotional responses. Social intuitionists do believe that moral decisions can be made through reasoned cognitive processes, but this is exceptional (Haidt, 2001). This implies that intuitions can be overridden,

but perhaps rarely and not in the ways people expect. Individuals are often not making reasoned decisions in real-world applications. Instead, they are operating off of intuition to make judgments. This implies that if ethical decisions operate like moral decisions, ethical decisions may arise from intuitions that are not conscious or deliberate.

There are several models in moral psychology which describe moral thinking, but not all describe the process of how decisions are made. Guglielmo (2015) categorizes the theories into information, biased information, and process models. As the label would suggest, information models focus on the cognitive content, such as self-talk or perceptions. The kind or quality of information affects the valence (e.g., good versus bad, fair versus unfair) of the judgment. For example, if a negative action is seen as intentional, this may lead to a negative moral judgment. These models often focus on interpersonal offenses and are less generally applicable. The process models focus on how the judgment is made, as in a sequence of events. They focus on the role emotions, cognitive processes, content, and social systems relate to the judgment. The information models are less relevant to this study, as counseling ethics defines the content, but are here discussed for context. Figures 1, 2, and 3 below show examples of information models, some of which include a bias feature. They generally follow a linear pattern of input, analysis, and judgment, with some models including bias.

Figure 1

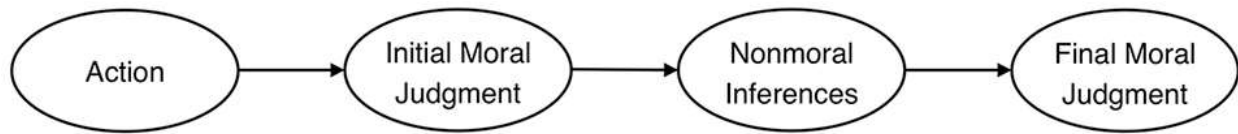
Alicke's Culpable Control Model



(Guglielmo, 2015)

Figure 2

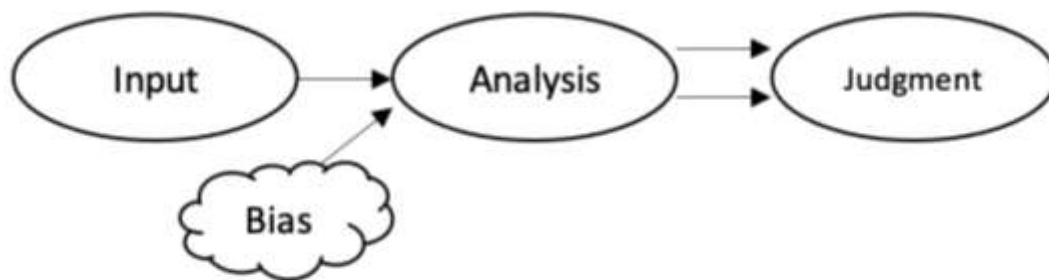
Knobe's Moral Pervasiveness Model



(Guglielmo, 2015)

Figure 3

Biased Information Model

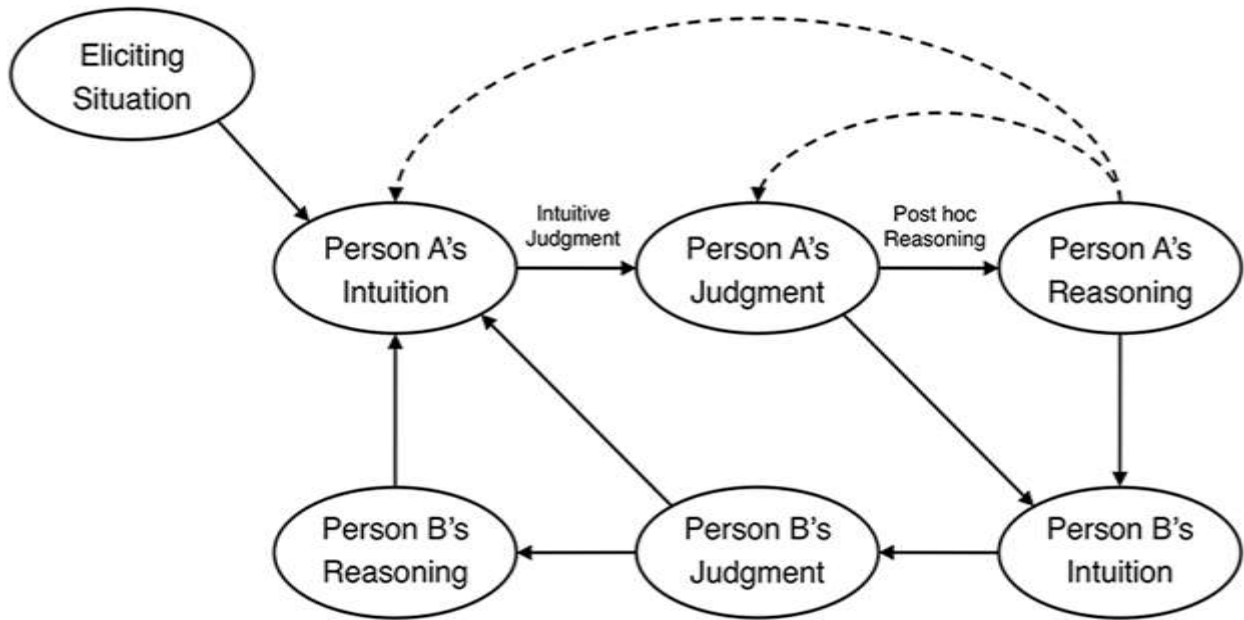


Note. This is a generic depiction that indicates potential bias, as not all information models have a biasing feature.

Note, information models depend on content and analysis such as blame or nonmoral inferences, so the focus is on content leading to the judgment, not the process. Information models are distinct from the processing models that focus on the process of judgments, such as the social intuitionist model (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

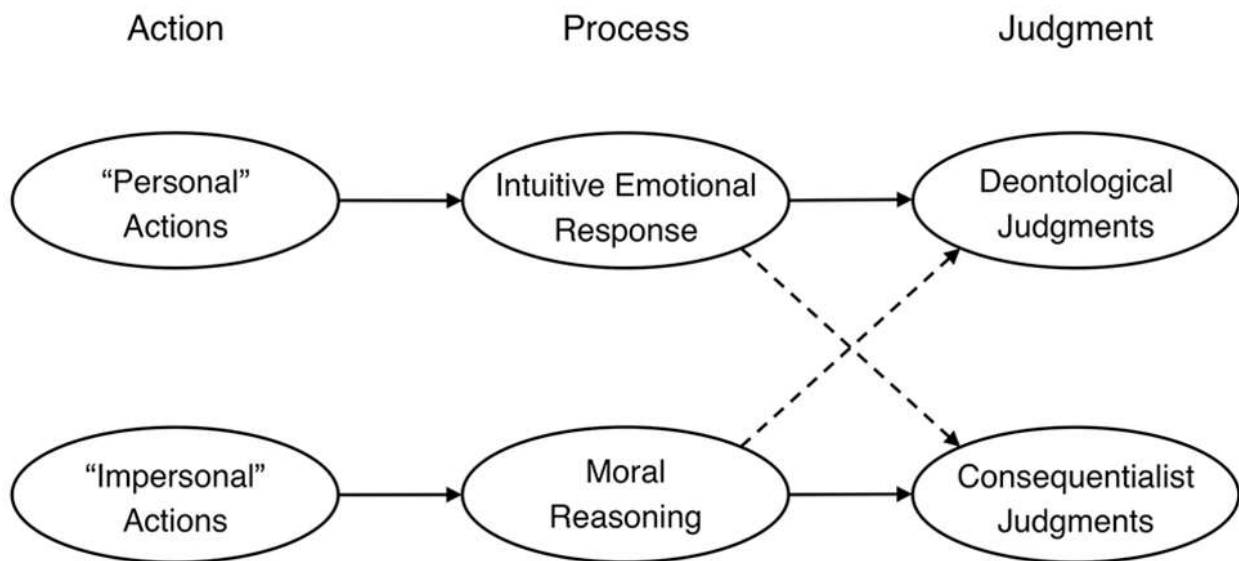
Social Intuitionist Model



(Guglielmo, 2015)

Figure 5

Dual Process Model



(Guglielmo, 2015)

Distinct from the social intuitionist model is the dual process model, Figure 5, which is the other dominant process theory in moral psychology (Guglielmo, 2015). The dual process model describes two pathways, almost like two information models which run side by side, that

potentially influence one another in the process of making a moral judgment. One pathway to making a moral judgment is through a more emotive response and another pathway is through conscious reasoning. The emotional response leads, for the most part, to a deontological position (evaluating actions from a law-like, rule-based position) and the conscious moral reasoning leads to a consequentialist decision (choosing an action based on its consequences). These are primarily driven by whether the action is considered personal or impersonal, and the amount of time spent or complexity of the task when making the decision. Haidt (2001) notes that both the social intuitionist and dual process models may possibly be compatible, though some of the predictions made from the dual process model have been tested and seem to contradict Haidt and colleagues' research (Guglielmo, 2015).

The problem with testing the dual process model in counseling is that counseling ethics assumes deontological foundations and then expects consequentialist-style reasoning. This means that when reporting rationale for decisions counselors are expected, and so they are motivated, to justify their position according to this combined model. This makes the dual process model hard to empirically test—at least without employing functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), which provides direct access to what is occurring in the brain—because the result is motivated by attempts to appear consistent with counseling ethics.

Counseling ethics shares features with the dual process model due to underlying philosophy; distinguishing between the psychological process and ethical decisions is difficult. Alternatively, social intuitionist theory, by noting the presence of dumbfounding, provides a means to test how counselors are reasoning using surveys. In contrast to the dual process model, it makes predictions that individuals will maintain intuitive judgments when challenged. If counselors were to appeal to counseling ethics in maintaining or changing their judgment, it

would be consistent with current thinking in ethical decision-making and would thus render social intuitionism likely false when applied to ethics. If they were to maintain a judgment without supporting reasons, it would instead support social intuitionism and would thus oblige a shift in how counselors understand ethical decisions. A study designed to present such dilemmas and detect dumbfounding would provide insight into how ethical decisions in the counseling setting are informed, or at the least may provide evidence against social intuitionism as a viable option. If the results were to show the presence of dumbfounding, this would lend support to the social intuitionist model.

Summary of Methodology

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate whether dumbfounding occurs when counselors encounter ethical dilemmas related to their practice. The original research on dumbfounding made use of verbal challenges presented by in-person interviewers. This study will use a similar format using online questionnaires. The method is adapted from McHugh et al.'s (2017) frequency-based replication study of Haidt et al.'s (2000) unpublished study using in-person interviews. McHugh et al. (2017) were able to convincingly replicate the dumbfounding effect of Haidt et al.'s (2000) study with online surveys. To provide a bridge from this previous work to the current study, two of the original dilemmas will be preserved to see if counselors exhibit moral dumbfounding generally.

For the present work, two survey items presented by McHugh et al. (2017) will be replaced with counseling-based ethical dilemmas. Since the moral psychology literature is distinct from the ethical literature, and because the philosophical concepts underpinning them make no such distinction, a subset of the questions will be framed as either ethical or moral (simply by shifting the language of the prompts) to see if there is a difference in response due to

a framing effect or if they are interpreted as the same. Finally, data will be analyzed to see if one's need for cognition, measured by responses on the Need for Cognition Scale (NCS; Cacioppo et al., 2013), acts as a moderator for dumbfounding responses.

Definitions of Key Terms

Automaticity: Automaticity refers to the preconscious automatic phenomena that are “generated from effortless sensory or perceptual activity and then serve as implicit, unappreciated inputs into conscious and deliberate processes” (Bargh et al., 2012, p. 593).

Cognitive Dissonance: Cognitive dissonance is the drive-like discomfort resulting from the holding of two or more inconsistent cognitions which individuals seek to reduce (Festinger, 1957).

Consequentialism: Consequentialism is a moral philosophy that is concerned with the consequences of behavior when evaluating actions rather than obedience to universals (Alexander & Moore, 2016). It is considered a foil to deontology. Consequentialism does embrace the concept of teleology but uses it differently than other moral philosophies. For consequentialists, the aim of action is that which results in a good consequence.

Deontology: Deontology refers to, as is the meaning of the Greek root “*deon*,” duty (Alexander & Moore, 2016). Deontology has origins in the writings of Immanuel Kant and is concerned with which choices are morally required according to universal moral laws (Alexander & Moore, 2016).

Dilemma: When dealing with counseling ethics, a dilemma most often refers to when two counseling principles conflict with one another or when context causes a principle to conflict with itself (Mabe & Rollin, 1986). However, it can also refer to a conflict between ethics and the law (Mappes et al., 1985).

Ethics: Ethics, also called moral philosophy, concerns right or wrong conduct (Parry, 2014). Ethics may also be considered the science of morals (“Ethics,” n.d.).

Intuitionism: Intuitionism in philosophy is the view that people grasp moral truths not by rational process or reflection, but by a process that is like perception or feeling. (Haidt, 2001, p. 814).

Morals: Principles of right and wrong behavior. Morals’ current connotation is something of an abstract law of acceptable behavior (Grannan, n.d.). Ethics is often understood as rules governing appropriate practice in a subdomain, like for a profession. Even though this is the connotation, philosophically and etymologically, they are not necessarily distinct. Morals are the norms whereas ethics is the science or philosophy of those norms.

Moral Intuition: Moral intuition is “the sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgment, including an affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike), without any conscious awareness of having gone through steps of searching, weighing evidence, or inferring a conclusion” (Haidt, 2001, p. 818). Moral intuition yields an instant feeling or emotional response to the content, as opposed to a moral reasoning multi-step process. Reasoned judgment may occur and not be the result of the moral intuitions, but these are hypothesized by social intuitionists to be rare occurrences.

Moral Judgment: Moral judgment is present in all cultures in that evaluations of behavior occur and affect future social interactions (Boehm, 1999). “Moral judgments are therefore defined as evaluations (good vs. bad) of the actions or character of a person that are made with respect to a set of virtues held to be obligatory by a culture or subculture” (Haidt, 2001, p. 817).

Moral Reasoning: Moral reasoning refers to a multi-step conscious process of inference resulting from morally relevant information. “Some of these steps may be performed

unconsciously and any of the steps may be subject to biases and errors, but a key part of the definition of reasoning is that it has steps, at least a few of which are performed consciously” (Haidt, 2001, p. 818). Moral reasoning leads to a moral judgment. It is a controllable process, is effortful, and the reasoner is aware (Bargh, 1994).

Social Factors: Social factors refer to the various social influences on a moral decision such as perceived judgment, dissonance, or group norms by which a social persuasion link functions (Haidt, 2001). The social persuasion link in the social intuitionist model asserts that if individuals in a social group have established a moral norm, then that will have a direct influence on the moral judgment of others, potentially changing future internal intuitive or automatic judgments. This process occurs through the aforementioned factors even if the individual making the decision only outwardly conforms to the norm.

Moral Dumbfounding: Moral dumbfounding is a failure to provide reasons for moral judgments (McHugh et al., 2017).

Vignette: Vignette is a short account of the behavior of individuals (McHugh et al., 2017). In this research it contains elements of a dilemma and then a description of a response to those elements.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Moral Reasoning

Anyone interested in quality food has a particular understanding as to what constitutes a particular dish as well as what makes it good. Pizza, for example, is clearly understood to be a particular kind of food throughout the United States. Despite this, what constitutes good pizza would be different in Chicago, Detroit, Scranton, and New York City. The essentials vary enough that if a New Yorker on the West Coast were given a sample of pizza from parts of California, they might not even consider it pizza. In the same way, defining morals presents some challenges because the consensus over the definition, or even the existence, of morals is debated. As a result, some scholars avoid defining what they are altogether, instead relying on vernacular understanding or common agreement (Huebner et al., 2009; Stanton, 1976). Other scholars wade into philosophy to define morals, proposing that they are deontic propositions (Bucciarelli et al., 2008). It is immediately apparent that avoiding the philosophy in moral psychology literature is impossible, as many of the constructs are borrowed terms which are testable, but not as well defined as typical constructs (Huebner et al., 2009). As such, it is essential to review specific philosophical terms which act as a backdrop for the moral psychology literature. The subject cannot be ignored because morality may be innate (Haidt & Joseph, 2008). Moral behavior may have neurological roots (Greene & Paxton, 2010).

Philosophical Background

Ethics, or moral philosophy, dates to the earliest philosophers and concerns right or wrong conduct (Parry, 2014). The language can be slightly confusing, as some terms have the same meaning. Morals and ethics are just such an example. Morals' current connotation is something of an abstract law of acceptable behavior (Grannan, n.d.). Ethics is often understood

as a set of rules governing appropriate practice in a subdomain, like for a profession. However, ethics was once considered the science of morals (“Ethics,” n.d.). Etymologically, the words “moral” and “ethical” share similar roots. “Ethos” is the character, spirit, or custom of a community. “Morals,” too, have the same etymological root meaning “custom” (“Moral,” n.d.). The word “custom” means habit, common behavior, and the ordinary manner in which things are done (“Custom,” n.d.). The two words meant something nearly identical but have changed connotation over time. “Philosophy” itself originally meant the love of wisdom, but has come to mean rational argumentation (“Philosophy,” n.d.). These concepts, taken together, imply that moral philosophy or ethics has its origins in words meaning something like the love of the wisdom regarding habits and customs. The specific branch in moral philosophy which psychological theory pulls from is called normative ethics, which contains several schools of thought (Alexander & Moore, 2016). These concern the best way to determine the right course of action. Due to this, there are different interpretations of morals and how they are determined. When the literature pulls from ideas within moral philosophy, it means they are pulling terms from *ways to determine the right action*. The research avoids determining what is right and instead determines how people *actually* make moral decisions. The psychological literature attempts to be more descriptive, meaning they describe what is actually done with regards to morality, rather than what ought to be done.

Virtue ethics, for example, emphasizes what kind of person one ought to be, what habits to cultivate, but is less prevalent in moral psychology literature (Upton, 2009). “Virtue” is a Latin translation of “*arete*” (“Virtue,” n.d.). “Virtue” has linguistic roots meaning “manliness,” in the sense of valor or courage, but the Greek word that it is often translated from, “*arete*,” means something closer to “excellence.” In this light, the earliest philosophers were discussing the

habits that produce excellence in a person, believing that these habits lead to a good life or “*eudaimonia*.” “Eudaimonia” is translated into English as “happiness,” but has its roots in the Greek words for “good” and “spirit,” meaning something closer to welfare, wellness, or the blessedness which is the highest human good (Kraut, 2018). The virtue ethics of Aristotle, for example, sees virtue (excellence) as the mean between extremes of behavior (a.k.a., the “Golden Mean”). What virtue or excellence looks like for a soldier would be courage; and courage is seen as the mean, average, or midpoint between recklessness and cowardice. The purpose or function of things was considered when making moral evaluations, as a soldier should be brave in a war to win, recklessness and cowardice working contrary to this aim, but virtue was not dependent on achieving the aim, as a courageous soldier could lose. Virtues more generally were viewed considering the purpose of eudaimonia, as a companion or necessary condition, though it was recognized that one needed some material goods as well (Aristotle, 343 BC/2011). The philosophy of purposes, teleology, has also fallen out of favor for ethical codes over time, but still affects notions of good and evil, and so influences what is considered to be moral. When codes are created, if they have a notion of what something ought to be, such as an ideal counselor, they have been influenced by this history. The good is that toward “which all things aim” (Aristotle, 343 BC/2011, 1094a 3). Other views developed over time, away from virtue ethics and this concept of the good, but it is important to understand. The importance is evident when different schools of thought are often contrasted with virtue ethics. Though less used in literature for moral reasoning, it is nonetheless influential, as the discussion references concepts of virtue, ethics, and good.

When counselors determine a code of ethics, it is ultimately to produce the habits and customs that produce the right action in the counselors, for good. Understanding these origins

makes the application of moral psychology literature to counseling ethics a natural fit. At the same time, it is important to understand how psychological research is often using different schools of philosophy as constructs to study and that those are not the only views found in moral philosophy (complicated even more by the fact that these schools influence each other). Instead, the use of philosophical terms is a way of noting how people make decisions which seem closer to these varied schools within normative ethics. Furthermore, as constructs, they are often oversimplified and reductionistic, which has affected the interpretation of the literature and makes some of the concepts more fluid than in other areas of research.

The views most often used in psychological research are consequentialism and deontology. This is perhaps because they are easier to test. These two branches of normative ethics focus more on how one determines the right action and behavior than what kind of behaviors produce excellence in a person, as in virtue ethics. Deontology refers to, as is the meaning of the Greek root “deon,” duty (Alexander & Moore, 2016). Deontology is concerned with what choices are morally required, what is one’s duty, and has its origins in the writings of Immanuel Kant (Alexander & Moore, 2016). “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law” (Kant, 1785/1993, 4:421). Deontology is therefore concerned with law-like universals, such as the statement “it is always wrong to murder,” which apply in all situations. Kant’s notion of morality dispenses with teleology, or at least the centrality of teleological moral views, causing some dispute among scholars beyond the scope of this paper (for more on this debate, see Johnson & Cureton, 2019). Consequentialism is the foil to deontology, and is concerned with the consequences of behavior rather than obedience to universals (Alexander & Moore, 2016). Consequentialism does embrace the concept of teleology but uses it differently, not as an ideal for a person. For consequentialists,

the right action is that action which results in a good consequence. The varying definitions of “good” yield the different schools of thought within consequentialism: Utilitarians, for example, see the good as the best outcome for the most people (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2019). However, literature will use these terms interchangeably, even if they do not actually measure constructs true to utilitarianism (Dubljević et al., 2018; Suter & Hertwig, 2011). Important research in moral psychology presents individuals progressing through stages of various forms of consequentialism and deontology (Kohlberg, 1958; Piaget, 1932).

Utilitarianism and deontological views have influenced ethical counseling models (Cottone & Claus, 2000). However, as stated above, these are not the only views and, as constructs, they are not always identical. Deontological rationales are often understood as closer to abstract laws or cognitive rules; consequentialist processes are closer to calculated evaluations of anticipated outcomes.

Hume’s philosophy sits slightly outside of the binary of deontology versus consequentialism and has only recently been used in the psychological literature for social intuitionism, discussed later (Cohon, 2018). Rather than arguing how one ought to reason through moral decisions, he claims that we do not reason to moral decisions, but act based on emotion, stating that reason is enslaved to passion (Cohon, 2018). The other views of deontology or consequentialism are then contrasted with his views as rationalist, since they focus on reasoning to what the right action will be. When research uses Hume's philosophy, it is often not making a claim that Hume's philosophy is true, but rather that when contrasted with rationalism, what is observed in subjects is closer to Hume’s ideas than the rationalist-based models (Haidt, 2001). In fact, the social intuitionist model claims that reasoning does occur, but *after the fact* rather than before the moral judgment is made.

Another point of clarification is that just as the definition of morals is disputed, so too is the term “reasoning.” Some authors use it interchangeably with “cognition,” whereas others make distinctions between cognition and reason (Haidt, 2001). Bucciarelli et al. (2008) use “reason” interchangeably with “inference” and mean any systematic and conscious mental process that makes a conclusion based on premises. The authors distinguish this from “intuition,” which is similar, but unconscious or automatic. Moral psychology has recently been concerned with how moral reasoning occurs as a process for the role of emotion, reason, and social factors (Guglielmo, 2015). This has not always been the case within the moral reasoning literature.

Evolutionary Theory of Morality

Evolutionary psychology is a specific research tradition that attempts to account for human behavior (Downes, 2021). There are multiple schools that consider evolutionary theory, but evolutionary psychology holds specific tenets and uses them to make testable predictions for research. The six tenets are: first, that the brain is a computer designed by natural selection; second, that human behavior is generated by evolved computer response; third, the programs of the brain are adaptations; fourth, if not adaptive now the programs were adaptive in ancestral environments; fifth, the brain is composed of several special-purpose programs; and sixth, describing these programs enables systematic understanding of culture and social phenomena (Tooby & Cosmides, 2005). Predictions based on these tenets are then tested using methods available to psychology. Some scholars do not fit into the strict definition evolutionary psychology, but may hold similar views about the explanatory power of evolutionary theory when applied to human behavior.

Evolutionary theory suggests that animal societies which prevent harm to members and are effective collaborators are more successful (Broom, 2006). A moral structure then develops to

promote and sustain behavior. This includes benefits provided from obtaining better resources by cooperation while avoiding costly cheating (Waal & Waal, 1996). Examples include cooperative behaviors in vampire bats (Wilkinson, 1984). Scholars believe adaptations may include motivations for protecting reputation (Sperber & Baumard, 2012). Perhaps most importantly for this study, intuitive judgments may also improve fitness in areas where delayed responses may be costly (Hromatko & Hrgovic, 2011). For example, what if an individual were threatened by a predator or member of another social group? If they had to think through the moral implications of using force against a threat, they might not respond in time. It is likely they would not survive, at least compared to an individual who acted quickly. In this line of theoretically informed speculation, quick action would benefit survival, even if imprecise in specific instances. Moral structures may be an integrated set of propositional cognitive structures for emotional, social, and other-regarding structures to map the world (Gillett & Franz, 2016). The underlying integrated structure of morality enables individuals to process information quickly in complex and ambiguous contexts, benefiting survival. While these findings are suggestive when taken as a whole, it is the specifics that are disputed.

The claim that at least some components of moral psychology evolved is considered uncontroversial (Machery & Mallon, 2010). The controversy results from a difficulty pointing to specific components that are evolved. It is difficult to show evidence that any given component is the result of evolutionary process, so claims are intentionally limited. Rather, had morality been maladaptive, evolutionary theory suggests it would not have survived. Theorists have speculated that morals supported cooperative or prosocial behavior, but these statements are cautious in not identifying components, as there is controversy as to how much of morality is the result of evolutionary process.

Many emotions are suspected have a long evolutionary history (Fessler & Haley, 2003). Likewise, cognition and social cognition are suspected to be the result of the same process (Stone, 2006). Researchers have looked for homologues in animals, attempting to elicit unfair outcomes or emotional responses to injustices (Machery & Mallon, 2010). One example includes paying animals unequal rewards for the same task. The animals completed tasks while in full view of one another to elicit emotional responses related to fairness. Primate tests were done to show that moral emotional responses to fairness exist in animals with shared ancestry of humans. However, to show that morality is due to evolution, cultural, developmental, and environmental factors need to be eliminated. This requires the input of other fields and is difficult to show conclusively. However, of the claims made by evolutionary psychology regarding morality, moral emotions are considered less controversial than normative cognition.

The case for normative cognition is supported by the historical record (Machery & Mallon, 2010). There is no human society in the historical record without norms, though the content of the norms may vary. The use of norms is universal and often entails a policing mechanism (Brown, 1991). This argument is supported by individuals from varied cultures and times struggling to reason about non-normative matters, such as the scientific method, while those same cultures are often adept at reasoning about norms (Cosmides & Tooby, 2005). Additionally, children as young as four are better able to reason about deontic conditions, moral rules, and norms, but not about indications of norm application (Cummins 1996a; Harris & Núñez, 1996). Children were far more likely to tell whether mice who squeak should be inside or outside when a cat is hunting, reasoning based on the norm provided. However, they were less likely to correctly identify how to check if all the squeaky mice were inside. Children readily learn moral rules and norms, and can follow them with reason, but struggle to reason about the

conditions in which they apply. While controversial, the early-age ability to reason about norms, but not what indicates if they are needed, suggests normative cognition is specialized and adaptive. This line of research argumentation treats morals as extensions of norms.

Morality, presented as distinct from conventional norms and as an adaptive trait, is the most controversial conception (Machery & Mallon, 2010). The research and arguments supporting the evolution of distinct moral cognition is not as strong as for moral emotions and normative cognition. Some studies with children show there is no distinction between norms and morals (Cummins 1996a; Harris & Núñez, 1996). Others have argued that empathy in infants and young children can be seen as supportive of distinct moral norms (Deweyer, 2006). There are arguments that altruism, cooperation, and policing for cheating provide selection advantages which, with the addition of communication, could give rise to morals or religious beliefs (Waal & Waal, 1996). Machery and Mallon (2010) point out that much of the proposed evidence can be interpreted as supporting normative cognition, not a distinct moral cognitive process. For example, no research has specifically shown that known cultures have distinct defined sets of moral norms and conventional norms. While it is agreed some components of morality are adaptive, how much is the result of evolutionary selection remains controversial and inconclusive. As a result, the philosophical implications based on an evolutionary psychology of morality are limited, though an assumption remains that some components of moral psychology have evolved.

Theories of Moral Development

Prior to the cognitive revolution in the 1960s, psychology viewed moral reasoning as a result of unconscious processes, emotions, and drives which needed to be expressed in socially acceptable behavior (Freud, 1960/1976; Haidt, 2001). Then, behaviorists saw moral reasoning as

merely the result of conditioning and the environment acting on the person, the notion of a reasoning self being merely the result of social contingencies (Skinner, 1971). This view began to shift over time with Piaget's work on moral development in children (Piaget, 1932/1965; Sachdeva et al., 2011). Regarding moral development, Piaget (1932/1965) argued that as children developed, they transitioned from a heteronomous state to an autonomous state. Children moved from relying on the authority of adults and rules to the ability to make their own choices, as evidenced by how different age groups engage in gameplay. Piaget had defined his view of morality in terms of philosophy, citing principles of universality like Kant's deontological views. He created a cognitive-developmental model (Piaget, 1932/1965).

Simultaneously in other areas of psychology, as the cognitive revolution occurred, social psychology and cognitive behavior therapy rose to prominence (Dowd, 2004; Gaudiano, 2008; Glenberg et al., 2013; Pullum, 2013). It is no surprise, then, that future moral development models emphasized the role of cognition in decision making. It is into this context that Kohlberg contributed to the next phase of moral psychology, with his moral developmental model, the earliest version of which is available in his dissertation (Kohlberg, 1958). Kohlberg argued that as children developed cognitively, they had corresponding moral developments (Levine et al., 1985). As a result, the field of moral psychology has been grounded in a cognitive model containing interesting overlaps with moral philosophy.

It is helpful here to summarize Kohlberg's view of moral development to treat the criticisms leading to further developments in moral psychology. Kohlberg analyzed responses to moral dilemmas, such as the famous Heinz dilemma, and categorized the responses. Kohlberg's resulting model contrasts with the behaviorism of the past and is distinctly cognitive (Haidt, 2001). The first two stages are preconventional, where the reasoner makes moral decisions that

are ego-centric and lack perspective-taking (Levine et al., 1985). Stage one decisions are based on consequences which might occur, focusing on obedience and punishment. The second stage is self-interest focused, but begins to take in the perspectives of others for prestige and self-advancement. The second two stages are conventional, and rigidly hold to rules and norms and can be like deontological views. Here the reasoners make moral decisions based on societal norms or laws, even if consequences are absent. In the third stage, the reasoner appeals to social norms and perceptions, attempting to live up to societal expectations. The fourth stage similarly appeals to societal norms, but begins to incorporate rationale that views the norms as means to maintain social order, and so is slightly consequentialist. The post-conventional stage appeals to principles which may, in certain circumstances, supersede social conventions. The fifth stage is the last that was able to obtain empirical support. The fifth stage elevates principles over societal norms, regarding laws as social contracts (Levin et al., 1985). The fifth stage views the world as full of different perspectives, paradigms, and worldviews which need to be respected. It takes a utilitarian perspective, seeking the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Kohlberg also envisioned sixth and seventh stages, but was unable to find support for them, leading to a softening of these stages into theoretical or philosophical portions of the model (Kohlberg, 1974; Levine et al., 1985). The sixth stage was one of abstract moral reasoning based on universal ethical principles such as justice, like Kant's deontological views of morality. The seventh stage, which is often omitted from conventional textbook portrayals of the model, was a religious or cosmic view of morality, which linked a transcendent view of morality with religion but was never developed fully (Levine et al., 1985). This model relies heavily on several assumptions.

Kohlberg's model explicitly adopts certain assumptions which are clearly stated (Levine et al., 1985). First, the assumption of value relevance implies that moral concepts are not to be

understood as value-neutral but normative, positive, or value-relevant. The second assumption is phenomenology, a view of philosophy which starts from the perspective of the individual's conscious experience of phenomena, and the associated conscious processes. The third assumption is universalism, or that moral development is found in all cultures and is not relative. The fourth, prescriptivism, suggests that one *ought* to do something; it is not just a description. The fifth assumption, cognitivism (or rationalism), is "the idea that moral judgments are not reducible to, nor directly expressive of, emotive statements but, rather, describe reasoning or reasons for action where reasons are different from motives" (Levine et al., 1985, p. 97). The sixth, formalism, is the notion that there are formal qualities of moral judgments that can be defined. The seventh is principledness, or the notion that moral judgments rest on applying rules and principles. The eighth is constructivism, in that moral judgments or principles are human social constructions. The ninth assumption holds that these aforementioned assumptions necessarily lead to the assumption of justice, and moral judgments will necessarily involve reference to justice (Levine et al., 1985). In this, it is clear that this model deviates from its predecessors in the emphasis on a cognitive process in moral decision making, defining developmental stages based on how one reasons through moral decisions.

Kohlberg's model has received significant criticism, most notably by Gilligan, who argued that the model had a gender bias (Gilligan, 1977). Gilligan argues that the justice dynamic Kohlberg presents is male-oriented and lacks a female voice oriented toward care (Gilligan, 1977). Kohlberg responded to Gilligan, disagreeing with claims of sexual, ideological, and cross-cultural bias (Levine et al., 1985). Subsequent research was conflicted, but largely did not support Gilligan's position regarding significant gender differences in care or justice frameworks (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000). For example, most differences were small, if existent, and more likely

driven by assessment (Baez et al., 2017). Though this debate is beyond the scope of the current discussion, it is interesting to note that Gilligan's criticism de-emphasized the role of abstract moral reasoning and emphasized the relational view of morality, like some of the claims of social intuitionists (Haidt, 2001). Another major source of criticism was that his model was not culturally neutral (Stanton, 1976). This is in line with the assumptions of the model, but can take a problematic tone when combined with the assumption that the moral reasoning in each of the stages is not value neutral. Members of different cultures progress differently through the stages (Sachdeva et al., 2011). Kohlberg responded that his model depends on underlying rationale, not associated beliefs (Levine et al., 1985). Finally, the model neglects the role of emotion in moral decision making. These decisions are made on a quick emotional basis (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). It was in response to this cognitive model that the social intuitionist perspective developed.

Moral Judgment Models

The cognitive emphasis has led to roughly two schools of thought within moral psychology literature that, while different, may be compatible. These are information models, which examine the underlying content for moral judgment (such as inferring the act to be intentional) and processing models, which is how the reason is processed (what triggered the moral judgment and in what order did emotion and reason occur; Guglielmo, 2015).

Explanations vary for the origins of the judgments. Some claim it is primarily the result of perceptions of mind (Baumeister & Vonasch, 2012). Others claim that moral judgments rely primarily in the social domain, to preserve social relationships (Rai & Fiske, 2011). Most commonly, the domains revolve around harm and fairness (Guglielmo, 2015; Kohlberg, 1969; Turiel, 1983). Other domains of morality are present in the literature, such as purity, loyalty, and

authority (Guglielmo, 2015; Guglielmo, 2018; Graham et al., 2009, 2011; Haidt, 2007, 2008; Haidt & Graham, 2009).

Biased Information Models

The biased models generally state that information is influenced by factors external to the immediate situation presented. The biased information models are the culpable control model and the moral pervasiveness model (Guglielmo, 2015). The culpable control model, shown in Figure 1, asserts that inferences about the intentionality of behavior and severity of the consequence affect the content and moral evaluation (Alicke, 2000). Essentially, these are automatic inferences people make about how much control agents had over the situation, which changes the moral judgment. The outcome's mutability can influence these judgments as well (Alicke et al., 2008). Even social attractiveness can influence moral judgments (Alicke & Zell, 2009). There is some support for the predictions of this model in the literature (Mazzocco et al., 2004). These inferences and beliefs can be false, yet still lead to judgments (Young et al., 2010). Confusingly, the moral pervasiveness model asserts that the consequence, as in good outcome or bad outcome, of the event, leads to bias (Pettit & Knobe, 2009). The intention is more often attributed to good outcomes rather than bad outcomes, thereby influencing the judgment through the perception of intentionality. The means used can influence these judgments as well (Cova & Naar, 2012). In fact, these quick initial inferences can influence all aspects of moral judgments used in the information models, such as perceived intentionality, consequence, and causality (Knobe, 2010). This is supported even with research on very young children (Leslie et al., 2006). This same effect was found in multiple age groups (Cushman & Mele, 2008; Mallon, 2008). There are substantial criticisms of the moral pervasiveness model, which will be addressed later

(Guglielmo, 2015). However, it does show additional support for quick evaluations being made based on information external to the immediate situation, like some of the processing models.

Process Models

The information models deal with content and how that content may be influenced. The process models may address information, but are more concerned about the steps that lead to a judgment as part of sequence (Guglielmo, 2015). Of these, two models are dominant in the literature.

The Dual Process Model. The dual process model asserts that two simultaneous processes concur, consequentialist decisions being more conscious and deontological judgments being driven by emotional responses (Greene, 2008, 2013). Consequentialism evaluates moral actions based on whether the action brings about the best consequences (Haines, n.d.). There are different forms of consequentialism, such as if one thinks the best actions are those that bring about the most happiness, bring the most freedom, or promote survival. Consequentialist decisions, as understood in the moral decision-making literature, are decisions that evaluate actions based on the consequences such as serving the “greater good” (Paxton & Greene, 2010, p. 513). These are often referred to as utilitarian, but may simply be decisions which evaluate morality based on preventing individual death or bringing about a desired outcome (as in ends justifying the means). It is not as strict as the philosophical definition, but consequentialist decisions appear closer to the philosophical concept of consequentialism or utilitarianism to an outside observer than a rule-based decision. “Deontological” refers to law or rule violation-based decision making and, as it appears to observers, is usually justified by statements like “killing is wrong.” The dual process model uses two pathways which contribute to the decision making.

However, emotions and time can influence these decisions, as deontological responses can be overridden in some cases when more time is given (Paxton & Greene, 2010).

This model has been supported using functional MRI (fMRI) studies using what are known in the moral psychology literature as “trolley problem scenarios” (Greene et al., 2001). The trolley problem is a dilemma commonly used in the literature which presents someone with a choice to direct a trolley down a set of tracks, with various people or items standing in the way who can potentially die based on the decision about where the trolley is directed. One might have to choose between the trolley killing several old women and one young girl, and then must explain why they valued one over the other. The fMRI studies presented these dilemmas and watched what occurred in the brain in response to these questions. They were able to see what areas were more active when providing responses associated with consequentialist or deontological reasoning. They were able to see how emotions also played a role. Patients with damaged brain regions responsible for emotion have dulled physiological responses to dilemmas when they are asked to imagine harming others (Moretto et al., 2010). Consequentialist decisions then become, in line with the model, more likely (Ciaramelli et al., 2007). The alternative prediction also seems true. Healthy emotional responses generated stronger aversion and deontological reasoning (Cushman et al., 2012). Supporting evidence also includes how deontological and consequentialist judgments can be made more or less likely by introducing or removing a funny video for some dilemmas (Valdesolo & Desteno, 2006). In other words, patient responses can be influenced by providing emotional content. This provides a method for showing that emotion plays a role in selecting between the two pathways presented by the model.

This model provides perhaps the largest criticism and most significant alternative to the social intuitionist model (Guglielmo, 2015). It shows evidence that the frequency and speed of

consequentialist judgments, but not of deontological judgments, are affected by cognitive load (Greene et al., 2008). Furthermore, some emotionally evocative dilemmas led to deliberative and consequentialist reasoning, not intuitive judgments. Physiological aversive responses predicted willingness to harm others, contrary to norms about harming others (Cushman et al., 2012). Results like these are difficult to explain using the social intuitionist model, as judgments based on quick intuitions should not be affected by cognitive load (Guglielmo, 2015). However, some initial aspects of the dual process model did not hold up either.

Criticisms of the Dual Process Model. Greene (2009) now agrees that some of the early aspects of the dual process model were not accurate, though he notes that those are not essential for the model. In particular, the initial presentations of the model distinguished between personal and impersonal actions, and that those lead to emotional or deliberative processes respectively (see Figure 4). When the data was reanalyzed, this seems to be due to a small subset of personal dilemmas. This distinction was part of how the model predicted if a deontological decision or consequentialist decision was made, affecting the model's predictive value. Also, there is evidence that the consequentialist and utilitarian concern for the common good is not a motivator for consequentialist decisions (Bartels & Pizarro, 2011; Kahane et al. 2015). This means that the decision process may not be a truly utilitarian or consequentialist decision, but might have other motivations that are more self-interested rather than utilitarian. These two issues have weakened the dual process model, in that the decisions are not necessarily consequentialist and cannot predict when deontological decisions are made. What is consistent in the prominent models is that norm violations are quick, intuitive judgments, and then rational processes supplement the moral judgment process (Guglielmo, 2015).

The dual process model pairs well with the counseling decision-making model (discussed later), which asks for identification of a norm violation followed by an evaluation of potential consequences; but as it is unintentionally incorporated and there are many of the same features in the decision-making model, it creates problems for testing. There are challenges to determining if the counselor is making ethical judgments due to the dual process model or if they are doing so according to the learned counseling decision-making model because of these similarities. Counselors are required to practice ethically, and so how these quick affective judgments affect decisions are difficult to assess. There are significant financial and social motivations to ensure that responses appear to follow the model, even if the actual decision process does not. Without access to an fMRI, this makes testing the social influence on the process difficult. However, there is another moral decision-making model that may be easily testable and may provide insight into how ethical decisions are made.

Social Intuitionism. The literature regarding social intuitionism presents a dichotomy of moral decision-making models, one of which emphasizes reason (“rationalism”), and the other emotion-based intuitions (“social intuitionism”), as the major driver of moral decisions (Haidt, 2001). Notably, this literature does not use these terms, in particular “rationalism,” the same way as the aforementioned philosophical literature. The terms are borrowed to emphasize psychological processes and, while they are either reductionistic or somewhat inaccurate representations of the philosophical schools they are named after, they nevertheless highlight a contrast in moral models and function as constructs. As described below, Haidt (2001), among others, make a persuasive case that ordinary moral decision-making relies primarily on what he calls “intuition” and is then followed by a post hoc justification. This has important implications regarding how ethical counseling decisions are made if they follow a similar process. It would

imply that ethical decisions are responses to intuition justified to the profession post hoc, as moral decisions are emotionally based and then socially justified.

Social intuitionism makes the claim that intuitions are the primary source of moral judgments (Haidt, 2000; Kagan, 1984; Shweder & Haidt, 1993; Wilson, 1993). To quote Haidt (2001), “Intuitionism in philosophy refers to the view that there are moral truths and that when people grasp these truths they do so not by a process of ratiocination and reflection but rather by a process more akin to perception” (p. 814). The social intuitionist model claims that an event occurs, an intuition such as revulsion is felt, and then a decision is made. Reason enters in after the fact, to justify the choice to others and influence their same intuitive responses. Social intuitionism is contrasted with the dominant model, based on reason, which Haidt labels “rationalism.” Rationalist models emphasize the role of reason in making moral decisions (Williams, 1967, p. 69). In the rationalist framework, reason is seen as the primary contributor to moral decision-making (Kohlberg, 1969; Piaget, 1932/1965; Turiel, 1983). Reason and cognition here are not viewed as one-and-the-same. “Moral intuition is a kind of cognition, but it is not a kind of reasoning” (Haidt, 2001, p. 814). The rationalist models present a structure in which the person is presented with an event; they reason through potential options, weighing evidence, and then decide. Reason can play a role, but not at the point in the decision-making process where rationalist models suggest that they do. Haidt claims that the emotional basis may not always be the case, but that it is most commonly the case, stating that social intuitionism is an “antirationalist model only in one limited sense: It says that moral reasoning is rarely the direct cause of moral judgment. That is a descriptive claim, about how moral judgments are actually made” (Haidt, 2001, p. 185). While it may be possible to reach a moral conclusion through

rational reflection, most often, moral, and ethical decisions are based on intuition or emotional responses.

Post hoc Reasoning and Dumbfounding. There is evidence to suggest reasoning is not impartial and is motivated (Kunda, 2000). The motivations may be thought of as self-interest, but this lacks precision in that it may involve group cohesion or social factors which may not directly benefit the individual. Often this reasoning is biased in ways that are self-relevant, such as rationalizing one to be smarter, and this likely has a social desirability function (Kunda, 2000; Mercier & Sperber, 2011). If asked about morals, violations are seen as taboo unless they are presented as a tragic tradeoff (Tetlock, 2003). This highlights the framing effect that can occur regarding protected values (Baron & Ritov, 2009; Sunstein, 2005). The framing effect means that when semantic changes are made in how a question is asked, such as particular language associated with these protected values or if it is presented as a gain or loss, it can manipulate the response. In some cases, two statements with the same logical meaning, but presented in a different way, can lead to contradictory moral intuitions and responses. However, these findings are not consistent, and are often directly contradicted, depending on how deeply held those values are (Connolly & Reb, 2003; Tanner & Medin, 2004). For example, people evaluate court case outcomes based on preconceived notions (Skitka & Houston, 2001; Skitka, 2002). Furthermore, evaluations of sexual moral action were better predicted by affective reaction rather than a perception of harmfulness (Haidt & Hersh, 2001). In studies where perceptions of harm were tested, participants appealed to some reasons but were unable to identify others (Cushman et al., 2006). Participants could identify physical contact and action causing harm as part of their justification, but the third option of neglect or omission (which caused harm) was not used even

in vignettes which made the neglect or omission obvious. This suggests some reasons are not consciously available to most people, though they can still make a moral evaluation.

One seminal source of support for post hoc reasoning came from Haidt, Björklund, and Murphy's (2000) unpublished work (based on Murphy's (1996) unpublished honors thesis study). In this study, participants were asked disturbing questions about moral decisions that, while descriptively harmless, were unusual (such as consensual incest). Most participants identified these instances as wrong and provided harm-based reasons as to why. When they were then challenged, often by rereading the prompt containing contradictory information, they typically committed to the statement that the act was wrong but were unable to provide the rationale. Though the original study was unpublished, follow-up studies have replicated the results, even showing the dumbfounding effect in computer-based tests (McHugh et al., 2017). The term "moral dumbfounding" was applied to this effect of "the stubborn and puzzled maintenance of a judgment without supporting reasons" (Haidt & Björklund, 2008, p. 197). However, McHugh et al. (2017) note that the definition has often been inconsistent and generally refers to a failure to provide reasons for moral judgment. This dumbfounding phenomenon supports the post hoc social intuitionist hypothesis because there is clearly an emotional, moral reaction and judgment, but the weak reasoning appears to be assembled post hoc. This is especially noticeable when the rationale is completely absent with the judgment intact. It does not entirely fit the dual process model, because often neither the deontological nor consequentialist rationale are present once sufficiently challenged, and it implies that, unlike the moral judgment, certain kinds of reasoning take more time rather than happening almost instantly. Similar dumbfounding effects have been found in other studies. Cushman et al. (2006) found that the nature of the harm altered rates of dumbfounding. Whether or not someone chose

to harm another person or simply allowed it to happen (action vs. omission) resulted in different rates of dumbfounding than dilemmas based on other themes. Vignettes with action leading to harm versus omission leading to harm had the lowest rates of dumbfounding. Intention-based vignettes generated the most dumbfounding. If the goal was intended (intended vs. a foreseen side effect) the vignettes created the most dumbfounding. Vignettes involving physical contact fell between the other two, implying that the content can influence dumbfounding responses on a spectrum, related to proximity and intention of the actor. The authors were able to distinguish, based on the kinds of dilemmas, that certain principles were consciously used, and others were less available to conscious reasoning, though still used. In other words, when it comes to moral content in a dilemma, action-based harm is readily identified and explained, whereas intention or physical contact-based dilemmas elicited less conscious responses, which were more difficult to explain.

Automaticity and Intuition. Automaticity refers to the preconscious automatic phenomena that are “generated from effortless sensory or perceptual activity and then serve as implicit, unappreciated inputs into conscious and deliberate processes” (Bargh et al., 2012, p. 593). The idea of automaticity has become an important concept in several domains, including moral psychology (Bargh et al., 2012). Much of the recent moral psychology literature has emphasized the automatic process (Haidt, 2007). Things that are not necessarily conscious reasoning can influence moral judgment, such as emotions (Horberg et al. 2011; Rozin et al., 2009). The relationship between disgust and moral reasoning can be noted in children as young as age five (Danovitch & Bloom, 2009). Facial responses to immoral behavior are the same as bad tastes and disease vectors, and not necessarily conscious (Chapman et al., 2009). Moral evaluations can be influenced by disgusting tastes (Eskine et al., 2011). Disgust’s influence on

moral responses can be differentiated from other emotions such as sadness, and the level of disgust can influence moral judgment (Schnall et al., 2008).

Moral judgment has been repeatedly shown to be influenced by emotions, and is moderated by several other factors (Schnall, 2017). People often imitate those around them (Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001). An example of this is the chameleon effect, in which people mimic the mannerisms of those around them, especially if they are empathic, and this likely facilitates communication (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Political groups show different disgust responses to moral judgments (Inbar et al., 2009). The perceived threat of a specific group and prejudiced responses were moderated by specific emotions (Dasgupta et al., 2009). While specific morals may not be universal, morality in an abstract sense (that there are morals people make judgments about) may be innate in humans, like how common speech patterns occur across languages after linguistic analysis (Mikhail, 2007). The words may not be the same, but language is universal. This implies a certain underlying psychological structure. Experimentally manipulating time by forcing participants to respond faster or making them wait to respond can influence deontological moral judgments (Suter & Hertwig, 2011). When given little time to respond, people tend to make deontological, rule-like, judgments. Given more time, they will be more likely to make consequentialist or utilitarian judgments. Utilitarian moral judgments can be influenced by cognitive load (Greene et al., 2008). If individuals are given complex tasks to complete while making moral judgments, they are less likely to make utilitarian judgments. Cognitive load can also reduce the concern for loyalty, authority, and purity (Bargh et al., 2012). It is not clear why this is the case, but it suggests that harm and fairness may be more automatic whereas loyalty, authority, and purity domains might be less automatic. Children, when provided moral dilemmas, show signs of both an automatic process and controlled cognition (Dys &

Malti, 2016). The perception of distance can influence moral thinking too, with distant events appearing more offensive (Eyal et al., 2008). This seems to be because people evaluate distant events in terms of moral principles rather than specific contextual factors which may nuance the moral decision. For the same reason, distance in time can also heighten the perception of moral decisions in those with strong moral values (Agerström & Björklund, 2009). Taken together, these studies show that moral decisions follow a process which includes some aspects that are automatic and emotionally influenced, and others that involve cognitive processes.

If moral judgment includes emotional responses, automatic responses, and cognitive processes, this presents a question for the social intuitionist model. If decisions are largely produced by intuition, what purpose does the post hoc rationale serve? As implied by the name, the post hoc rationale influences the moral judgments of others (Haidt, 2001). Social influences will demand justifications for the behavior, and so the rationale will serve both to address these, as well as to influence the judgment of others, like an internal lawyer making a case. This then influences others, since “it is hypothesized that reasoned persuasion works not by providing logically compelling arguments but by triggering new affectively valenced intuitions in the listener” (Haidt, 2001, p. 819). Due to the expressed reasoning, and because people are attuned to group norms, this then begins to shape others’ intuitions. This is the social intuitionist’s normative description of moral judgment, but not the only one. Two other methods are listed by Haidt as methods to change moral judgments through private reflection (Haidt, 2001). One is private reasoning, though this is considered the rarest and often faulty, and the other is through role-playing, and empathizing with another. It is interesting that role-playing is often used to train counselors in an educational setting, but the theory suggests it might also be a technique that counselors could use individually. However, since moral reason typically is a social process,

this suggests that the dumbfounding effect is the result of a failed attempt to justify the intuition in the social context (as evidenced by the discrepancy in dumbfounding between in-person interviews when compared to surveys [McHugh et al., 2017]). The motivating factors are suggested to be coherence and relatedness, which tie into cognitive dissonance.

Coherence, Relatedness, and Cognitive Dissonance. The motivation to provide these explanations comes in part from the strong impulse to relatedness (Haidt, 2001). People are more motivated to function together than to be accurate. Haidt takes note of the impression motivation, which is “the desire to hold attitudes and beliefs that will satisfy current social goals” (Chen & Chaiken, 1999, p. 78). This contrasts with the accuracy-motivated goals, where there are incentives to be accurate. Individuals tend to try and express views more in line with those views which they know others hold (Chen et al., 1996). Some of these effects are noted even in anticipation of meeting others (Darley & Berscheid, 1967). Relatedness is an important motivator and can be noted in disparate cultures (Hofer & Busch, 2011). It is also consistent with the chameleon effect (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999).

Another motivator is the desire to be coherent and avoid internal contradictions (Haidt, 2001). Chaiken et al. (1996) defined “defense motivation” as “the desire to hold attitudes and beliefs that are congruent with existing self-definitional attitudes and beliefs” (p. 557). Lacking coherence can cause significant anxiety (Moskowitz et al., 1999). People have a strong motivation to avoid contradictions in their thinking (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). People are willing to engage in counterfactual thinking if it is not related to their most sacred values, which they seek to protect (Tetlock et al., 2000). There is a complicated interplay between defense motivation and accuracy, affecting how people evaluate moral arguments due to this coherence motivation (Liu, 2017). When people hold strong

positions on an issue, they will readily assimilate confirming evidence, but not disconfirming evidence (Lord et al., 1979). These effects can be manipulated when a certain subject, like mortality, is made salient, leading to harsher punishment for those who deviate from cultural norms (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Haidt (2001) provides an example of this biasing coherence mechanism and its relationship to worldview or cultural beliefs: “It is plausible to say, ‘I don’t like asparagus, but I don’t care if you eat it.’ It is not plausible to say, ‘I think human life is sacred, but I don’t care if you kill him’” (p. 821). People will assume that others are at fault if blame is ambiguous (Gosling et al., 2006).

There is substantial evidence that people are disposed to defend their own perspective and that understanding the other’s perspective in an argument must be learned, and even then, only once someone is developmentally capable (Felton, 2004; Felton & Kuhn, 2001; Kuhn, 2008; Kuhn & Udell, 2003a, 2003b, 2007). People’s bias toward their side of the argument affects them in context, but can improve their evaluations of arguments when shown only one side of the debate, even when the side they are evaluating is not their side (Baron, 1995). Coherence-related bias is related then to the context and influences evaluations. These biases have proven difficult to change (Lilienfeld et al., 2009). This has led some to say that reason has an argumentative social function, rather than a function of improving knowledge (Mercier & Sperber, 2011). This is not to say that the argumentative function does not lead to truth; in fact, in a functioning social group, it can address confirmation bias (Haidt, 2001).

While not entirely the same, this phenomenon is related to cognitive dissonance, which does occur when dilemmas are presented. Cognitive dissonance originated from idea of social comparison (Cooper, 2019; Festinger, 1954). This theory asserts that people have a motivational necessity, a drive, to influence and share the opinions of others in order to have correct opinions.

The similarity to the social intuitionist model is obvious, but there are situations where a similar process of reducing inconsistency occurs, and so Festinger shifted the theory to broaden its applicability (Cooper, 2019). It occurs when “the holding of two or more inconsistent cognitions arouses the state of cognitive dissonance, which is experienced as uncomfortable tension. This tension has drive-like properties and must be reduced” (Festinger, 1957, p. 115). This was demonstrated experimentally by asking people to speak positively about obviously boring tasks and paying them varying amounts of money for the statement (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). The amount of reported tension experienced led people to shift their opinion, and more tension was created when they were offered less money for their statements. This is counterintuitive as one would think that more money would shift the opinion, but rather the tension was what shifted opinion. This was supported with numerous follow-up studies with similarly counterintuitive results (Cooper, 2019). Examples are studies that show that the more people suffer, the more they like what they obtain through their suffering (Aronson & Mills, 1959). Children will devalue toys if told not to play with them in proportion to the severity of admonishment (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962). When choosing products, people raise the evaluation of the one they select (Brehm, 1956). In some instances, people prefer failure to inconsistency (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1963). These studies generally fall into the two categories of insufficient justification and free choice (Draycott & Dabbs, 1998).

The notion that dissonance is a drive was supported with deception; when individuals were told a placebo might cause arousal, their dissonance tension did not seem to affect their work, as they attributed it to the placebo, but it did cause aversion when the same statement regarding the pill was not made (Zanna & Cooper, 1974). People felt the need to alleviate the tension when they believed it was due to the task, but not when it was thought to be due to the

pill. Inverse results were found using actual sedatives: The higher the arousal, the more likely people were to change their beliefs (Cooper et al., 1978). Later studies followed up, showing physiological responses to cognitive dissonance (Croyle & Cooper, 1983; Losch & Cacioppo, 1990). Though there are several theoretical explanations for why cognitive consistency is relevant, one perspective is that it often leads to unwanted outcomes, so the motivation to change is to render consequences of behavior non-aversive (Cooper, 2019). It has some treatment applications as well. Dissonance can possibly be used to treat eating disorders among women (Green et al., 2018). It may be possible to use it to improve body image (Jankowski et al., 2017). Dissonance-based therapies have been used for smoking, exercise compliance, substance abuse, and depression (Azdia et al., 2002; Simmons et al., 2013; Steiker et al., 2011; Tryon & Misurell, 2008). Dissonance can also be experienced vicariously (Norton et al., 2003). Combined, these findings make a case that dissonance and its avoidance can motivate behavior change, that this effect is active in a therapeutic context, and that it has social implications. If this is true for the client, why would it not be an influence on the counselor?

Criticisms of Social Intuitionism. Notably, there are some significant criticisms of social intuitionism. Most of the literature on moral dumbfounding has asked if something was wrong for a disgust-based violation, not if something was *morally* wrong for other violations, such as anger-based violations (Guglielmo, 2015). This presents two substantial problems for social intuitionist research. First, disgust's role may be overstated due to its "wrongness" being a social violation, as opposed to a moral violation. Research suggests that disgust and moral violation are different: Harmful acts are more situational, whereas impure acts are attributed to the person (Chakroff & Young, 2015). Anger and disgust can be manipulated separately, disgust by norm violation and anger by harm (Russell & Giner-Sorolla, 2011a). Disgust is often more difficult to

justify compared to anger (Russell & Giner-Sorolla, 2011b). The difficulty justifying disgust may be because it is not a moral violation, but a norm violation; people may have difficulty explaining their reasoning because it is a social norm issue, and not a moral one. It may be that it is not considered morally wrong, but just socially taboo or distasteful. Second, disgust may be amplifying the effect of a moral violation and not be the source itself; when correcting for publication bias, effects disappear entirely (Landy & Goodwin, 2015). Landy and Goodwin evaluated publication bias by estimating effect sizes based on the published studies and then comparing unpublished studies to published studies. The published studies showed a small effect, whereas unpublished studies showed none. It is not surprising that the unpublished studies would show a smaller effect, but the authors noticed how different they were. It seems that anger may be able to account for the results, and in fact, some of the disgust vignettes may be perceived as harmful (Gray et al. 2014; Royzman et al., 2015). Wording for these moral dilemmas has been shown to have theoretical and methodological implications that require attention, but the effects are subtle enough to allow for comparison in most cases (Barbosa & Jimenez-Leal, 2017; O'Hara et al., 2010). In response to Landy and Goodwin's (2015) criticisms, Schnall et al. (2015) argued that the results may also be interpreted as supportive of social intuitionism, if certain known moderating variables are considered (Schnall et al., 2015). They noted that the meta-analysis failed to include personality variables crucial to the effect, in particular body sensitivity for the olfactory disgust-related experiments. Additionally, experiments on emotional influence on moral judgment require that participants are ignorant of the source. So, if the participant realizes a bad smell prior to the moral judgment, they will attribute the disgust to the smell, not the judgment, and, even if the moral act is repugnant, will

attribute the disgust to the smell. Amplification of moral judgment using these methods requires specific procedures.

Whereas there are criticisms of social intuitionism, the dumbfounding effect still occurs, and people can assert that there was a moral violation without sufficient justification (McHugh et al., 2017). The explanation may be due to disgust, but disgust was selected for theoretical reasons related to moral foundations. The participants still believed the violation to be a moral violation, not a norm violation, and were unable to justify the assertion. There is also reason to believe that coherence and dissonance drives can be observed in a counseling context. Some of the distinctions within the debate are subtle, and the dilemmas sometimes depend on careful wording paired with loose constructs based on abstract philosophical schools. Replication with other designs and in other contexts is likely the only way to settle the debate on social intuitionism and dumbfounding. It still seems possible and even likely that similar processes to the social intuitionist model occur with counselors. The question remains, how similar are the dilemmas found in the moral psychology literature to the dilemmas encountered by counselors?

Need for Cognition

McHugh et al. (2017) were unable to find an association with dumbfounding and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006), as well as the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (Huber & Huber, 2012). As a result, to find moderating variables for dumbfounding, the authors recommend meaning maintenance, meaning threat, need for closure, and zeal. Meaning maintenance and meaning threat have limited validated measures available, as does zeal. “Zeal” is a set of unreasonable beliefs formed as a compensatory response to threats (threats such as those of meaning, epistemic concerns, or relationships) (McGregor, 2006). There is an available and validated measure for closure: The Need for Closure Scale, also called the Need for

Cognitive Closure Scale (NFCS) (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). The scale measures tolerance of ambiguity, closed-mindedness, and personal fear of invalidity (fear of the cost of making an incorrect judgment) (Kruglanski & Freund, 1983). These items might be of interest; however, it also seems to tap into the notion of personal need for structure, notably borrowing some of the strongest items from the Personal Need for Structure Scale (Neuberg et al., 1997). This is less relevant to ethical decision-making by therapists. Tolerance of ambiguity at first seems to be relevant to ethical decisions, but is not related to therapist behavior, except with new therapist trainees; where tolerance of ambiguity provides an advantage, this relationship does not appear with more experienced therapists, suggesting that as therapists become more experienced tolerance of ambiguity is less of a factor (Fremont & Anderson, 1988). The NFCS is also long, with 47 questions, and even though there is a shorter 15-question version, most research has used idiosyncratic pieces of the Need for Closure Scale (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). The NFCS is not without criticism, lacking evidence of discriminant validity, and is arguably multidimensional when claiming otherwise, and so is less used in the literature (Neuberg et al., 1997). However, there is a related, but conceptually distinct, construct that may hold more promise as a potential moderator of the dumbfounding effect.

Need for cognition is a construct describing individual differences or propensity for effortful cognitive endeavors (Cacioppo et al., 1996). The Need for Cognition Scale (NCS) measures an individual's tendency to engage in effortful cognitive endeavors (Cacioppo et al., 1996). The NCS is widely used and has some interesting relationships to the moderating variables the authors suggested. Haidt cited need for cognition in his arguments for social intuitionism (Haidt, 2001). Individuals with high need for cognition find cognitive activity enjoyable or are at least less stressed by effortful thinking. Those who have less of a need operate

on automatic processes or heuristics. The theoretical origins focused more on ambiguity intolerance and cognitive-dissonance-like tension reduction, arising from a need to make meaning out of ambiguity in experience. The modern scale focuses more on motivation for cognitively effortful tasks, distinct from cognitive ability or intelligence. Some have suspected that cognitive dissonance and meaning making might be related and observe the same phenomena (Randles et al., 2015). Most importantly, the NCS is widely used in the social sciences and has some theoretical connections to political decisions, as does the moral foundations and social intuitionism literature. As such, there is a strong theoretical connection to McHugh et al.'s (2017) recommended alternatives, as well as to the basis for the moral foundations and dumbfounding literature. It fits in well because while moral dumbfounding and social intuitionism claim moral decisions are made on a more emotional basis, there is a need to justify the behavior to others and it is a kind of cognition (Haidt, 2001). In fact, need for cognition incrementally predicts moral behavior above other moral traits, and is directly related to self-reported moral behavior (Strobel et al., 2017). Need for cognition is a construct that reflects an individual's motivation for reasoning, and social intuitionism claims reasoning is motivated. There is an emotional response, followed by a justification. It is suspected that those who have a higher need for cognition would be more interested in supplying the justification, whereas those low in need for cognition might more readily admit they are dumbfounded by a dilemma.

The NCS, both the original and the shortened 18-item scales, show high internal consistencies with Cronbach alphas typically greater than .85 across multiple studies (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Cacioppo et al. (1996) also report additional support, such as test-retest reliability. They note that Sadowski and Gulgoz (1992) reported a test-retest correlation of .88 ($p < .001$)

over a 7-week period with 71 undergraduates using the 18-item NCS, and Verplanken (1991) reported a correlation of $r = .66$ ($p < .001$) over 8 months in his using only six items from the Dutch translation of the NCS with Dutch residents. Multiple studies have shown that the scale is gender-neutral and that there are no differences between the U.S. and European samples (Cacioppo et al., 1996). The NCS has shown strong convergent validity through its negative correlations with dogmatism; attention to social comparison cues; tendency to avoid, distort, or ignore new information; the need for closure; and several other variables expected to be negatively correlated. It is positively related to the ability to formulate complex attributions, considering evidence and reason when making judgments or formulating beliefs, curiosity, and others. Need for cognition covaries with intelligence but is distinguishable. Also interesting is the complex relationship of emotion and need for cognition; those high in need for cognition are not unemotional, in fact, they are often better able to identify emotions and communicate them; but need for cognition seems to be unrelated to emotionality (Taylor & Bagby, 1988; Taylor et al., 1992). For discriminant validity, it has been shown to be weakly or nonsignificantly correlated with social desirability and response biases, such as test anxiety (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Petty & Jarvis, 1996). The attitudes of individuals high in need for cognition are more influenced by the quality of the issue-relevant arguments in a persuasive message than are the attitudes of individuals low in need for cognition.

Ethical Dilemmas in Counseling

The ACA (2014) provides six principles used to guide ethical decisions in counseling: autonomy, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, fidelity, and veracity. “Autonomy” refers to the ability to make decisions and direct one's own life. “Beneficence” refers to working toward the good for individuals and society, “non-maleficence” is the principle to do no harm, and “justice”

is treating people equitably, including seeking social justice. Finally, “fidelity” and “veracity” refer to maintaining agreements and promises, and speaking truthfully to those who come into a counseling context. The Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) for counselors is founded on these principles. Properly understood, they form part of a common morality underlying moral frameworks and can be used to make more specific considered judgments (Beauchamp, 2003).

The origin of these principles can be traced back to the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates (Merlino, 2006). However, it is beyond the scope of this review to delve into the centuries of ethics and bioethics literature. Instead, this review will draw on the ACA’s decision-making model, which cites more recent work. Prior to 1979, the helping professions had few academic ethics texts that dealt with philosophy outside of a Catholic context which often presented examples for discussion (Fletcher, 1980). Prior work on ethics took a teleological view, a view that Fletcher (1980) and Ramsey (1970) incorrectly describe as based on consequences (consequentialism), but which is better understood as looking at aims or purpose. This is a minor point, as the intention of the writers appears only to contrast earlier views with the transition to deontological perspectives. The classic book *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, first published in 1979, and the subsequent editions, is the modern source of four of the six counseling ethical principles (Beauchamp & Childress, 2012). It does discuss alternative philosophical views and concludes that a roughly deontological view, based on what they call “common morality,” is the best for biomedical ethics. Interestingly, people who make associated deontological judgments are more likely to be considered trustworthy and selected as cooperative partners (Everett et al., 2016). Taking a deontological view, the text sets out principles that are to be followed as universal for making ethical decisions. The fifth foundation of fidelity is attributed to Kitchener (1984), who was influenced by Ramsey (1970; see Forester-Miller &

Davis, 2016). Ramsey's (1970) work focuses on a contrast between situational ethics and principles and appeals to religious foundations rather than personal values in ethical situations. Veracity is listed as a sixth principle in the ACA Code of Ethics, but is not in the decision-making model white paper, which is the decision process recommended for counselors to use in a dilemma (*Navigating the Ethical Decision-Making Process*, n.d.). It is likely considered part of fidelity, which is about trust. When dealing with counseling ethics, a dilemma most often refers to when two of the principles conflict with one another or when context causes a principle to conflict with itself (Mabe & Rollin, 1986). However, it can also refer to when there is a conflict between ethics and the law (Mappes et al., 1985).

Criticisms of the principles are nuanced but plentiful. Some have criticized the identification of morality with rule-following (Karlsen & Solbakk, 2011). By this the authors state that the deontological ethics of Kant, acting as if you would like the rule to always be followed, have been conflated with simple rule-following, and that this view of morality is not "common morality," as various cultures might subscribe to views like virtue ethics. In essence, if it is just rules, who and what culture makes them? Simply claiming they are universal does not make it so. Others have criticized the distinction in personal autonomy versus action autonomy (Quante, 2011). This is a subtle distinction about how autonomy can refer to self-rule, as in the structure of a life. However, there are distinctions regarding informed consent about whether one has the capacity to make those kinds of decisions, and when actions agreed to in the moment are given consent but might harm the integrity of the person. Still, others have criticized the emphasis of autonomy of the individual instead of the autonomy in the relationship (Entwistle et al., 2010). This is important because the idea of individual autonomy may lack an appreciation of cultural influence or shifting identities in the larger social context. Decision-making can be

imbedded in autonomy, supporting or undermining contexts. There is also the responsibility of the client or patient, which is often ignored (Draper & Sorell, 2002). There is the issue of where informed consent, autonomy, and persuasion interact when persuasion might be needed for informed consent (Shaw & Elger, 2013). A physician may need to correct a bias in the decision-making process, such as omission bias (choosing inaction, as it is easier when the consequences may be dire), certain cases with intellectual disabilities or phobias, or if there is a belief the treatment is expensive when it is free. Managing emotional responses to make informed decisions needs to be considered in light of social costs, justice, and autonomy (Graber & Tansey, 2005). There are problems as to how these ethical principles relate to the law and legal assumptions (Epstein, 2007). Examples are the presumption that adequate disclosure has been provided if the patient or client has no further questions, as well as opt-out consent forms and presumptions of mental capacity. Deeper challenges have argued against the claim that the foundations are universal and based on a supposed common morality, questioning how that could be determined (Christen et al., 2014; Herissone-Kelly, 2011). There are disputes about what constitutes common morality, cultural bias regarding common morality, and lack of cultural considerations. This is reflected in that counselors have encountered situations in which a client's cultural values conflict with counseling values, which are based on Eurocentric perspectives (Sadeghi et al., 2003). Common Eurocentric beliefs cited as problematic are basic assumptions of individualism versus collectivism when making ethical decisions, a preference for independence, and linear cause and effect leading to assumptions about initial consequences providing adequate informed consent. Most of the criticisms relate to how to prioritize or how to interpret autonomy, as that can often guide the interpretations of other principles (such as what one decides is good, and the limits of autonomy affecting non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice).

Counseling Decision-Making Models

Many models for counseling decision-making models have been proposed (Cottone & Claus, 2000). Cottone and Claus (2000) categorize the decision-making models into four categories of philosophically based, theoretically based, practice-based, and models for specialty practice.

The philosophically based models resolve conflict using philosophy or theory. Hare (1991) argued that due to personal bias, intuition is insufficient when selecting which principle to value more than others. This contributed to other foundational work, such as Kitchener's decision-making model (Kitchener, 1984). This was a more general conceptual model based on Beauchamp and Childress (1979). The model placed the intuitive first, followed by the critical evaluation stage. This critical evaluation stage had three hierarchically arranged substages. These were legal, respect for autonomy (and non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity), and ethical theory, in that order. Rest created a temporally non-linear four-step model, where the competing ideals were contrasted with what other moral courses of action might be and then a decision was made if an ideal or which ideal was going to be implemented (Rest, 1984). Kohlberg's cognitive influence led Rest (1994) to later revise his steps into a model of moral action that involved moral sensitivity, judgment, motivation, and character (Rest, 1994). Gutheil et al. (1991) proposed a model based on decision analysis, tracing out potential consequences and their probabilities. Models that were based in theories attempted to incorporate Berne's transactional analysis or apply transactional analysis to other decision-making models (Chang, 1994; McGrath, 1994). Feminist models have been proposed, which incorporate the therapist's emotional-intuitive response and then the social context (Hill et al., 1998). Betan (1997) emphasizes underlying philosophy, understanding these models as embedded in a social and

cultural context which needs to be understood to evaluate the decisions. Cottone (2001) then built upon the socio-cultural underpinnings with a social constructivist decision-making model, arguing that psychological processes were not involved, but rather that the decision involved social processes. This model is interesting considering social intuitionism, as it has similar steps to other models but seeks consensus out of potentially conflicting social norms, rather than adhering to principles. Cottone and Clous (2000) do an excellent job explaining the above in their review, and their social constructionist perspective highlights points that support a social intuitionist perspective. They point out that Social Systems Theory was tested in light of decision-making, and results suggest social factors influenced decision-making more than individual moral or ethical reasons for decisions (Cottone et al., 1994). Further supporting the social intuitionist model in decision-making, decision-making was seen to be influenced by social pressure, but was not very much influenced by legal guidelines (Hinkeldey & Spokane, 1985).

There are also models for specialty areas. This includes the use of touch, if applicable (Calmes et al., 2013). Models exist to address dilemmas in school counseling settings (Brown et al., 2017). There are prevention models (Crowley & Gottlieb, 2012). Other models have been used to address the additional factors in family counseling (Southern et al., 2005). There are also models for rehabilitation counseling and models for assessing children with special needs (Rae et al., 2001; Tarvydas, 1987). Decision-making models extend to education and dual relationships (Gottlieb, 1993). These models continue to be produced, but generally focus on one specific area or set of dilemmas.

The models that most resemble the ACA's decision-making model have been the practice-based models. These models describe a process of evaluation, do not result in a single

ethical decision, and may not appeal to philosophy or theory as a basis (Keith-Spiegel & Koocher, 1985, as cited in Cottone & Claus, 2000). Some models incorporate the counselor's own moral values while emphasizing but not imposing them on the client (Stadler, 1986). Stadler's (1986) model assumed that the therapist was a moral agent with their own moral values which will influence actions taken in session. To avoid unduly influencing the client's values, Stadler recommends internal tests like checking if the therapist felt comfortable recommending the course of action to a colleague before continuing. Tymchuck (1986) emphasized justice in the steps that have contributed to other ethical models (as cited in Cottone & Claus, 2000). Manuals have been created that imply that non-maleficence may not be the most important value out of respect for other values, such as autonomy or justice, and that provide steps to take when dealing with dilemmas (Steinman et al., 1998). Others present ten-stage models and imply that familiarity with them will allow for quicker ethical decisions (Welfel, 2006). Still others have combined models into a single set of practical steps, often incorporating features of both, like the counselor's personal values (Corey et al, 1998).

The ACA has a guide on its website for navigating difficult ethical decisions (*Navigating the Ethical Decision-Making Process*, n.d.). The ACA acknowledges that counseling ethics can often be difficult to navigate and, as such, have collaborated to create a white paper to guide counselors and counselor educators (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016). The paper presents the foundational ethical principles of counseling: autonomy, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, and fidelity. It then presents a seven-step model based on the relevant literature, summarizing other decision-making models into one authoritative method. The steps are: first, identify the problem; second, apply the ACA Code of Ethics. If the first two do not yield a clear response, additional steps are to be followed. The next steps are: third, determine the nature and

dimensions of the dilemma; fourth, generate a course of action; fifth, consider the potential consequences; and finally, implement the course of action. In conclusion, it states that there is rarely one correct way to proceed, but, if followed, the resulting decision will be professional (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016). This affirms that ethical principles can be in conflict and that the counselor will be asked to “use professional judgment to determine the priorities when two or more of them are in conflict” (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016, p. 3). In stage six, the document then recommends principles from an additional source, which asks you to evaluate the decision again. The three points used are universality (if you would recommend the same to other counselors), publicity (how you would want the behavior reported in the press), and your own “sense of fairness based on whether you would treat others the same in this situation” (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016, p. 4). These points contain other evaluative measures within them.

The decision-making model document cites the Van-Hoose and Paradise (1979) criteria to guide counselors, and states that one is probably acting ethically if the action meets four criteria. These are honesty, acting in the best interest of the client, lacking malice or personal gain, and if it can be justified based on “the current state of the profession” (p. 58). This is interesting, because the result of following the steps is then described as only probably ethical, though it will be a professional decision.

There are several potential conflicts that can arise with counseling principles or the law. It is still possible that one might have a conflict between autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, fidelity, and veracity, which means selecting one above the others, generally leading to a selection of the autonomy of the client. Fulmer (2014) notes that even within non-maleficence and beneficence, there may be contextual conflicts, without involving other principles, such as in the case of a client in unbearable pain or with memory issues. As Fulmer argues, autonomy in the

end is a primary ethical pillar, but he also cites that counselors follow the law foremost. What remains unanswered is that if counselors are to be ethical, and laws are not necessarily ethical, how is that process understood? Does law override autonomy? There are obvious pragmatic reasons why a law needs to be followed in a profession, but the law as a limitation shows that the principles apply only to a point, and it is not sufficient to always default to autonomy or the law.

Additionally, perceptions of what is the best interest of the client may differ between counselor, supervisor, and client. Ultimately, the client will determine in the end if the perception was correct due to the respect for autonomy. Furthermore, counselors are asked to combine their own sense of justice with what others would think about the situation, which implies a potential conflict between the social context and individual feelings, though most of the points emphasize the opinions of others. These conflicts are what create dilemmas; they are by nature challenging (and hopefully rare) cases. Adding to these difficulties, the decision-making model presented by the ACA may not be followed in practice. There is limited research on the use of the decision-making models, but the existing research suggests that counselors may only be informed by them, the relationship between education and practice remaining unclear (Levitt et al., 2015).

The results demonstrated that participants made decisions following a split-second model that included a combination of personal values, beliefs, and professional responsibilities. Responses indicated that participants did not really think about the steps involved in making ethical decisions; rather, they arrived there through experience and perhaps self-awareness of personal values (Levitt et al., 2015, p. 89).

For the purposes of this research, the process models have been selected for a few reasons. First, ethical decisions are ideally made based on the defined counseling ethics, to enable therapists to avoid unethical behavior. Therefore, the content of thought is either

consistent with ethics or not. The assumption is that the content is known *unless* the process shows that reasoning is not based on counseling ethics. Second, the information models focus on attributions of blame and responsibility. This does not map well onto counseling ethics, as most of the models describe situations where one party in the relationship has harmed the other, whereas the counseling setting focuses on a helping relationship, and most often the client would present an issue of blame regarding a third party. Additionally, a stated goal of ethics is to prevent harm (ACA, 2014). Perhaps a moral judgment in the counseling setting would not be ideal, but it wouldn't necessarily be an ethical issue if the therapist handles those judgments appropriately. Depending on the resulting behavior, issues with content may be a personal issue for the therapist, not specifically a counseling issue. Knowing the process of judgment would then guide appropriate handling of the ethical judgment, whereas the content may not, as appropriate content is already defined and readily identified. In other words, the thought, "what's the best way to view the thought and judgment in process to address it" would be more useful than the simple comparison of, "is the thought in line with counseling ethics?" Since ethics is a protective factor, knowing how it are being used in the process would be more informative than determining if the content of the binary judgment were in line with ethics. The one area where the information model might be of use is in the biased models, which claim that automatic processes may be influencing the content.

Summary

Counseling ethics attempts, in a practical set of rules, to implement the counseling values of autonomy, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, fidelity, and veracity (ACA, 2014). These principles have a history that developed out of practical and philosophical concerns to protect clients. However, when these principles run into conflict, a process begins of making a decision

to navigate the dilemma. Guides are offered, but when examined, they are not as clear as they initially appear, and do not necessarily alleviate the conflict. Perhaps one could turn to the principles underlying the values and decision-making models, but they are developed from deep philosophical conflicts impractical to wade through when an actual dilemma occurs. The models do provide clear guidance, but often they are more of an evaluative process that ensures due diligence rather than a method for resolving the conflict. Finally, the social aspects of decisions come in for the final deliberation. The decision process is then evaluated by peers, either through consultation, supervision, and regulatory boards to ensure that the decisions appropriately maintained the desired ethical values. Luckily, it is rare for these dilemmas to occur, and the ethical framework is strong enough to address most problems in counseling. Still, understanding how we *actually* make decisions that protect clients and counseling values is important to ensuring ethical practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The primary purpose of this study was to see if dumbfounding occurs with counselors. The occurrence of dumbfounding with counselors is needed to see if it is worth exploring social intuitionist implications for counseling ethics. The current study design was adapted from McHugh et al.'s (2017) frequency-based replication study, which replicated the findings of Haidt et al.'s (2000) seminal (albeit unpublished) work supporting the existence of the dumbfounding phenomenon. McHugh et al. (2017) were able to convincingly replicate the dumbfounding effect of Haidt et al.'s (2000) study four times, including with online surveys using a set of challenges displayed on the screen to replace the in-person interviewer. The study was designed to see if dumbfounding could be evoked in-person, and then to compare the results with computer-based interviews as well as other measures. The authors achieved similar effects of dumbfounding, but found no relationship to the additional constructs of meaning in life and religiosity. These authors showed that online surveys were similar to in-person interviews. Vignettes with dilemmas are used to educate counselors, so if this is an appropriate method to educate counselors in ethics, it is a valid way to examine counselor ethics. As such, McHugh et al.'s (2017) method will be adapted using the online format for dilemmas, but with altered questions designed to place counseling ethical foundations in conflict. The intent is to generate dumbfounding among the counselor participants. The full survey is available in Appendix A.

Research Questions

1. Do counselors exhibit dumbfounding when presented with moral dilemmas?
2. Do counselors exhibit dumbfounding when presented with ethical dilemmas related to counseling practice?

3. Do counselors respond differently to counseling dilemmas when asked if something is *wrong* versus when asked if something is *ethical*?
4. Does need for cognition moderate the dumbfounding effect?

Hypotheses

H1: Counselors will exhibit dumbfounding when presented with moral dilemmas.

H2: Counselors will exhibit dumbfounding when presented with ethical dilemmas related to counseling practice, but at a lower rate than when presented with moral dilemmas.

H3: Counselors will respond differently to counseling dilemmas when asked if something is *wrong* versus when asked if something is *ethical*.

H4: Need for cognition will moderate the dumbfounding effect in both moral and ethical dilemmas. Specifically, those higher in need for cognition will be less likely than those lower in need for cognition to exhibit dumbfounding.

Participants

Participants were counselors with at least one year of experience and who were actively practicing at the time of the survey. Experience ensured that they had enough exposure to counseling ethics, as well as to its application in real-world scenarios. The sample was recruited from online groups based in the United States, so participants were likely to have advanced English language skills. Participation was voluntary, with a lottery system for a \$50 Amazon gift card. Online recruitment occurred through counseling listservs such as CESNET, CounsGrads, and private social network groups (such as on Reddit or Facebook) which are specifically for counselors. Participants necessarily had access to the internet, due to the online nature of the Qualtrics survey software used.

To inform a power analysis to determine a target sample size, an effect size (r) of .34 was drawn from the average of reported effect sizes of empirical studies examining need for cognition. These include NFC correlations with Openness ($r = .46$) and Intelligence ($r = .42$) (Furnham & Thorne, 2013). Sargent (2004) found that NFC negatively correlates with Punitiveness ($r = -.22$). Strobel et al. (2018) found that NFC correlated with self-reports of moral behavior, known as Everyday Life Behavior ($r = .28$). G*Power 3.1 was used to calculate the required sample size of 118 participants. The input parameters used for the a priori sample size estimation were for a two-tailed test with an effect size (d) of .7, critical p -value (α) of .05, a power ($1-\beta$) of .80, and an allocation ratio ($N2/N1$) of .20. The allocation ratio was selected based on McHugh et al.'s (2017) results for the modified online surveys.

Procedure

This study used the procedure of McHugh et al.'s (2017) third experiment (labeled "3b"), wherein the authors used an online survey to induce moral dumbfounding. The authors created a systematic style of questioning that asked participants to respond to vignettes online. The vignettes (available in Appendix A) contained accounts of individuals engaging in behaviors typically governed by morals and which contained elements of a dilemma. The online surveys provided four vignettes used by Haidt et al. (2000) in the original in-person study.

The original vignettes included the classic Heinz dilemma, a trolley problem, the Jennifer Cannibal Dilemma Vignette, and the Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma Vignette from Haidt et al. (2000) study. The Heinz Vignette contains a moral dilemma in which a man, Heinz, stole lifesaving medicine to save his terminally ill wife. Participants were asked if it was morally permissible; this vignette was a modified version of that used in Kohlberg's (1958) seminal research on moral judgment. The authors also added what is known as the "trolley problem"

vignette. The most common variation of the trolley problem—which has been frequently used in the moral psychology literature (see Greene et al., 2001)—describes a train running down a track, unable to stop, and about to hit five people. It is possible to push a man who is very obese onto the tracks and stop the train, killing one, but saving five; in this vignette, a man in the vignette chooses to push the obese man. These two vignettes were expected to be more reason-based, rather than intuition-based. The reason vignettes were used for purposes of even comparison, comparing two reason vignettes with two intuition-based vignettes, as the intuition vignettes were based on the moral foundations literature. Only the vignettes based in the moral foundations literature were used for this study.

The vignettes based on moral foundations theory were created to avoid common objections found in a WEIRD culture (Haidt, 2000). The questions carefully avoided things that might be attributed to harm, unfairness, and oppression, the more common foundations in WEIRD social groups. The cannibal vignette used by McHugh et al. (2017) was a slightly modified version of Haidt et al.'s (2000), asking whether a moral vegetarian could eat fresh human cadaver meat. The vignette specified that the cadaver was donated for experimentation after a heart attack, and it was going to be disposed of in an incinerator. The fourth vignette was the Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma. This was a story about two siblings who decided to make love while on summer vacation from college (Haidt et al., 2000). According to this vignette, college was used to suggest age, they used two forms of contraception, and no one was harmed or ever found out. The vignette also states that this behavior brought the siblings closer together. These details were intended to remove common objections to the behavior while still eliciting the sense that this was morally wrong. These intuition-based vignettes were retained for the present study, and two new ones were created for a counseling context.

Creating New Vignettes

McHugh et al. (2017) included their vignettes, questionnaires, data, and analyses in the Open Science Framework. The Open Science Framework is a tool designed to improve the reproducibility of psychological research and maintained by the Center for Open Science, a non-profit organization whose goal is to improve the integrity of research (Foster & Deardorff, 2017). For the present study, these available vignettes, challenges, and questions were used (Jennifer Cannibal Dilemma Vignette, and Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma Vignette) or modified as a template to construct the counseling vignettes. The new vignettes were constructed to put the counseling fundamental principles in conflict (created to contain a dilemma) and avoid common objections as much as possible. Approximately seven were created, and informal reviews were done by three practicing counselors and three counselor educators to determine two that may elicit dumbfounding. The two that were selected were based on real-world events, with some details modified. An additional source of input for the questions came from this researcher's direct contact with a representative of the ACA's ethical consultation service. The representative provided examples of real-world questions posed to her by practicing counselors and counselor educators. They also provided dilemmas used in ACA ethics competitions. These examples and responses informed the creation of the new dilemmas.

The first counseling vignette, the Heidi Immigration Vignettes, contained a story of a therapist working with an undocumented person. In this case, the story contained a dilemma of providing housing and food to a child by a therapist to protect the child from immigration enforcement. This was based on a real-life event that occurred in a local social work program with an intern. The real therapist who served as a basis was consulted and gave permission to use the story, but details were modified to protect the identity of the program and intern. Details were

also modified to make the dilemma more challenging. For example, the intermediary time of two weeks was selected because a longer time frame was clearly a violation and too short a time frame might be viewed as more tolerable. The topic of immigration was conceived of because while gaps in moral foundations literature are not available in counseling ethics, there might be gaps in political beliefs or associated laws that might conflict with counseling ethics, and this could be used in a similar way. Licensed clinical mental health counselors' self-reported data shows 50.99% registered Democrat, and the majority self-identify as liberal (Norton & Tan, 2019). Data on political beliefs is sparse, but consistent over time. In 2014 50% of counselors identified as Democrats, and both counselor educators (28%) and counselors (33%) identify as liberal at a higher percentage than a national average (9%) (Steele et al., 2014). For comparison, Steele et al. showed 15% identified as Republican in 2014, and 13.9% of counselors identified as conservative. As a result, dumbfounding was more likely to arise in counselors if the vignette held a conflict between issues associated with the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party's policy platform is more favorable toward undocumented immigrants (Creating a 21st Century Immigration System, 2021). The vignette was modified to create a perception that justice, beneficence, advocacy, and non-maleficence conflicted with the law, a dilemma, and only the counselor could intervene. The perception of conflict was increased by making the child not responsible for the current state and therapeutic support as critical. This is a dual relationship, but one that study participants might see as excusable, since the ethics were intended to protect and support minority populations, not place them in need. This was part of the rationale the intern had provided in real practice. This story was also selected because it did not elicit disgust responses, as this was a criticism in the dumbfounding literature (Guglielmo, 2018). The full text is available in Appendix A.

The last vignette was created based on a case in Germany known as the Rotenburg Cannibal (Eckardt, 2004), in which a man named Armin Weis entered into a consensual agreement with another man named Bernd Juergen Brandes. The agreement was for Brandes to be stabbed and dismembered after losing consciousness with pills so that Weis could consume Brandes. This was part of a fetish community online which focused on cannibalism. The details were altered to remove any doubts, present in the original case, that this was consensual. The case was selected to place autonomy, non-maleficence, and duty to warn into conflict to create a dilemma. Elements were intentionally highlighted that might create uncertainty such as the potentially harmed party's desire to be eaten and the lack of information. Furthermore, a physician assisting the process was added to inject doubts, but not certainty, about illegality. The inclusion of the physician was designed to create doubts about application of counseling ethics while retaining a strong sense that this had been wrong or unethical. Uncertainty and autonomy were combined with clear loss of life in an attempt to elicit dumbfounding. The loss of life would have maintained a sense of wrong, theoretically, based on evolutionary group survival needs (Machery & Mallon, 2010). The Rotenburg Cannibal Dilemma Vignettes were likely to elicit, and details were modified to increase, disgust. The hope was to maintain the disgust features of the Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma Vignette, but with clear harm and a conflict with counseling ethics. The disgust of the Rotenburg Cannibal Dilemma Vignettes was in contrast to the Heidi Immigration Vignettes, which had few details associated with disgust. Initially, it was uncertain if dumbfounding would be exhibited by counselors at all. Details to increase disgust were added to the Rotenburg Cannibal Dilemma Vignettes to make them more likely to increase dumbfounding responses (Guglielmo, 2018).

Steps of McHugh et al.'s (2017) Dilemma and Challenge Method

For each of the four vignettes, the response options and challenges were displayed in a specific sequence. Initially, McHugh et al. (2017) used computer-based software to display the vignettes and record responses, but later the 3b experiment used online surveys which allowed for webpages to function in the same way. This study at first follows the same method as their 3b, for the first two vignettes, except for randomizing the order. After determining eligibility to participate with a questionnaire regarding basic demographic questions, participants were presented with instructions to the online survey. Instructions included directions to not change responses on previous pages. The instructions, and freedom in the survey, were provided so that participants would only be shown challenges to their responses and not see that they would receive alternate challenges based on their response. However, they were permitted to go back, so that they could return to reread the details of the vignette if they chose. First, participants were shown the text of the Jennifer Cannibal Dilemma Vignette and the Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma Vignette. After they were provided the text of a vignette, they were immediately asked underneath if actions described in the vignette were morally wrong. They were given a 7-point agree-disagree Likert scale, and were then able to move on to the next page. On the next page, the response would be challenged with three challenge statements displayed on the screen. These statements were alone in the survey flow, with no opportunity to respond, just an option to continue to the next page. The challenge statements were in the form of questions, and were targeted to prevent objections. The challenge statements focused on preventing objections based on asserting points explicitly eliminated in the vignette text. In past research, participants would simply state that someone would be harmed, even though the vignette stated otherwise (Haidt, 2000; McHugh et al., 2017). For example, the Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma Vignette included a challenge statement which read “And do you concede that nobody else was affected by their

actions?” to hopefully eliminate harm claims as viable responses. Following this page, participants were shown a “critical” page. This screen had a critical statement, such as “Julie and Mark’s behavior did not harm anyone, how can there be anything wrong with what they did?” displayed above three options. The three options included a “nothing wrong” response, a dumbfounded response (“it’s wrong and I can’t think of a reason”), and finally an option to state it is wrong and provide a reason. If the participant selected the last option, then a space to provide an open-ended explanation was provided. If the participant provided an unsupported declaration or tautology, this was coded and then considered to be evidence for dumbfounding in addition to the dumbfounded response option.

Following this page, participants were then given a brief post-vignette questionnaire between vignettes, asking them to rescale their response, to see if it had changed; they were also asked if they felt irritated, changed their mind, and whether they felt the response was based on their “gut” or reason. The order of the vignettes, as well as the possible responses to them, were displayed randomly in the McHugh et al. (2017) study, but not in this study, to ensure that the counseling-based vignettes did not influence the vignettes unassociated with counseling. The questionnaire was retained as an additional means to assess if dumbfounding was elicited.

Following the presentation of the first two vignettes, the next two vignettes deviated slightly from some features of McHugh et al.’s (2017) approach. At this stage, participants were randomly sorted into two groups, receiving the same vignettes but with changes to wording before the responses. One group received “ethical” framing language. The other received “moral” language to see if this distinction elicited a different response. For example, while one group received “How wrong would you rate this therapist’s behavior?” the other group received

“How unethical would you rate this therapist’s behavior?” Additionally, questions and challenge statements were different in that they were based on participants’ responses.

Because counseling ethics avoids imposing viewpoints and is not based on moral foundations theory, the same gaps moral foundations would use to elicit dumbfounding were not available. As a result, it was difficult to predict counselor responses in a directional manner. Instead, counseling principles were placed in conflict to create unusual dilemmas. Participants were presented with a 6-point scale instead of a 7-point Likert scale. This forced a non-neutral position so that if they answered it was “wrong”/“unethical” or “nothing wrong”/“nothing unethical” they would receive challenges relevant to their selection. If they scaled closer to nothing wrong (one through three), they were presented with one set of challenges opposing their view. If they agreed that something was wrong, they were challenged with a separate set of questions (four through six). These dilemmas were created by posing conflicting counseling principles to the participants. For example, one vignette described an inappropriate relationship with an undocumented person where a therapist provides substantial material assistance. If the participant responded with there was something wrong with intervening, they would receive challenges such as “Do you accept that the client would be harmed if she had not intervened?” If they responded that there was nothing wrong, they would receive “Do you agree that this is a dual relationship; she provides food and shelter for him?” These responses were only seen after a judgment had been made and is in part why the original questions came first, but also so that the challenges could be neutral and based on participants’ responses, rather than assuming their conclusions. After the McHugh et al. (2017) vignettes, each vignette was followed by three questions. One principle, benevolence, was intentionally but plausibly misused to ensure that each response had the same number of challenge questions.

Finally, just as before, the critical page was displayed. A question critical of the response provided was displayed at the top and paired, like the challenge statements, to their response. For example, if they believed the Rotenburg Cannibal Dilemma Vignettes therapist did nothing wrong, they would see a challenge page followed by the critical page with “Won’t someone be harmed? Isn’t this unethical?”/“Isn’t this wrong?” above three options. If they answered there was something “wrong”/“unethical,” they would receive a challenge about respecting autonomy. Participants were provided three options, as in the previous vignettes, including a “nothing wrong” or “nothing unethical” response, a dumbfounded response (“it’s wrong and I can’t think of a reason”), and finally an option to state it is wrong or unethical and provide a reason. If the participant selected the last option, then a space to provide an open-ended explanation was provided. If the participant provided an unsupported declaration or tautology, this was then considered to be evidence for dumbfounding in addition to the dumbfounded response option. These were followed with the questionnaire, as with the initial two vignettes. Finally, they were presented with the NCS and taken to another survey to enter information if they wished to enter for a chance to win a gift card as an incentive.

Notably, McHugh et al. (2017) found unexpectedly high rates of dumbfounding when only using the unsupported declaration of the behavior “is just wrong” response as originally presented. They contended that merely selecting the unsupported declaration option was psychologically different from selecting the option of disapproving and from providing an open-ended unsupported declaration as the reason (i.e., clicking “it’s just wrong” was different than typing it out). They felt that counting the selected option as evidence for dumbfounding creates too liberal a measure. Instead, they changed the wording to “I can’t think of a reason” and provided an option to say it’s wrong and type a response. This corrected the issue of participants

claiming they had a reason if they had none, bringing the responses closer to the results obtained from the in-person studies (McHugh, 2017). The authors suspected that a dissonance-like drive makes it less likely that participants would take the “can’t think of a reason” and so would encourage them to take the time to type out a response. Once these issues with the survey were worked through, online and computer-based surveys showed less dumbfounding than the in-person interview and less variation between the vignettes, so this is likely a conservative measure of dumbfounding.

Need for Cognition Scale

The McHugh et al. (2017) study originally paired the dilemma questions with two questionnaires measuring religiosity and meaning in life; however, they found no significant correlations with dumbfounding responses, and they did not aid in identifying dumbfounding effects. As such, they were omitted from this study. Instead, the NCS was used to explore whether need for cognition functions as a moderating variable for rates of moral dumbfounding. The NCS was cited by Haidt (2001) in explaining the social intuitionist model. He explained that for some, “such solitary moral reasoning may be common among philosophers and among those who have a high need for cognition,” but he continues, stating that this is not the norm, since “reasoning naturally occurs in a social setting” (Haidt, 2001, p. 820). As such, it stands to reason that those high in need for cognition would be less likely to be dumbfounded. The construct of need for cognition was originally defined as a need to make sense of experience and intolerance of ambiguity (Cacioppo et al., 1996). However, Cacioppo et al. (1982) refined the concept to refer to a stable trait, reflecting the enjoyment of engaging in effortful cognitive activity, and created a scale to measure this conceptualization. Two years later, Cacioppo et al. (1984)

developed a shortened version of the NCS, reducing the number of items from 34 to 18. The 18-item NCS is what was used for the current research.

The NCS construct provides a good theoretical fit for the present study, because it measures the tendency for individuals to enjoy and engage in thinking (Cacioppo et al. 1982). Enjoyment is theorized to arise from frustration, tensions, or dissonance when an individual struggles to make sense of incongruous parts of the experiential world. The tension resolves if an individual makes sense of the world and is reinforced by a natural process rewarding them with positive emotions, making one more likely to enjoy structuring, understanding, and integrating ideas. This would be especially true for things which require explanation in a social context, which adds a distinct but relevant layer of social desirability to the explanation (Cacioppo et al., 1982). Examples include things like political beliefs or anything that needs justification, such as ethics or morals. This makes it a good fit for the present study, because if someone enjoys engaging in the effortful cognitive activity, they are hypothesized to be more likely to expend the effort required to reason through a dilemma, and less likely to be dumbfounded.

The NCS measures this tendency of enjoying effortful cognitive activity (Cacioppo et al. 1996). The 18-item NCS has shown strong internal consistency, with Cronbach alphas typically greater than .85 across multiple studies. Cacioppo et al. (1996) also reported additional support such as test-retest reliability. They note that Sadowski and Gulgoz (1992) reported a test-retest correlation of $r = .88$ ($p < .001$) over a 7-week period with 71 undergraduates using the 18-item NCS, and Verplanken (1991) reported a correlation of $r = .66$ ($p < .001$) over 8 months in his, using only six items from the Dutch translation of the NCS with Dutch residents. Multiple studies have shown that the scale is gender neutral and that there are no differences between U.S. and European samples (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Cacioppo et al.'s (1996) NCS research showed

evidence of convergent validity, as the NCS was found to be negatively correlated to dogmatism, attention to social comparison cues, the tendency to avoid, distort, or ignore new information, the need for closure, and several other variables expected to be negatively correlated. It was also found to be positively correlated to the ability to formulate complex attributions, consider evidence and reason when making judgments or formulating beliefs, exercise curiosity, and others. Finally, for discriminant validity, NCS was found to not be significantly correlated with social desirability and response biases such as test anxiety (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Petty & Jarvis, 1996).

Cleaning and Coding

Responses were coded according to the definitions proposed by McHugh et al. (2017). If a statement was an unsupported declaration or tautological response, it was coded as reflecting dumbfounding. A second coder independently coded responses to prevent bias in the coding process and provide a way to check reliability. To ensure that interrater reliability was not affected by removed items, all available responses were coded. McHugh et al. (2017) presented definitions for coding the open-ended responses, the responses to the option that what the vignette contained was wrong or unethical giving participants space to provide an explanation. According to these definitions, participants were considered dumbfounded if the response was tautological or an unsupported declaration. The second coder was provided with the survey responses and the definitions. The instructions to the second coder included definitions about how to code a response if a participant selected the third option. These instructions were that if the participant selected the third option they were to “check if it is unsupported” and were provided the examples: “it’s wrong!” or “unethical!” The second coder also marked a participant as dumbfounded if they provided a tautological response. They were provided an example that

explained, if they say, “cannibalism is wrong because eating people is wrong,” or some other self-referential statement, then that is tautological and was also to be considered dumbfounding. Responses were coded independently, and the second coder’s responses were compared with the primary researcher’s, to check for interrater reliability.

Statistical Analysis

As in the McHugh et al. (2017) study, the results for the first and second research questions are expected to be descriptive (i.e., the proportion of those dumbfounded compared to those not dumbfounded will be reported). The descriptive information will be used to understand to what degree, if any, dumbfounding occurred. The information will also show if counselors are dumbfounded when presented with counseling-based vignettes. For the third research question, a chi-square test was used to determine whether dumbfounding rates differ between the responses to questions framed as “ethical” versus “wrong.” Finally, an independent samples *t*-test was run to test for differences in need for cognition between those who were dumbfounded and those who were not; this, in essence, is the moderation analysis in the present study (see McHugh et al., 2017).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical risks were minimal for several reasons. Due to the study being conducted through online surveys to prevent experimenter bias, there was no direct interaction with the participants. Furthermore, it presented a minimal risk to the participants, as they must have already been broadly familiar with the subject matter, since one of the selection criteria for participation was that the participant must have graduated and had one year of experience practicing as a counselor. Though not all graduated from a CACREP-accredited counseling program (see below for more on participant selection criteria), all CACREP-accredited programs must have

coursework in ethics (CACREP, 2015). Independent of CACREP, counselors are required to practice ethically, and licensure requirements include mandatory training in ethics (*Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors Act, 1906/2010*). It was unlikely that any risk would be present, even if the dilemma contained disturbing content (as in the dilemmas containing stories of cannibalism or incest), as another selection criterion was that the participant must have been practicing in the counseling field for at least one year and must have also had counseling fieldwork experience in their counseling program. Counselors regularly deal in emotionally charged ethical content or disturbing events, such as helping a trauma victim, and so it is reasonable to presume they have already developed the skills to handle emotionally charged situations to provide therapy. Given that the study design permitted participants to remain anonymous, exemption was granted by the Institutional Review Board. There is no risk for privacy violation, as data is be reported in the aggregate with no identifying information associated with results.

Chapter 4: Results

The survey data required coding prior to analysis. Qualtrics collected 242 total responses; however, this included incomplete surveys and those who did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. There were $N = 185$ responses that met the criteria and were able to be coded. The open-ended explanations for participants' judgments varied in length from single word responses to short essays on rationale. The time predicted to complete the survey (25 minutes) was accurate on average, but some participants felt they needed to provide lengthy responses, increasing the time required for completion. Those who did not type out lengthy responses took considerably less time, but the time increase caused by typing out lengthy responses likely accounts for the number of incomplete surveys.

Coding and Cleaning Process

The primary researcher coded the responses according to the definitions proposed by McHugh et al. (2017). If a statement was an unsupported declaration or tautological response, it was coded as dumbfounding. Prior to cleaning the data, a second coder (a master's level counseling clinician) was brought in to prevent bias in the coding process and check reliability. The second coder was unfamiliar with the literature on moral dumbfounding, other than what was provided for the coding process. The coding occurred prior to cleaning, as some participants provided incomplete surveys with some information that required coding. To ensure that interrater reliability was not affected by removed items, all available responses from the $N = 185$ that contained codable data were coded. McHugh et al. (2017) presented definitions for coding the open-ended responses, the responses to the option that it was wrong or unethical and gave space to provide an explanation. According to these definitions, participants were considered dumbfounded if the response was tautological or an unsupported declaration. The second coder

was provided with the survey responses and the definitions. The instructions to the second coder included definitions about how to code a response if a participant selected the third option. These instructions were that if the participant selected the third option they were to “check if it is unsupported” and were provided the examples: “it’s wrong!” or “unethical!” The second coder also marked a participant as dumbfounded if they provided a tautological response. They were provided an example that, if they say “cannibalism is wrong because eating people is wrong,” or some other self-referential statement, then that is tautological and was also to be considered dumbfounding.

The data for the open-ended responses—namely, the typed options for the wrong or unethical and could provide an explanation option—were then coded independently and the second coder’s responses were compared with the primary researcher’s, to check for interrater reliability. Cohen’s κ was run to determine if there was agreement between two rater’s judgments on whether $N = 185$ participants capable of being coded exhibited dumbfounding. There was very strong agreement between the two raters’ judgments for each of the vignettes. For the first vignette, the Jennifer Cannibal Dilemma Vignette, $\kappa = .942$ (99% CI, .908 to .975), $p < .001$. For the second vignette, the Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma Vignette, $\kappa = .860$ (99% CI, .767 to .953), $p < .001$. For the third vignette, the Heidi Immigration Moral Framing Vignette, $\kappa = .931$ (99% CI, .867 to .996), $p < .001$. For the Heidi Immigration Ethical Framing Vignette $\kappa = .970$ (99% CI, .962 to 1.013), $p < .001$. For the last vignette, the Rotenburg Cannibal Dilemma Moral Framing Vignette, $\kappa = .904$ (99% CI, .832 to .976), $p < .001$; and the Rotenburg Cannibal Dilemma Ethical Framing Vignette, $\kappa = .916$ (99% CI, .849 to .983), $p < .001$. Finally, data was checked for missing items, straightlining, and satisficing, and those participants were removed using listwise deletion. Additionally, participants that did not meet the study inclusion criteria

(currently practicing counselor with at least one year of experience) were removed, and $N = 142$ participants remained for further analysis.

Demographic Information

All participants were practicing counselors and had at least one year of experience. Of the participants, 68.3% were graduates of CACREP-accredited master's programs. Participants identified 19.7% as male, 76.8% as female, 2.8% as non-binary, and .7% chose not to respond. The average birth year was 1982, with the youngest participant being born in 1996 and the oldest in 1952. 10% identified as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino. These participants further specified if they identified specifically as Spanish, .7%, both Spanish and Latino, .7%, Hispanic, 2.1%, as Hispanic and Latino, 1.4%, and as Latino, 2.1%. 85.9% identified as White, 1.4% as both White and Native American or Alaska Native, 2.5% identified as Black or African American, 3.5% identified as Asian, and 6% selected other. 9.2% thought of themselves as Republican, 50.7% as Democrat, 20.4% as Independent, 16.2% typed in their own response, such as Latinx, and 3.5% stated no preference. They were also provided a seven-point slide scale of political association. One was labeled as "extremely left" and seven was labeled "extremely right." By selecting one, 9.2% scaled themselves as "extremely left," 50.2% selected two on the scale, 20.4% selected three, 16.2% selected four (the middle response option) or did not respond, and 3.5% selected five. There were no six or seven ("extremely right") responses in the sample (See Table 1). The mean was $M = 2.96$ and the standard deviation $SD = 1.376$. As stated above, it should be noted that if a participant chose not to scale themselves, they were counted as responding four on the one through seven scale. The demographic information was a default package provided by Qualtrics, and the political scale required participants to drag a virtual marker left or right on a continuum. The default was four, and so this affected the results. 4.2% reported they were

addictions counselors, .7% were career counselors, 76.1% were clinical mental health counselors, 4.9% were marriage and family therapists, 7% were school counselors, and 4.9% college counselors or student affairs counselors.

Table 1

Political Association

1. Extremely Left	2. Very Left	3. Left	4. Center or No Response	5. Right	6. Very Right	7. Extremely Right
9.2%	50.2%	20.4%	16.2%	3.5%	0%	0%

Results for Research Question One

The first research question asked if counselors were dumbfounded. The results showed that counselors were in fact dumbfounded by non-counseling vignettes. Furthermore, a small portion of counselors who participated in the survey were dumbfounded in all vignettes. The dumbfounding occurred in similar proportions to those found by McHugh et al. (2017). In the four studies reported by McHugh et al. (2017), they found that the Jennifer Cannibal Dilemma Vignette dumbfounded 29.17% to 63.8% of participants, depending on the method of presentation and response options used. The difference in the results depended on variations in the method used. The first study was in-person, the second study was computer-based, and the third was an adjusted response option for both the computer and online version. The first method, which involved in-person challenges, yielded higher rates of dumbfounding because of the ability to provide bespoke challenges to responses and social pressure. These features could not be replicated in an online survey. The authors refined the method to use on computers, but

found artificially high dumbfounding rates. The McHugh et al. (2017) 3b method was recommended by the authors because the method used in the second study was too liberal a measure. McHugh et al. (2017), using the method most like this study (3b), found dumbfounding responses occurred in the following percentages: 29.7% (Cannibal), 27.7% (Incest), 15.8% (Heinz), and 30% (Trolley); for all vignettes, 56% of participants were dumbfounded at least once. With the first Jennifer Cannibal Dilemma Vignette, 16.9% of counselors were dumbfounded in the current study. For the Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma Vignette, 33.1% of counselors were dumbfounded. Examples of responses for the Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma included “That’s your sister or brother!”, “I don’t believe in incest,”; and “It is wrong base [sic] on my religious beliefs about sex and incest.” Despite training and professional norms that endorse a very clear set of ethical guidelines that should, at least in theory, protect against dumbfounding, counselors can be dumbfounded at a rate that is similar to the adult population surveyed by McHugh et al. (2017).

Table 2

Rates of Dumbfounding by Vignette

Vignette	Jennifer Cannibal Dilemma	Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma	Heidi Immigration Moral Framing	Heidi Immigration Ethical Framing	Rotenburg Cannibal Dilemma Moral Framing	Rotenburg Cannibal Dilemma Ethical Framing
Rate of Dumbfounding	16.9%	33.1%	11.9%	14.7%	28.4%	29.1%

If the coded responses are excluded, explicit declarations of dumbfounding accounted for 40.1% of the responses across all vignettes. If the explicit declaration is considered too liberal a measure, 18.4% of counselors were dumbfounded implicitly and provided unsupported declarations or tautologies. Using either implicit or explicit dumbfounding, dumbfounding occurred

often enough to believe it is not spurious. McHugh et al. (2017) suggested online surveys as more conservative than in person surveys. The surveys cannot consider subtle cues, sounds, and expressions that indicate a participant was dumbfounded, so real rates are likely higher. Additionally, the responses to the Jennifer Cannibal Dilemma Vignette and the Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma Vignette were in line with the previous research results, so it was unlikely that this was due to overly liberal measures.

Overall, 58.5% of the participants were dumbfounded at least once while taking the survey. Specifically, 37.3% were dumbfounded once, 12% were dumbfounded twice, 5.6% were dumbfounded three times, and 3.5% were dumbfounded by all four vignettes. Though the fact that 58.5% of participants were dumbfounded at least once may seem high at first glance, as it was hypothesized that counselors would be dumbfounded less frequently due to the non-judgmental nature of the profession, these results were in line with McHugh et al.'s (2017) findings. The authors provided data for each vignette, but found different rates of dumbfounding depending on vignette and method in their three replications. For their in-person study, 70.97% (22 of 31) produced a dumbfounded response; the computer-based surveys resulted in 56% of participants being dumbfounded; and the two online surveys resulted in 44% and 39% of participants showing that they were dumbfounded (McHugh et al., 2017). Though these are not direct comparisons because the counseling dilemmas were different, it does suggest a rough range of what is reasonable to expect.

Results for Research Question Two

The second research question asked if participants were dumbfounded with counseling-based vignettes, and results indicated that they were—and not at noticeably lower rates. Some brief examples of typed responses to the Rotenburg Cannibal Dilemma Vignettes were

“Harmful”; “Cannibalism is wrong”; “murder is murder”; and “Lord have mercy.” For the counseling-based vignettes, participants were randomly assigned questions framed with moral or ethical language, so the reporting of these results is split into two groups. Participants receiving the Heidi Immigration Vignettes were dumbfounded 11.9% (of $n = 75$) with moral framing and 14.7% (of $n = 67$) with ethical framing. For the Rotenburg Cannibal Dilemma Moral Framing Vignette, 28.4% (of $n = 75$) of participants were dumbfounded and 29.1% (of $n = 67$) were dumbfounded with the ethical framing. Finally, when comparing the new counseling vignettes with an original vignette used by McHugh et al. (2017), there was no significant difference in the proportion of those dumbfounded: $\chi^2(1, N = 142) = 2.763, p = .096$.¹ It can thus be reasonably concluded that these results provide evidence that counselors can be and in fact are, likely at high rates, dumbfounded in the face of ethical dilemmas, and there is no evidence in the data to suggest that counselors are different from the general population regarding ethical judgment and dumbfounding.

To ensure the high percentage of dumbfounding was not due to a coding error, further exploration was necessary. When coding participants as dumbfounded, the responses were separated into implicit and explicit to provide the data to a second coder. The explicit declarations did not need to be coded, as the participant self-identified that they were dumbfounded in their response. However, the implicit dumbfounding responses (unsupported declarations and tautologies) required coding. This was then added to the explicit dumbfounding for each participant. The data was coded and then reconciled, but doing so created an additional layer of grouping for implicitly and explicitly dumbfounded participants not originally anticipated. If a participant selected that the decision in the vignette was wrong but they could

¹ Given the p -value was less than .10, this result does suggest a larger sample size might have supplied the necessary power to detect a significant effect.

not provide a reason they were coded as explicit. If they selected that it was wrong and they could provide a reason, but they provided an unsupported declaration or tautological explanation, they were coded as implicit. Some participants were only dumbfounded explicitly; some only implicitly. These responses suggested a pattern. This led to questions about the survey measuring a single construct of dumbfounding or two separate effects of implicit and explicit dumbfounding.

To see what the responses indicated, additional theoretical reexamination and exploration of what responses could mean was required. A detailed discussion of possible groups represented is discussed in chapter five. For additional exploration, first implicit and explicit groups were compared to see if there were differences. Of the responses, $n = 9$ (or 6.3% of all participants) were dumbfounded both implicitly and explicitly, whereas $n = 68$ (47.9%) were dumbfounded either explicitly or implicitly, but not both. This appears important at first, but only 21.1% ($n = 30$) were dumbfounded more than once, as there were only four opportunities to be dumbfounded. Of the overall participants, 20.4% were implicitly dumbfounded and 40.1% explicitly dumbfounded; that is, there were approximately two explicit declarations of dumbfounding for every one implicit declaration. So, of 142 participants, $n = 83$ (58.5%) were dumbfounded; of these, only $n = 30$ (21.1%) were dumbfounded more than once. This makes the 6.3% ($n = 9$) who were dumbfounded both implicitly and explicitly reasonable in context, as it is close to the two to one ratio of implicit to explicit and there are limited combinations of implicit and explicit declarations available when there are only four opportunities to be dumbfounded. This is in line with the ratio of the implicitly to explicitly dumbfounded reported by McHugh et al. (2017), but is too small a subsample to make meaningful inferences about this group. As a result, the NFC scale was also used to compare potential groups within the data.

The various combinations of participants, based on their responses of implicit and explicit, were analyzed to see if they differed in responses for the NFC scale. The analysis also checked for the total number of times dumbfounded, if participants were dumbfounded at all, the number of times implicitly dumbfounded, the number of times explicitly dumbfounded, and if they were explicit or implicitly dumbfounded at all. Furthermore, participants were broken up into which questions they received. They were broken into groups of those implicitly dumbfounded on moral or ethical questions and those explicitly dumbfounded on moral or ethical questions. Finally, there were those dumbfounded once, never, and more than once. These groups were all compared to see if the responses differed on the NFC scale.

There were no meaningful differences in NFC responses from this exploration, except for total number of times dumbfounded, which will be discussed in response to research question four. There was no significant difference between group means for the total times explicitly dumbfounded and total times implicitly dumbfounded, as determined by one-way ANOVA, $F(40, 101) = .736, p = .863$. The number of times explicitly dumbfounded was not significantly different from the number of times implicitly dumbfounded $\chi^2(12, N = 142) = 3.276, p = .993$.

Results for Research Question Three

The third research question asked if there was a difference between ethical and moral framing of a question. There was no difference in rates of dumbfounding between the two framings of ethical and moral: $\chi^2(1, N = 142) = 0.487, p = .485$. This is true if the times dumbfounded are added together as well, $\chi^2(2, N = 142) = 0.638, p = .727$. There was no difference if questions were isolated to the vignette, such as just the Heidi Immigration Vignettes ($\chi^2(1, N = 142) = 0.227, p = .634$) or just the Rotenburg Cannibal Vignettes ($\chi^2(1, N = 142) = 0.016, p = .898$). Despite responses from participants, discussed in chapter five, suggesting that

ethical and moral norms were distinct, the framing of the questions did not appear to have any effect.

Results for Research Question Four

The 18-item NCS showed suitable psychometric properties for analysis. Cronbach's was $\alpha = .858$, and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the NFC scores follow a roughly normal distribution, $D(142) = 0.056, p = 0.200$.

The present study did not provide evidence that need for cognition moderated the dumbfounding effect for counselors. There was no significant difference between scores of dumbfounded participants and those not dumbfounded on the NFC: $t(140) = 1.679, p = .096$.² According to the method outlined in chapter three, a t -test determined that participants who were dumbfounded did not differ in their NFC scores. However, during the exploration for research question three, it appeared there was a difference in NFC scores for those dumbfounded four times and those who were dumbfounded three or less times. This was discovered because it was noticed that the proportion of participants who were explicitly dumbfounded was statistically different from those not dumbfounded: $\chi^2(16, N = 142) = 204.771, p = .001$. Also, the proportion of times implicitly dumbfounded and not dumbfounded were significantly different $\chi^2(12, N = 142) = 100.257, p = .001$. However, this is logical, as those who are not dumbfounded will be inversely proportional to those who were dumbfounded. Just to make sure this was the case, as there was no difference in NFC scores between those dumbfounded and not dumbfounded, further testing was needed. The difference possibly resulted from another unknown source, not necessarily differences between the dumbfounded and not dumbfounded groups.

² Given the p -value was less than .10, this result does suggest a larger sample size might have supplied the necessary power to detect a significant effect.

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between NFC and number of times dumbfounded. There was a weak, negative correlation between NFC and number of times dumbfounded, which was statistically significant ($r_s(140) = -.202, p = .016$). Correlation is not causation, but it was reasonable, due to the search for different groups discussed in research question three's analysis (further explained in chapter five), to suspect that multiple groups were influencing the results. The responses contained more than a simple dichotomy of dumbfounded and not dumbfounded groups. The weak correlation might be the result of these group differences, but they may simultaneously make detection more difficult due to the combined influence on results. To separate out the groups, a test was run to see if the number of times dumbfounded showed evidence of theoretical response groups. The groups differed as determined by one-way ANOVA, $F(3,132) = 2.749, p = .045$. Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test indicated only the participants who were dumbfounded four times were significantly different $M = 9.212, SD = 2.427, p = .040$. This suggests that the need for cognition is not a simple, or is at best a very weak, moderator for dumbfounding. But those who score lower on the NCS are more likely to be dumbfounded multiple times. In other words, scores on the NFC do not predict whether someone will be dumbfounded or not, in a dichotomous sense. However, low scores on the NFC do suggest that someone is more likely to be dumbfounded repeatedly when faced with multiple dilemmas.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The results showed counselors can be dumbfounded, which provides evidence for the first hypothesis. The results also provided evidence for the second hypothesis, that counselors can be and often are dumbfounded with counseling-based dilemmas. Despite their training and professional norms, which endorse a very clear set of ethics and ethical decision-making procedures, counselors often base their judgments on intuitions. Dumbfounding suggests these intuitions are not based on critical, deliberative, or evaluative reasoning. The reasoned explanations, instead, appear to be socially influenced post hoc justifications of intuitions. The EDMs may not function, or be possible to use, as intended. Contrary to the third hypothesis, the results did not provide evidence of a difference in rates of dumbfounding between vignettes framed as moral or ethical. Finally, the fourth hypothesis was not supported; the need for cognition does not predict if someone will be dumbfounded or not. However, those who score lower in need for cognition are more likely to be dumbfounded when presented with multiple dilemmas. Overall, this study supports social intuitionist theory of moral judgment and presents numerous directions for further exploration, practice, and research.

Exploration of Response Groups

As a result of splitting dumbfounding responses into explicit and implicit, there was speculation that the results potentially represented nine separate groups. The method examines two dichotomous groups, the dumbfounded and not dumbfounded participants. Splitting into these two groups is consistent with social intuitionist theory, but the responses could be categorized further. If participants differed in explicit or implicit dumbfounding responses, there is the possibility that responses might represent different effects or more groups than initially apparent. For example, it is possible that participants who responded to “there is nothing wrong”

or “unethical” could be representative of multiple groups. Each group would be different in the motivation or rationale for which the conclusion was “there is nothing wrong” or “unethical.” However, what lead to that conclusion may result from important differences. As such, each of the responses following the challenge statement could be broken down into multiple groups. These possible group categories are intended as suppositions for the purpose of future exploration, not an articulation of groups empirically established in the results.

The first response broken down into subcategories is the group of participants who answered, “there is nothing wrong/unethical.” These groups may not necessarily exist. However, logically, the first group could be composed of participants who honestly felt there was nothing wrong in the presented vignettes (group one: “honestly nothing wrong” responders). As some participants offered no rationale and said that there was nothing wrong in all four vignettes, it is possible that there are some who never thought anything was wrong ever (group two: amoral nothing wrong responders). There is also the possibility that this group contained participants who felt social or professional pressure to respond “there was nothing wrong,” but did not believe it themselves (group three: deceptive nothing wrong responders). This last group was suspected not only because of social intuitionist theory, which posits that the intuitions were unconscious and influenced by peer responses, but also because of the differences between in-person and online surveys found by McHugh et al. (2017). It seems that when other people are present, people are more likely to be dumbfounded. This is an advantage of online surveys, but makes it difficult to understand the role social pressure plays on the dumbfounding response. Nevertheless, the additional exploration searched for signs of these subgroups, and none was found.

The next conceptual group of participants is the group that provided an explicit declaration of dumbfounding. This group was characterized by their insight. They felt the vignette was wrong but could provide no reasons to justify their assertion. They were aware that they were making an unsupported judgment (group four: insightful explicit dumbfound responders). It is also possible that they had a reason which was understood as not persuasive to others and did not wish to share it (group five: socially aware explicit dumbfound responders). Due to the anonymous nature of the survey and lack of social pressure when comparing online and in-person surveys, this fifth group seems unlikely, especially since McHugh et al. (2017) found that providing an opportunity to explain a response led several participants to avoid selecting this option. The fact that participants change their behavior when they have an option to explain themselves suggests that people feel some dissonance selecting the “no reason” option. The dissonance is strong enough a motivation for participants to provide long explanations. Exploration was unable to meaningfully distinguish these two groups in the data.

The third response in the survey of “it’s wrong and I can provide a reason” potentially had multiple groups represented within. It is likely there were those who were able to provide sound reasons for why something was wrong and who were not dumbfounded (group six: valid rationale responders). Additionally, there were likely two groups that were providing a post hoc explanation with varying degrees of success. Of those who provided post hoc explanation, it is conceivable some were better than others at concealing their post hoc justification (group seven and eight: successful and unsuccessful post hoc responders). Examples of a spectrum of responses include “The eating of your own species”; “we don’t eat humans”; “laws in current state”; “No consent was given for her to take part of the body and consume it”; “The consent was given for RESEARCH”; “dead did not consent”; “blatant disregard”; and “Ethical Violation.”

Another possible group is one that lacked the insight of the explicit group and were unaware of the post hoc nature of their explanation (group nine: invalid but passible rationale post hoc responders). There is some evidence for group nine within the survey responses, but they may overlap with groups six through eight in ways difficult to detect. Group nine is distinct from other dumbfounding cases, because some provided reasons that did not meet the criteria to be coded as dumbfounded but, nevertheless, relied on faulty reasoning. They were not coded as dumbfounded, and may at first have seemed persuasive, but it was obvious they could not provide a persuasive response. An example that appeared more than once is the “x is illegal” response when the vignette had been constructed to avoid legal problems. Also, legality is not a sufficient explanation, as laws can be immoral. One common example, which many participants were unlikely aware of, was the behavior presented in the Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma Vignette. The behavior was not illegal in the country mentioned, France, at least at the time of the creation of the vignette. One might object that the law had changed in France, but the specific country is not important, as it can be switched out for another location where incest is not illegal. They may also have responded that it was illegal as a sufficient response, but made the judgment based on more complex reasoning they did not wish to explain. Also, some responses contained logical contradictions that did not meet the criteria for dumbfounding (they provided a faulty reason but provided a reason that was not tautological or an unsupported declaration). It is also possible that some deception was simply not detected or was unknown, to either the researcher or participant, such as self-deception.

These nine groups can be further consolidated into five groups if social intuitionist theory is assumed (Haidt, 2001). Assuming the method (from McHugh et al., 2017) of asking for judgments and then challenging rationale shows a real separation of reason and judgment, and

social intuitionist theory is accurate, some of the assumption of deception can be attributed to the natural process of post hoc explanation, reducing the number of groups. This is because all groups, regardless of conclusion, are providing unconscious intuitive judgments and post hoc explanations. The first response group would then be honest responders who felt nothing presented was wrong. There would be no meaningful difference in groups one, two, and possibly three. It is possible, though less likely under social intuitionist theory, that group three might be something like insightful responders who think their emotional response of moral judgment could not be adequately justified, and so concealed their intuition due to social expectations. The explicit declaration response group had insight that they lacked sufficient justification, but did not conceal this fact. The implicitly dumbfounded, or those who provided a reason, were those skilled and unskilled at providing post hoc responses. These are the two options if all judgment is intuition-based and followed by post hoc rationale. There would be no difference between valid and invalid reasons for the judgment process.

The only evidence of these group subsets was found using the NFC scores. A group made of the insightful without justification responders (group four) and those who were less skilled at providing post hoc justification (group eight) scored lower on the NFC. Scoring lower on the NFC indicates that they are less motivated for complex cognitive tasks. This makes them more likely to be dumbfounded multiple times because they do not enjoy the effortful process required to provide adequate post hoc justification. Further research with larger sample sizes would be required to see if these other groups could be detected. The relevance of this final group is limited, because if not broken down into possible groups, they are dumbfounded on both implicit and explicit measures. The difference is only that they are dumbfounded at every opportunity provided in the survey.

Discussion of Results

Research Question One

Regarding the first research question, the results of the present study provide clear evidence that, like the rest of the general population, counselors can be dumbfounded. The fact that counselors can be dumbfounded provides support for intuitive emotional responses guiding counselor decision-making similar to Kitchener's (1984) model. Furthermore, this study is additional support for social intuitionist theory; the stated reasons for judgments are likely produced post hoc in support of intuition (Haidt, 2001). Dumbfounding of counselors is not necessarily supportive of moral foundations theory. Counseling ethics are distinct in that they are intentionally restrictive, to avoid imposing viewpoints on clients. The gaps in moral foundations are not needed to elicit dumbfounding. However, the kind of intuition social intuitionists present is distinct from assumptions found in counseling models. Unlike Kitchener's (1984) model, the critical evaluative stage is not used to modify the intuition but post hoc, to support the intuition. Several participants maintained their judgment when challenged, stating that they believed something was wrong but could not provide a reason. They maintained that an action was wrong, or unethical, despite lacking sufficient explanations. This cannot be the absence of viable explanations alone, as the majority received training in their counselor education and all worked as a counselor under the Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2015). The challenge statements also provided some principles in the survey itself. The intuitive nature of these decisions is consistent with the combination of personal beliefs, perceptions of professional training, client interest, and transparency found in past research on ethical decision-making (Levitt et al., 2015). This study

contributes the empirical data on ethical decision-making called for by others (Burkholder et al., 2020; Levitt et al., 2015).

EDMs might benefit from adjustments which consider the social intuitionist theory, particularly intuitive judgments and post hoc explanations (Haidt, 2001). Adjustments may include more intentional reflection on perceptions of peers, attending to emotions, and seeking supervision earlier in EDM steps. Assumptions regarding reason's function may need revision. Instead of relying on reasoning alone, it may help to take advantage of social influences, which provide social pressure to motivate ethical behavior (Burkholder et al., 2020). However, further research would need to be done to test the effectiveness of these recommendations. If social intuitionist theory is correct, these models might be the framing of a process already occurring and the reasoning may provide some poorly understood function, even if it is not the one assumed by current models. The difference contributed by social intuitionist theory would be a nuanced understanding of how these models are used. Social intuitionist theory also shifts the role reasoning plays in moral judgment; it influences peers and the social group, rather than the judgment directly. The understanding of EDMs would have to incorporate the notion that reason is often enslaved to the passions (Cohon, 2018). The results suggest that that using EDMs is more about teaching socially appropriate explanations for judgments rather than a method for dealing with dilemmas. EDMs teach how to explain, appropriately, intuitions rather than guiding ethical actions. Further research and philosophical discussion are required before making hasty adjustments to such fundamental aspects of counseling. This research provides a basis for a critique but is not sufficient to make any claims for a better alternative.

Research Question Two

Answering the second research question and confirming the second hypothesis, the dumbfounding effect can and does occur when counselors are considering counseling dilemmas. This does not necessarily show dumbfounding leads to adverse or inconsistent ethical responses when making ethical decisions with clients. The dumbfounding effect was elicited using contrived ethical dilemmas. Still, the results are persuasive, as the online surveys were based on in-person surveys and were likely a more conservative measure of dumbfounding (McHugh et al., 2017). Furthermore, counselors are often educated with dilemmas (Burkholder et al., 2020). Dumbfounding shows the role of intuition as a primary source of judgment. This applies even when people are responding according to counseling principles-based vignettes, not just by exploiting gaps in the moral foundations (Haidt et al., 2000). The decision is emotive and located within the counselor.

Ethical decisions are often made quickly, and there are evolutionary reasons for doing so (Hromatko & Hrgovic, 2011; Machery & Mallon, 2010). Responding to threats may preclude systematic thinking, and charged emotional responses are then relied upon for judgment. Likewise, counselors occasionally must make decisions quickly to ensure the safety of their clients. Evolutionary theory suggests that the underlying process may have primarily prevented harm, but also served the function of making effective collaborators (Broom, 2006). This introduces unintended social features when trying to prevent harm. Evolutionary theory suggests moral structures developed to promote and sustain social behavior because they made human beings better able to survive. Examples include the benefits from better resources by cooperation while avoiding costly cheating (Waal & Waal, 1996). As such, these intuitive systems include motivations for protecting and policing reputation (Sperber & Baumard, 2012). Research on counselors, dumbfounding, and social intuitionist theory all support the idea that this social

pressure on the judgment is indirect, unconscious, and not precise, but incredibly influential (Burkholder et al., 2020; Haidt, 2001). The intuitive judgment and social awareness reside within the counselor but are not easily separated. The evolutionary arguments about moral intuition fit with the dumbfounding results of this study. This suggests an imprecise social process contributing to the intuitive judgments counselors make. This is not necessarily a flaw or issue to be overcome, but an advantage to be harnessed. It may provide a roadmap for effective ethical education.

Further research would be required to harness these features but, if true, social intuitionist theory suggests several avenues for effective ethical education. The intuitive responses are, according to social intuitionist theory, formed by the socially acceptable or persuasive post hoc explanations that form the discourse in the social group (Haidt, 2001). For counselors, this occurs in professional groups, counselor education, and supervision (Burkholder et al., 2020). Intentional discussions in professional counseling settings would theoretically shape the intuitions, and by extension the ethical framework counselors appeal to. Simply having discussions that can be overheard by peers may be an effective means to shape intuitions. Intuition-shaping is likely to occur where strong social attitudes are expressed in response to ethical content. This suggests that some discussions can or should be targeted toward ethical principles and values. Conversations can be directed and shaped to support and inculcate ethical principles. The nature of the conversation means that some conversations are not completely open dialogue or reciprocal, but directed, conversation. Encouraging students to defend these principles against critics might be an effective means to inculcate these values (Baron, 1995; Felton, 2004; Felton & Kuhn, 2001; Kuhn et al., 2003a, 2003b, 2007).

The intuitive drive-like nature of unconscious intuition needs to be considered when providing education. Long explanations of non-maleficence are less likely to be effective than quick semi-complete syllogisms like “do no harm” (Greene et al., 2008; Guglielmo, 2015). These ethical building blocks could be used as the foundation. It may also be possible to use the building blocks to connect them to more complex post hoc rationales where individuals can be taught to explain the intuitions. Education in post hoc rationale could have goals such as avoiding dissonance-inducing responses to support the intuition. Social intuitionist theory suggests that providing smaller, easily intuited principles would make principles capable of being accessed during an intuited judgment, like the finding of the dual process researchers (Greene et al., 2008). Guglielmo points out several findings that indicate quick judgments are closer to deontological maxims than consequentialist reasoning (Guglielmo, 2015). Focus should be on the deontological, intuitive-type decisions, as there is evidence to suggest that deliberative decision-making increases unethical behavior (Zhong, 2011). Also, for the sake of the relationship of the profession with the public, those who make deontological-like judgments are more likely to be considered trustworthy (Everett et al., 2016). Use of shorter maxims does not mean reasoning should be excluded. One possible strategy would be to connect and harmonize properly formed intuitions with adequate post hoc rationale. Properly reasoned post hoc rationale would contribute to ethical intuitions in other counselors, creating a robust system of ethical formation.

Gatekeeping also has a formative role in shaping ethics, but not just in eliminating bad actors to protect the profession. If those in the group shape intuitions of the group through discourse, some attention should be given to the intuitions of those entering the field. This is very similar to Cottone’s (2001) recommendation of encouraging counselor identity to ensure ethical

behavior. Cottone's model connects identification with the group as sharing the epistemology from which ethics are known and constructed, but the ethical judgment is located in the group rather than in the counselor. The social intuitionist contribution is distinct in that social intuitionism locates the judgment within the individual. However, it still maintains the importance of social influence on the intuitive judgments of others. People often imitate those around them (Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001). The imitation of others can be seen in the chameleon effect (mannerism mimicry), which is more noticeable in empathic individuals like counselors (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). The social process described by Cottone (2001) shares common features with the intuitionist model. The intuitionist model suggests that identification with counselors would lead to shared ethical intuitions. Imitation of others also indicates some caution as coherence motives target togetherness rather than accuracy (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). Individuals tend to try and express views more in line with those which they know others hold (Chen et al., 1996). Relatedness is an important motivator and can be noted in disparate cultures, of which counseling is one (Hofer & Busch, 2011). Gatekeeping may include managing a dynamic interplay between cohesion, external cultures, and ethical practice. Some support for the coherence motivation over accuracy can be seen in that professional identity is not always clearly defined (Cannon & Cooper, 2010; Reiner et al., 2013). The lack of clarity may be because what is considered professional might more accurately reflect the attitudes of those in the group (and the valued association with them) rather than adherence to principled ethics. The values may be adopted due to cohesion motivations, indirectly, rather than the group being formed around beliefs or attitudes. To cohere with the group, counselors may pick up values expressed in another counselor's discourse but which are not necessarily part of counseling ethics. Individuals may conflate the group identity with other adjacent values. Though closely aligned to counselor

values, counselors may adopt political or social views. Some evidence of this effect be seen in the Heidi Immigration Vignettes, where the majority of participants felt that dual relationships had a diminished importance. Gatekeeping should consider the potential of non-counseling attitudes influencing the group so that counseling ethics take priority.

The results suggest an additional level of importance to the ongoing role of supervision and consultation in informing ethical decision-making, like Cottone's (2001) recommendation. Supervision is the closest counseling-based relationship to the client outside of the therapist. The discussion with the supervisor would, theoretically, be the most proximate source of ethical discourse. Supervision would then act as a microcosm of the larger professional body, representing the Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) to the counselor. The explanations provided by the supervisor may act as checks on post hoc explanations and, perhaps by extension, emotions which govern counselor judgment. Supervisors should be aware that post hoc explanations may not be true, but that this may not be deception. Instead, the explanations provide potential insight into the intuition that the supervisee experienced as well as the discourse to which they have been exposed. This can guide the supervisory process and supplemental education.

Research Question Three

Counselors do not seem to respond differently when presented with information that is framed as ethical or moral; as such, the third hypothesis was not confirmed. The lack of difference contrasts with some responses provided by participants, where appeals were made to moral or ethical distinctions. Notably, in the Heidi Immigration Vignettes, participants stated they believed what Heidi did was wrong or unethical but expressed that they agreed with the action. These were often justified by making distinctions or temporarily splitting personal, ethical, moral, or legal categories. Examples include, "This is legally wrong and ethically

correct. In this case ethics overrule the legal ramifications and this counselor takes her legal licensure in her own hands to deal with her ethical choice”; “Generally, this would be having multiple relationships with the client . . . however, it does seem to be a possible humanitarian situation”; “Crosses Boudnaries [*sic*], but I would of done the same thing”; and “It’s wrong for all of the reasons in the previous slide. However, just because I’m a counselor doesn’t mean I’m a heartless monster.” Participants seemed to believe that there were tiers of authority (ethical and moral) with one set of obligations overriding others. Despite having these tiered categories on hand when required to provide an explanation, when asked questions using those tiered terms there was no evidence to suggest they treated those categories differently.

The splitting may be the result of a combination of coherence motivations and dissonance avoidance motivations (Haidt, 2001). As stated before, holding conflicting beliefs can cause significant anxiety, motivating people to avoid contradictions in their thinking (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019; Moskowitz et al., 1999; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). Dissonance avoidance is especially true regarding sacred values, which coherence motivations seek to protect (Tetlock et al., 2000). The Heidi Immigration Vignettes splitting may be due to perceiving a challenge to sacred values, and the responses are a part of the complicated interplay between defense motivation and accuracy (Liu, 2017). There are conflicts between group identities and associated beliefs within the counselor. The resolution comes from the explaining different tiers of authority, with one overriding the other. Counseling dilemmas, and the EDMs used to address them, apply when two of the principles conflict with one another, one principle conflicts with itself, or two principles conflict with the law (Mabe & Rollin, 1986; Mappes et al., 1985). Despite clear ethical codes, the Heidi Immigration Vignettes responses support social intuitionist theory and past research which suggests that social pressure is more influential than

ethics or the law (Cottone et al., 1994; Hinkeldey & Spokane, 1985). Deontological rule-following, like that around dual relationships, is a specific set of cultural assumptions that not everyone holds (Christen, 2014; Herissone-Kelly, 2011; Karlsen & Solbakk, 2011; Sadeghi et al., 2003). Yet cultural and legal factors cannot be avoided (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016; Frame & Williams, 2005). How larger societal values relate to counseling-specific values may be an important area of philosophical study from a constructivist perspective. Social constructivism is an incredibly adaptable philosophy with contextual truths. This can give the impression some distinctions may not matter. As long as individuals do not put these objective spheres into conflict, this reasoning is not seen as necessary. However, dumbfounding suggests that there are present conflicts within the counselor, influencing their intuitions while they are unaware. As a result, discussing the relationships between these spheres further might prove valuable. Some have argued that universalism should trump relativism (Kinnier et al., 2008), while others present a more complex picture (Sadeghi et al., 2003). However, what does it mean if this prioritizing debate goes on within counselors unconsciously?

Research Question Four

Finally, the findings, though nuanced, do not provide clear evidence that need for cognition moderates dumbfounding; as such, the fourth hypothesis could not be confirmed. It is surprising that need for cognition did not show a stronger relationship, as Haidt (2001) cited it in his arguments for social intuitionism. NFC scores do not predict if someone will be dumbfounded in a dichotomous sense, as higher-NFC-score participants were still dumbfounded. Lower scores only predicted that a small percentage would be dumbfounded every time, but they were not significantly different from those who were dumbfounded three times. For an individual vignette, there was no discernable difference; it was only when examining multiple vignettes in

sequence. This is unlikely to occur in the real world. It may be that for evolutionary reasons, the moral systems are so important for survival, in preventing harm, and in promoting collaboration that all members maintain some levels of these functions. If some participants are worse at providing response, it is not because they cannot, but because they do not enjoy the effort required to provide responses (Cacioppo et al., 1982). This in turn makes them less effective or consistent at providing responses, but does not mean they are incapable of doing so. The evidence shows that lower scores on the NCS may mean someone is more likely to be dumbfounded multiple times, but it is very rare that someone is always dumbfounded. This is also even less likely, as these vignettes describe rare occurrences. The vignettes highlight an underlying process, not necessarily real-world behavior. There are clear theoretical evolutionary reasons for the findings, in that moral judgment may be important for survival, but the relationship of NFC score to dumbfounding does highlight some variability in counselors (Machery & Mallon, 2010).

With clients, counselors often deal with one particular ethical dilemma at a time; it is unlikely this finding regarding the need for cognition would have much bearing on ethical decision-making with clients. If someone does not find enjoyment in complex cognitive tasks, this does not mean that they would not be able to function as an ethical counselor. Rather, it is their intuitive judgments which would be likely to indicate whether they would practice ethically. With supervisees that score low on the NFC, attention should be paid to their provided reasons for ethical decisions. They may be unsatisfactory even if the choice was correct, and may need help providing adequate responses to justify their behavior to ethics boards and in legal contexts. However, it should be remembered that this is not a reflection on their ability to make ethical judgments.

The exception to this would be if counselors are dumbfounded at nearly every presentation of ethical challenges. Since the dilemmas are contrived to elicit the effect, it is not clear that these dilemmas are reflective of real-world practice. However, if these counselors are dumbfounded in all dilemma-like contexts, they may not be well suited to the profession, because they are a danger to themselves in a professional capacity. This may be because they have not internalized the ethics, either due to lack of comprehension or interest, or because they are unable to provide any post hoc explanation when it is required of them. They are still likely making judgments that are ethical, but seem unaware of how to apply counseling ethics to explain choices to their peers. This group requires further research.

Regarding philosophical and epistemological underpinnings, dumbfounding has several potential implications requiring further exploration. Social intuitionism presents some questions regarding social constructivism. Social constructivism “places the decision in the social context itself, not in the head of the decision maker” (Cottone, 2001, p. 40). However, while social intuitionism still relies heavily on social influence, it still places the judgment in the emotional response and later justification in individuals (Haidt, 2001). As an epistemological basis, social constructivism views reality as constructed socially through negotiation, consensus, and arbitration. Social constructivism is described as objectivity within parenthesis, or that there are no universal absolutes and yet something is certain within a social context (Cottone, 2001).

The shift with the introduction of dumbfounding is that in this process arbitration occurs as a post hoc explanation of intuition (Haidt, 2001). The judgment does occur in individuals, but what influences the group is what the group finds persuasive as a reason for judgment. If the judgment can be justified according to group norms, it is accepted by the group. It is more about coherence motives than accuracy. This shapes how individuals feel and intuit about the realities

they encounter, but the arbitration is guiding the acceptable reasoning, not reasoning accurately. This may well fit the construction of reality, but the intrapsychic process more accurately polices justifications for behavior. While this does indirectly influence intuitive emotional responses, it is reflective of the members' feelings about certain explanations related to their sacred values (Tetlock et al., 2000). Counselors do not construct, in an active sense, but the structure both arises from the counselors and shapes them unconsciously. It happens *to* counselors as much as it is because of them. The unconscious intuition-shaping includes inputs from the other contexts counselors are imbedded in. The social process described by Cottone (2001) shapes people's moral judgment and might more properly fit into ethical and moral formation rather than epistemology.

Dumbfounding occurred with counselors with each vignette and at different rates, meaning that counselors sometimes stated there was nothing wrong, something wrong with no reason, and that some believed they had specific answers. If there was a sense of objectivity within parenthesis, one would expect more consistent responses to the vignettes, at least within the counseling context, but this did not occur. What happened instead was various judgments with differing degrees of explanation, implying different interpretations of the vignettes. Cottone (2007) describes a process of consensus that is formed around an issue. However, McHugh et al. (2017) show that in-person challenges create more dumbfounding than computer or online surveys. The in-person difference suggests that there is less consensus around an issue, yet counselors know what is acceptable in a professional context. Cottone (2001) might be seeing the underlying process described by social intuitionism when arguing that ethical decision-making is "not decision making at all, it is linkage to a professional culture" (p. 42). If the social network of professional counselors shapes the reality of counseling, professional identity is of

primary importance. The underlying process is also why Cottone states that counselors should “avoid social networks in which challenges of right and wrong must be answered” (Cottone, 2001, p. 42). Cottone is not alone in suggesting that professional identity is crucial for ethical behavior (see Hendricks, 2008). The influence of social groups is considered in social constructivism. It suggests that the norms of these groups may even conflict and these conflicts are to be avoided, as they may be problematic for social construction. However, this assumes that the cultural spheres are external to the counselor and can be kept separate. However, the fact that dumbfounding occurs suggests that the judgment is located within the counselor. Within the counselor, professional identity is only one culture among many that compose an individual identity. All these identities and associated social spheres influence the intuitions counselors make unconsciously; they cannot be selectively avoided in the same manner. The individual is unaware that the social group is influencing their intuition. This leads to significant questions that can only be resolved through future research and debate.

Future Research

If there are multiple spheres which counselors operate in, how do they relate to one another? If professional identity is important for shaping ethics, why were several participants willing to override ethics about dual relationships in the Heidi Immigration Vignettes (Hendricks, 2008)? This implies that some influences are more important than others. Furthermore, some research suggests that counselor identity is not coherent (Reiner et al., 2013). This may be the result of these conflicting social and ethical spheres as they relate to identity. Perhaps identities that are more salient will override professional obligations. Measures of identity salience could be used in conjunction with counseling vignettes to see if responses differed due to salience. If someone identified more as a counselor relative to some other social group, they might differ

from those who identify closely with their cultural background. Complex identity leads to another question if epistemology is socially constructed. Does this mean that different identity salience groups are operating off of differing epistemologies or philosophies of counseling? The participants were all counselors, but are the different responses the result of being parts of different social groups? How do things like time spent in different social contexts affect professional behavior? Is professional culture able to be powerful enough to influence counselors who are part of their local communities and work with clients from a specific population? Are they more likely to be influenced by their locale than professional culture? These questions could be examined by research comparing responses to ethical or philosophical questions of participants who spend more time in various communities or locales when compared with counselor educators.

Does the inability to provide a reason serve as an indication of inability to provide adequately persuasive responses to the dominant social group, or is it an indication of unethical behavior? There is research to suggest the ethical principles of counseling are not ethical foundational principles, but are instruments of justification (Christen et al., 2014; Karlsen & Solbakk, 2011). Without brain imaging technology, such as those used to study dual process theory, it is hard to create a complete picture of what is occurring. The assumption underlying the moral dumbfounding literature is that the vignettes and the dilemmas they describe elicit a genuine psychological phenomenon. As with any construct, additional research would be required to understand the ties to behavior. In this case, methods would need to be developed to see if the vignettes are reflective of real-world behavior. This may mean brain imaging, but may also be the result of other methods. The challenge is the inability to intentionally create unethical situations. However, there may be other means for checking for correlations with real-world

behavior. It may be possible to compare responses of counselors who have lost their licenses or membership to professional organizations and see if their implicit or explicit dumbfounding responses were the same as other counselors. While correlation may not be sufficient alone, it would provide insight into the relationship between dumbfounding and ethical behavior.

Additionally, there are implications for counselor education regarding social intuitionism (Burkholder et al., 2020; Haidt, 2001). If social intuitionism is true, then discussions or dialogues might be a means to shape intuitive responses. While social intuitionist theory suggests that dialogues influence both parties' intuitive responses, participants have shown that they are aware of socially acceptable responses. This is evidenced by the difference between in-person and computer-based response rates (McHugh et al. 2017). Without the social pressure, people are more willing to express what they believe. This implies a certain lopsided nature to some discussions, where individuals modify their responses due to social pressure. It may be possible to measure how reciprocal a given conversation is through linguistic analysis, self-report scales, and mapping of social networks. Also, attempts to create such directed discussions could be tested to see if they are effective at educating counselors in real-world classrooms.

Counseling Philosophy: Future Discussions

Dumbfounding also leads one to ask: Who informs the discussion around ethics? Counselors are imbedded within a multicultural social context, so what is the relationship between the client's social group, the counseling profession, and the larger society? Which takes priority and what does it mean when their influence is unconscious? Kinnier et al. (2008) argue that universalist principles should trump relativism. However, people may select a different set of principles. As discussed above, there may be more room for development here than previously

anticipated; though it is not clear what this would look like, it is clear that more research is needed.

Furthermore, the Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) and legal structures do not move at the same rate as the shifting epistemic commitments of social groups. Individuals are held accountable by legal structures and ethics boards according to static norms and, practically speaking, they must be. This may be how counselors frame a process, but part of the philosophical discussion must be how this anchors counselors temporally to a set of values. The values may have changed over time, but it may be important to examine the relationship of past to present considering the creation of ethical norms. It is likely a stabilizing feature so that the larger society can know what to expect of counselors. However, this implies a need for stability to relate to society at large, which may lead to interesting developments about the role of the professional identity-in-relationship. Discussions like these may provide new areas for philosophy to develop.

There are several questions that result from dumbfounding for which there is no obvious solution, and further research and discussion are needed to resolve. Dumbfounding can both support and call into question some social constructivist thinking. It is supportive in that ethics and counselor decision-making are derived from social processes largely external to the counselor. Particularly, the post hoc reasoning is subjected to a process-like negotiation or deliberation, where counselors seek consensus on how to proceed (Cottone, 2001). Counselors are indeed shaped by these discussions on a deep level relating to professional identity. What is being called into question using this process as an epistemic basis (Cohon, 2018) If the process is derived from social processes largely external to the counselor, but unconscious instead of conscious construction, it may not be compatible with the principle that meaning is created

insofar as it is discovered (Hansen, 2004). Is this process a way of knowing, in a cognitive sense, if the process is unconscious and emotionally motivated? The claim from social intuitionists is that reason is slave to the passions (Cohon, 2018). It may be an epistemology, but the described social intuitionist process combined with social constructivist thought means that what we know is what we feel, and what is true is what can be justified to peers. There is evidence that intuitions may not be true or may not be justifiable, and intuitions are sustained even if counselors may not believe it. Discussion of these relationships may prove fruitful to provide a stronger grounding for epistemology and to prevent potential bias introduced by coherence motivations. Epistemology is foundational, in that it is the philosophy of how things are known. Shifts in epistemology and philosophy would have corresponding shifts in the conception of ethics and counselor identity.

What is being shaped are emotional responses, and generally speaking the group shapes the responses more than the individual shapes the group. Shaping of responses occurs through shaping taboos, acceptable rationale, and feelings rather than an intentional consensus-driven or negotiated construction of reality. What peers find persuasive and acceptable, what allows membership to or allows the group to cohere, is what shapes intuitions for those in the group, The direction of the intrapsychic construction—the process between individuals in which reality is made—changes in that it is less conscious and judgments are occurring in individuals which then have post hoc side effects on peers. Members of the group are not constructing reality, but limiting what is acceptable for membership or group identity. Instead, it is the emotional intuitive responses shaped by the discussion acceptable in the group that shapes what members intuit. This is less an intentional making of an ethical framework and more of an imprinting of a set of feelings and attitudes toward ethical content, and the boundaries of the group are not well

defined. Social intuitionism creates something of a “chicken or the egg” problem, where it becomes unclear if the ethical norms are present because we want them to be or if it is that counselors want them because of membership in the social group. Is the social constructivist position a guiding philosophy or is social constructivism merely acknowledging a part of a psychological process already going on within the counseling profession?

The process described by social intuitionists may impose a distinctive set of values that may not be compatible with some cultures or that could be unduly influenced by specific cultures (Sadeghi et al., 2003). If not all counselors hold counseling values, because of their cultural beliefs, it is likely that many discussions, formal (such as research) or informal (such as verbal discussions), are not actual reciprocal dialogues, where parties influence each other, but rather are intended to inculcate counselor values. Counselor ethics are a major portion of this discourse, and simultaneously are a result of it, like the process described by social constructivism (Cottone, 2001). However, there is an inherent tension in that the discourse may inculcate a set of deontological counseling values while at the same time multicultural educational research has shown a preference for adaptive curricula reflecting student backgrounds (Hachfeld et al., 2015). Multiculturally aware methods are preferred, but at the same time counseling ethics requires inculcating a set of deontological counseling values. Part of multicultural education is being open to dialogue with students of different cultures, but how does this change if the dialogue is not reciprocal, and the process which shapes intuition unconscious? Values are imposed and people may not be consciously aware. There is no easy solution or way to distinguish what the balance is, as the multicultural context needs to inform counselors and counselors need ethics. One solution proposed is that counseling values are more important and override the cultural values (Kinnier et al., 2008). However, this does not appear to fit the social constructivism paradigm in

which what we know about ethics is negotiated among members (Cottone, 2007). A debate needs to occur to resolve issues about what the appropriate balance is between conflicting values or the appropriate value hierarchy.

There is a balance that needs to be struck where counselors adopt sufficient values to maintain counselor identity and ethical practice, but there is also a need for diversity. As stated in the Code of Ethics, the goal is “honoring diversity and embracing a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts” (ACA, 2014, p. 3). As future ethical codes are created or current ones edited, the creators should be aware that this will, of course, shape the values of counselors, but it may also limit the discourse in unintended ways within the field. Naturally, ethical rules will respond to culture as part of normal professional evolution and development; however, it may also be unduly influenced by coherence motivations. Coherence motivations may have developed due to benefits of group cohesion in war; there is evidence from history and evolutionary psychology that identity is related to outgroup threat (Brooks et al., 2021; Clark & Winegard, 2020; Raffield et al., 2016). There is an unlikely but possible feedback loop where the group values then inform the group emotions, and individuals shaped by these intuitions then act as gatekeepers in the group. A distillation process could occur, where encountering individuals who evoke intuitive responses excludes those with different cultural beliefs who respond differently (Clark & Winegard, 2020). Over time, it is possible that such a distillation could influence the development of ethics, and so the process can conceivably repeat until counseling becomes restricted to a particular kind of discourse and the individuals who subscribe to it, if social intuitionist theory is true (Haidt, 2001). The discourse and associated intuitive responses become restricted and then begin to shift the philosophical underpinnings incrementally. This has the

potential to eliminate checks for bias within the social group. Ideally, this same process works toward progress and produces better counselors, but there is no real guarantee, as it seems equally possible that this process is susceptible to fads or the exclusion of minority views. In the current social context, it seems unlikely to create major distortions, but may increase lacunae in research or blind spots. Attention should be paid by the larger body of professional counselors, counselor educators, and governing bodies to maintaining a balance between counseling values and diversity (Tansey & Kindsvatter, 2020). This means that we have a need for distinct values, counselor identity, and ethical standards, even from a marketing perspective, but this needs to be balanced with reflecting the populations counselors serve and advocate for (Cottone, 2007). We need to be different enough to be specialized, but not so different as to no longer be able to relate to our clients. If we can be as dumbfounded as the rest of the population, we should be wary of the social cohesion forces which can lead to tribalism, echo chambers, and polarization that can be exhibited by those outside the profession (Haidt, 2012).

Counseling ethics guides therapists in a counseling relationship. However, counseling ethics also guides some behavior outside the relationship, such as advocacy that is not relationship-specific. The counseling relationship has a different set of norms than those outside a counseling context, and counselors move in and out of this context along with their counselor identity. Furthermore, judges in a criminal justice context would not follow counseling ethics' emphasis on autonomy, so counseling ethics are not expected to be universal. Counselors do not consider counseling ethics to extend to times when they are not acting in their role as counselor, as evidenced by some of their responses, but they do use these different spheres in their explanations. As counselors move through different spheres, as in Bronfenbrenner's (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) bioecological model, their responsibility regarding morals or

ethics shifts. If ethics is one overarching system, what context-specific changes occur when entering a relationship that alter how counselors respond to moral content? Researching how or when different contexts and specialized relationships do or do not override ethical norms will make beneficial contributions. In the past, such as with the Tarasoff case, it had been slowly worked out within the legal system (Cottone, 2001). Further discussion may highlight other areas to inform the legal discussion and may provide insight into how and when people feel that counseling ethics are not important, or more important, to follow relative to the law.

Limitations

This study and its implications are limited by several assumptions. First, that the vignettes and questions relate to real-world practice. There is some evidence to suggest that the vignettes are not representative of real-world practice (Bauman et al., 2014). However, vignettes like this are commonly used in counselor ethics training, so counselors are familiar with them, and educators have found them useful in their pedagogy. Also, the dumbfounding effect has been replicated; even if the vignettes are not indicative of behavior, they do show the effect can be elicited from counselors. The vignette-and-challenge method shows a social intuitionist-like underlying process of moral judgment, even if it is not clear how that process affects behavior.

A second limitation is that the moral dumbfounding effect uses logic to suggest that emotions precede reasoning. If people make judgments in the absence of reasons, such as the explicit declarations, or if they can maintain their moral judgment after challenges and provide faulty reasons, such as unsupported declarations, it strongly suggests that emotions and rationale can be separated. It is inferred that the intuitive emotional response is first. However, if this is not the case, the theoretical foundations of social intuitionist theory are weakened (Guglielmo, 2015). It is possible that the process is more complex or has other influences not yet observed.

Moderators of dumbfounding have not yet been found, and the dual process model also struggles to find moderators that predict moral judgments of one type or another. It has been difficult to find other variables that manipulate moral judgments, and the findings of dumbfounding research replicate, so it is more likely than not that social intuitionism reflects a genuine process. However, if it is shown that the moral judgment process does not function according to social intuitionist theory, the implications of this research are restricted.

Finally, there may be problems with the sample. The sampling approach attempted to get counselors from across the country using nationwide email listservs and social networking services. Despite this, only a small percentage of counselors reported that they were somewhat conservative, in line with past research, which may have inflated the dumbfounding numbers for political vignettes such as the Heidi Immigration Vignettes (Norton & Tan, 2019). Also, because the Likert scale was displayed with a slider, non-responses were counted as four on a seven-point Likert scale. This may have skewed the data toward the center, but the mean was within a standard deviation. Nevertheless, the political question was not the focus of this study and the Heidi Immigration Vignettes provided similar results to the Jennifer Cannibal Dilemma Vignette, so it is unlikely to have skewed results. Another issue with the sample may have been size. A larger sample size might have been needed for NFC results to show meaningful differences. As discussed in the analysis, there was evidence to suggest a larger sample size may have been more powerful to detect such effects.

The method using online surveys has advantages and disadvantages. It does not capture as much of the response of participants as in-person interviews. However, it also removes some experimenter bias and allows for much larger sample sizes. There is a noticeable decrease in dumbfounding online when compared with in-person interviews (McHugh et al., 2017). The

ability to type responses does avoid artificially high dumbfounding rates, but participants also feel the need to provide lengthy responses, creating the opportunity to turn a 25-minute survey into 45 minutes if they choose. The optional length meant increased satisficing, in that many participants never completed the survey, even though it took around 25 minutes to complete in pilot testing. This method may have affected the results, but 144 responses were still usable and should have been sufficient to answer the research questions.

The method for challenges after the two counseling vignettes was novel. Prior research on dumbfounding had used gaps in moral foundations to elicit dumbfounding (McHugh et al., 2017). As a result, the response of participants was easier to predict. The challenge statements were constructed to address the predicted responses. However, this study lacked this advantage for the counseling-based questions. To elicit dumbfounding, challenges were needed no matter what counselor responses were. This required not providing a neutral option. This may have introduced some unintended measurement issues, though none were noticeable. McHugh et al.'s (2017) original vignettes and challenges, along with their method, allowed for replicating their results with online surveys. Since these were presented first, this created a baseline. The counseling vignettes had similar dumbfounding rates, so it is unlikely the method used for the counseling challenges created measurement issues. Also, the counseling vignettes required more intensive coding to ensure that the reason corresponded to the correct challenges. As interrater reliability was high, and the coding process did not reveal any systematic problems, there is no reason to suspect the new method caused issues. However, it is possible that coding was affected by the new method or that the method introduced measurement issues that are unknown.

Conclusion

Counseling ethics assumes a deontological, cognitive, and rationalist model (Beauchamp & Childress, 2012; Haidt, 2001; Maxwell, 2010). Instead, counselors often make ethical decisions based on intuition. This study provides evidence to support social intuitionist theory by showing that counselors can be dumbfounded at similar rates to the general population.

Counselors do not provide consistent responses to complex counseling dilemmas, and often will make an ethical judgment without supporting reasons. The evidence suggests that this judgment is based on intuition and is only indirectly influenced by the ACA (2014) Code of Ethics.

Furthermore, signs of this process can be found throughout the counseling and psychological literature (Burkholder et al., 2020; Cottone, 2001; Hansen, 2004; Levitt et al., 2015). This study supports past research on counselor ethical decision-making. Ethical decision-making involves a complex combination of counselor, client, and professional interests, which are not always consciously available (Burkholder et al., 2020; Levitt et al., 2015). This research also highlights that the role of EDMs may not be what they appear. Dumbfounding leads to several fascinating research opportunities and directions for philosophical discussion. This study also provides an interesting empirical method to examine counseling ethics that is challenging and stimulating.

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Appendix A: Dilemmas & Survey

You will now be presented with several vignettes (short accounts) describing behavior. The description may contain unusual or challenging information. You will be asked to rate the behavior on a scale. Afterwards, you will be presented with a set of questions to think about. Not every page will have a space to respond. Instead, responses will be collected on the following pages. You may go back to re-read the vignette, but please do not change your initial response. Thank you.

Jennifer Cannibal Dilemma (from McHugh et al., 2017)

Jennifer works in a medical school pathology lab as a research assistant. The lab prepares human cadavers that are used to teach medical students about anatomy. The cadavers come from people who had donated their bodies for the general use of the researchers in the lab. The bodies are normally cremated; however, severed cuts may be disposed of at the discretion of lab researchers. One night, Jennifer is leaving the lab when she sees a body that is going to be discarded the next day. Jennifer was a vegetarian, for moral reasons. She thought it was wrong to kill animals for food. But then, when she saw a body about to be cremated, she thought it was irrational to waste perfectly edible meat. So she cut off a piece of flesh, and took it home and cooked it. The person had died recently of a heart attack, and she cooked the meat thoroughly, so there was no risk of disease.

How wrong would you rate this behavior?

Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely wrong
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- The body had been donated for research; it was to be discarded the next day. You must agree then that it had obviously fulfilled its purpose?
- Do you accept that the body was already dead?
- And do you accept that there was no risk of disease?

Nobody was harmed and the body was going to be destroyed anyway. How could this be wrong?

- There is nothing wrong
- It's wrong but I can't think of a reason
- It's wrong and I can provide a valid reason

NOTE: Next question only displayed if "It's wrong and I can provide a valid reason" selected for previous question.

Provide your reason:

On a scale from 1 to 5, please answer the following:

How sure were you about your judgment?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Sure

How much did you change your mind?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

How confused were you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Confused

How irritated were you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Irritated

How much was your judgment based on reason?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

How much was your judgment based on “gut” feeling?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

Julie and Mark Incest Dilemma (from Haidt et al., 2000)

Julie and Mark, who are brother and sister, are traveling together in France. They are both on summer vacation from college. One night they are staying alone in a cabin near the beach. They decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. At the very least it would be a new experience for each of them. Julie was already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom too, just to be safe. They both enjoy it, but they decide not to do it again. They keep that night as a special secret between them, which makes them feel even closer to each other.

How wrong would you rate this behavior?

Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Wrong
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Page

Break

- Do you not agree that any concerns regarding reproductive complications are eased by their using of two forms of contraception?
- And do you accept that they are both consenting adults, and that they both consented and enjoyed it?
- And do you concede that nobody else was affected by their actions?

Julie and Mark's behavior did not harm anyone; how can there be anything wrong with what they did?

- There is nothing wrong
- It's wrong but I can't think of a reason
- It's wrong and I can provide a valid reason

NOTE: Next question only displayed if "It's wrong and I can provide a valid reason" selected for previous question.

Provide your reason:

Julie and Mark

On a scale from 1 to 5, please answer the following:

How sure were you about your judgment?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Sure

How much did you change your mind?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

How confused were you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Confused

How irritated were you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Irritated

How much was your judgment based on reason?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

How much was your judgment based on “gut” feeling?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

Heidi Immigration Moral Framing

Heidi, a native Spanish speaker, has been working in a community serving undocumented immigrants. There are few professionals in the area that can speak Spanish. One of her clients is a fifteen-year-old male who lost contact with his parents and has been staying at a homeless shelter for youth which her organization serves. In therapy, he has been working through feelings of abandonment and the stress of not knowing what happened to his parents when they crossed the border and became separated. One day, Heidi received a Facebook message in the middle of a cold stormy night that he was lost in the city and had no place to stay. The shelter and other services began reporting undocumented immigrants to the authorities, so he ran. He did not know who else to contact as he could not speak English. Heidi had a friend who was out of town and she was house-sitting their apartment; the friend told Heidi she was welcome to use the apartment whenever and however she wanted. Heidi decided to allow the client to stay there. The client ate the food in the pantry and refrigerator for two weeks until Heidi could find appropriate services for him. She replaced the food that was consumed, and she cleaned the apartment. Heidi did not report this to her supervisors or her organization, no one ever found out, and it allowed her to make significant progress with her client.

How wrong would you rate this behavior?

Not at all	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Extremely Wrong
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NOTE: Next questions only displayed if participant responded with the fourth through sixth options closer to extremely wrong

- Do you accept that the client would be harmed if she had not intervened?
- He wasn't staying at her place; isn't this consistent with the counseling principle of benevolence?
- Don't you agree that no one else could have helped?

NOTE: Next questions only displayed if participant responded with the first through third options closer to not at all

- Do you agree it's inappropriate to have this kind of contact on social media with an underage client?
- Do you agree that this is a dual relationship; she provides food and shelter for him?
- Isn't it outside of counselor's role and competence to help clients avoid law enforcement?

NOTE: Next question only displayed if participant responded with the fourth through six options closer to extremely wrong

Given that "Do no harm" and justice are essential principles of counseling ethics, how could Heidi's actions be wrong?

NOTE: Next questions only displayed if participant responded with the first through third options closer to not at all

This is not the role of a counselor and may be illegal; aren't Heidi's actions wrong?

- There is nothing wrong
- It's wrong but I can't think of a reason
- It's wrong and I can provide a valid reason

NOTE: Next question only displayed if they responded with the fourth through sixth options closer to extremely wrong

Provide your reason:

On a scale from 1 to 5, please answer the following:

How sure were you about your judgment?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Sure

How much did you change your mind?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

How confused were you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Confused

How irritated were you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Irritated

How much was your judgment based on reason?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

How much was your judgment based on “gut” feeling?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

Rotenberg Cannibal Dilemma Moral Framing

Jen has a client, Armin, who is seeking treatment for an adjustment disorder. During the course of therapy, it is disclosed that Armin has a cannibalism fetish, but this is offered as background and not related to his desire to seek counseling. After several sessions, rapport is incredibly strong and Armin reports that he is going to eat a human being. The therapist follows up by asking more questions and Armin discloses that is part of an online fetish community and has found a willing young man over 18 who finds sexual gratification in the idea that he will be eaten. This young man has a terminal illness and wants to consume his own penis with the person who he knows will eat the rest of his body. After this individual takes prescribed sleeping pills, obtained from a doctor in the same online community, Armin is going to eat his penis with him as he dies. He will then slowly eat his body over the course of several months. He is filming the event to remove any doubts that the act was voluntary, consensual (no one was forced), or that Armin killed the young man. Armin claims both are looking forward to enjoying this experience. Jen decides not to report this disclosure to the local authorities.

How wrong would you rate this therapist's behavior?

Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Wrong
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NOTE: Next questions only displayed if participant responded with the fourth through sixth options closer to extremely wrong

- What about not judging the client’s lifestyle choices and respecting autonomy?
- This isn’t what the client came to work on; won't it break trust and confidentiality? Do counselors report all activity that might break a law?
- Don’t you agree that the client was not harming someone? Their friend was voluntarily committing suicide with a physician's assistance and there are provisions for this in the ACA Code of Ethics; what would you be warning other parties for?

NOTE: Next questions only displayed if participant responded with the first through third options closer to not at all

- What about safety? Are there cases where confidentiality can be broken?
- Isn’t Justice a core principle of counseling?
- How is this consistent with the counseling principles like benevolence?

NOTE: Next question only displayed if participant responded with the fourth through sixth options closer to extremely wrong

Autonomy and fidelity are core principles of counseling ethics which would not be respected if reported. How can this be wrong?

NOTE: Next question only displayed if participant responded with the first through third options closer to not at all

Won't someone be harmed? Isn't this wrong?

- There is nothing wrong
- It’s wrong but I can’t think of a reason
- It’s wrong and I can provide a valid reason

NOTE: Next question only displayed if “It’s wrong and I can provide a valid reason” selected for previous question.

Provide your reason:

On a scale from 1 to 5, please answer the following:

How sure were you about your judgment?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Sure

How much did you change your mind?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

How confused were you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Confused

How irritated were you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Irritated

How much was your judgment based on reason?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

How much was your judgment based on “gut” feeling?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

Heidi Immigration Ethical Framing

Heidi, a native Spanish speaker, has been working in a community serving undocumented immigrants. There are few professionals in the area that can speak Spanish. One of her clients is a fifteen-year-old male who lost contact with his parents and has been staying at a homeless shelter for youth which her organization serves. In therapy, he has been working through feelings of abandonment and the stress of not knowing what happened to his parents when they crossed the border and became separated. One day, Heidi received a text message in the middle of a cold stormy night that he was lost in the city and had no place to stay. The shelter and other services began reporting undocumented immigrants to the authorities, so he ran. He did not know who else to contact as he could not speak English. Heidi had a friend who was out of town and she was house sitting their apartment; the friend told Heidi she was welcome to use the apartment whenever and however she wanted. Heidi decided to allow the client to stay there. The client ate the food in the pantry and refrigerator for two weeks until Heidi could find appropriate services for him. She replaced the food that was consumed, and she cleaned the apartment. Heidi did not report this to her supervisors or her organization, no one ever found out, and it allowed her to make significant progress with her client.

How unethical would you rate this therapist's behavior?

Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Unethical
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NOTE: Next questions only displayed if they responded with the fourth through sixth options closer to extremely unethical

- Do you accept that the client would be harmed if she had not intervened?
- He wasn't staying at her place; isn't this consistent with the counseling principle of benevolence?
- Don't you agree that no one else could have helped?

NOTE: Next questions only displayed if they responded with the first through third options closer to not at all

- Do you agree it's inappropriate to have this kind of contact on social media with an underage client?
- Do you agree that this is a dual relationship; she provides food and shelter for him?
- Isn't it outside of a counselor's role and competence to help clients avoid law enforcement?

NOTE: Next question only displayed if they responded with the fourth through sixth options closer to extremely unethical

Given that "Do no harm" and justice are essential principles of counseling ethics, how could Heidi's actions be unethical?

NOTE: Next question only displayed if participant responded with the first through third options closer to not at all

This is not the role of a counselor and may be illegal; aren't Heidi's actions unethical?

- There is nothing unethical
- It's unethical but I can't think of a reason
- It's unethical and I can provide a valid reason

NOTE: Next question only displayed if “It’s unethical and I can provide a valid reason” selected for previous question.

Provide your reason:

Rotenburg Cannibal Dilemma Ethical Framing

Jen has a client, Armin, that is seeking treatment for an adjustment disorder. During the course of therapy, it is disclosed that Armin has a cannibalism fetish, but this is offered as background and not related to his desire to seek counseling. After several sessions, rapport is incredibly strong and Armin reports that he is going to eat a human being. The therapist follows up by asking more questions and Armin discloses that is part of an online fetish community and has found a willing young man over 18 who finds sexual gratification in the idea that he will be eaten. This young man has a terminal illness and wants to consume his own penis with the person who he knows will eat the rest of his body. After this individual takes prescribed sleeping pills, obtained from a doctor in the same online community, Armin is going to eat his penis with him as he dies. He will then slowly eat his body over the course of several months. He is filming the event to remove any doubts that the act was voluntary, consensual (no one was forced), or that Armin killed the young man. Armin claims both are looking forward to enjoying this experience. Jen decides not to report this disclosure to the local authorities.

How unethical would you rate this therapist's behavior?

Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Unethical
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NOTE: Next questions only displayed if participant responded with the fourth through sixth options closer to extremely unethical

- What about not judging the client's lifestyle choices and respecting autonomy?
 - This isn't what the client came to work on; won't it break trust and confidentiality? Do counselors report all activities that might break a law?
 - Don't you agree that the client was not harming someone? Their friend was voluntarily committing suicide with a physician's assistance and there are provisions for this in the ACA Code of Ethics. What would you be warning other parties for?
-

NOTE: Next questions only displayed if participant responded with the first through third options closer to not at all

- What about safety? Are there cases where confidentiality can be broken?
- Isn't Justice a core principle of counseling?
- How is this consistent with the counseling principle of Benevolence?

NOTE: Next question only displayed if participant responded with the fourth through sixth options closer to extremely unethical

Autonomy and fidelity are core principles of counseling ethics which would not be respected if reported. How is this unethical?

NOTE: Next question only displayed if participant responded with the first through third options closer to not at all

Won't someone be harmed? Isn't this unethical?

- There is nothing unethical
- It's unethical but I can't think of a reason
- It's unethical and I can provide a valid reason

NOTE: Next question only displayed if "It's unethical and I can provide a valid reason" selected for previous question.

Provide your reason:

On a scale from 1 to 5, please answer the following:

How sure were you about your judgment?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Sure

How much did you change your mind?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

How confused were you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Confused

How irritated were you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely Irritated

How much was your judgment based on reason?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

How much was your judgment based on "gut" feeling?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely