



Research Article

The professional identity, career commitment and subjective well-being of art therapy students

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the professional identity, career commitment, and subjective well-being of art therapy students compared with those of counseling psychology students. Art therapy graduate students (N=112) and counseling psychology graduate students (N=91) completed the My Vocational Situation (MVS), Career Commitment Measurement (CCM), and Concise Measure of Subjective Well-Being (COMOSWB) measures. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, *t*-tests, and χ^2 -tests. The results of this study are as follows: First, correlation analysis results showed that professional identity is interrelated with career commitment and subjective well-being. Second, the results of regression analysis indicated that career commitment and subjective well-being were significant predictors of professional identity. Third, comparing art therapy students with counseling psychology students revealed that there were no significant differences in professional identity and career commitment between the two groups. However, art therapy students needed much more vocational information than counseling psychology students, and they were also more likely to complain of the economic difficulties they faced in pursuing their career. In addition, the two groups showed no difference on the overall subjective well-being scale, but the counseling psychology graduate students showed higher life satisfaction and reported more positive emotions than art therapy students. Finally, this study's implications and limitations are presented.

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Introduction

Professional identity issues have been reported frequently in studies of art therapy students and professionals (Allen, 2000; Feen-Calligan, 2012; Kapitan, 2012; Lachman-Chapin, 2000; Orkibi, 2010; Vick, 2000). Relevant issues include the core nature of art therapy, the essence of art therapists (Brown, 2008; Iliya, 2014; Moon, 2002), and the qualification of art therapists as mental health professionals (Edwards, 2014; Stoll, 2005). Key questions posed to clarify the professional identity of art therapists are, "Are you an artist or a therapist?" (Moon, 2003, p. 53) and "Are you an art therapist or a counselor?" (Feen-Calligan, 2012, p. 150).

Professional identity refers to the internalization of the values of one's occupation, identification with the occupation, and psychological unity with it (Trede, Macklin, & Bridges, 2012). People with a strong professional identity tend to take pride in their profession, and they accomplish self-realization and growth through the

profession (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Yu, 2008). A strong professional identity reduces the degree of burnout in job performance, and also is closely related to social adaptation and psychological well-being (Kim & Yu, 2010).

There has been growing interest in counselors and therapists' professional identities, as their career development and professional growth could be affected by the strength of their professional identity (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Early studies on art therapy have focused on professional identity using insights based on experiences and observations. Recently, quantitative studies using questionnaires were used to evaluate professional identity. According to Orkibi (2010), the professional identity and career commitment of arts therapy graduate students shows significant, positive correlations. Orkibi and Bar-nir (2015) also found that collective self-esteem affects the subjective well-being of arts therapy students and practitioners. By studying the professional identity of music therapists, Kim (2012) found that job satisfaction significantly predicts burnout, and collective self-esteem functions as a mediator between the two. Vulcan (2013) pointed out that, in addition to extrinsic factors such as funding and institutional

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frameworks, the somatic-verbal divide impedes the professional identity of dance/movement therapists.

Related to professional identity is the concept of career commitment. Career commitment is defined as the strength of one's motivation to work in a career continuously, based on one's belief in the value of one's own chosen occupation (Goulet & Singh, 2002), and can represent one's attitude toward the profession (Blau, 1985). When people perceive their careers as sustainable and satisfying both economically and psychologically, career commitment is higher and occupational turnover intention is lower (Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000). Both the salary and social status of a particular career can affect one's appraisal of the career (Ballout, 2009). A study of 505 art therapy students and practitioners found that salary levels affect both career commitment and burnout (Orkibi, 2016), and a survey of 176 music therapists reported that low wages and few advancement opportunities can cause burnout and occupational turnover (Decuir & Vega, 2010).

Research on art therapists' career commitments is necessary because there remain many areas requiring improvement in the environmental factors surrounding the profession. For example, legislation and licensing issues can alter career commitment (Orkibi & Bar-nir, 2015). Stoll (2005) reported on the problems posed by art therapy licensing in the United States and the resulting curricula coordination. Although it is mandatory to have a state license for mental health professionals, art therapists are not licensed in most states except in New Mexico. Consequently, art therapists must acquire licenses in related fields, such as marriage and family counseling. In addition, graduate art therapy programs coordinate their curricula to meet certain requirements. In reality, all of these constraints might impede both art therapy students' career commitment and their professional identities.

Counseling and psychotherapy societies in most countries are larger and older than the art therapy society. In the United States, there are 100,305 health service provider psychologists (American Psychological Association, 2016), while the American Art Therapy Association has a membership of 3374 art therapists (Elkins & Deaver, 2015). In Korea, the Korean Counseling Psychological Association was established 53 years ago and has become a leading academic society (Korean Counseling Psychological Association, 2017), but the Art Therapy Society has been divided into several smaller associations during its 25-year history (Kim, 2009). An association with a longer history and more people naturally exerts stronger political power, which facilitates employment opportunities and higher job quality.

Despite the fact that counseling and psychotherapy are superior to art therapy in terms of job opportunities and salary, people with the desire to become art therapists still enter art therapy graduate schools. One of the reasons why research on career commitment is important is that career commitment can significantly predict turnover intention and learning motivation (Kim, 2002). If we elucidate art therapy graduate students' career commitments, it is possible to foresee their performance efforts, learning motivation, and adjust the graduate program to meet their needs accordingly.

Subjective well-being is another psychological factor to consider when evaluating professional identity and career commitment. Positive psychology is a recognized factor that affects mental health professionals, and there is growing interest in subjective well-being. Wiese, Freund, and Baltes (2002) stated that dysfunctional career behaviors are related to a decrease in subjective well-being, and Strauser, Lustig, and Ciftci (2008) reported that psychological well-being is a construct that powerfully affects the career development process. As psychological well-being increases, career-related anxiety decreases, and the career development process becomes more effective. It should be noted that this causal relationship works in both directions. In other words, professional identity affects psychological well-being, and vice versa. Simsek (2013)

reported on the effect of collective self-esteem on emotional well-being and the role of personal self-esteem as a mediating factor between the two. Orkibi and Bar-nir (2015) examined the impact of collective self-esteem and job satisfaction on the subjective well-being of arts therapy students and practitioners and found that collective self-esteem has both a direct and an indirect effect on subjective well-being, but only an indirect effect on job satisfaction. In addition, arts therapy graduate students showed higher collective self-esteem, lower job satisfaction, and lower subjective well-being than art therapy practitioners.

In summary, professional identity, career commitment, and subjective well-being are important constructs for the identification and characterization of art therapy graduate students' professional development. However, research on this topic is scarce. This study explores and articulates the issues of professional identity as follows: First, we examine the correlation of the three conceptual constructs to see whether there is an interrelatedness found in previous studies. Second, after confirming the existence of interrelationships, we identify the characteristics of the professional identity of art therapy graduate students in the following two ways: (a) through regression analysis, the explanatory power of career commitment will be examined along with subjective well-being on professional identity, and (b) through comparison with counseling psychology students, the following characteristics of art therapy students will be examined: professional identity, career commitment, and subjective well-being.

The comparison of the professional identity of art therapy graduate students with counseling psychology graduate students was based on the following reasons. First, in Korea, counseling psychologists are the primary providers of psychotherapy services. They provide mental health services at private practices, counseling centers, social welfare agencies, schools, and businesses. Although they are different from art therapists in terms of their specific approaches and functions that they perform, they have similar roles to art therapists in that both groups provide psychotherapy and counseling services. For that reason, Song and Chung (2005) examined the level of counselors' development by comparing counseling psychologists with other therapists, including art therapists. Second, psychotherapy theories are essential in both art therapy graduate curricula and counseling psychology graduate curricula in Korea. They have a common background to help foster an understanding of human psychology and theory of psychological change, which explains the similarities between the two fields. Third, from an empirical point of view, art therapy graduate school applicants often deliberate on their choice between counseling psychology graduate school and art therapy graduate school. It is not uncommon to meet applicants who are interested in both areas. Therefore, in this paper, counseling psychology graduate students were selected as a comparison group in order to compare their professional identity, career commitment, and subjective well-being.

Method

Participants

The participants consisted of 112 art therapy graduate students from six graduate schools and 91 students from four counseling psychology graduate schools. In Korea, art therapy graduate students and counseling psychology graduate students generally spend between two years (four semesters) and three years (six semesters) in their master's programs. The distribution of the art therapy graduate students' school year enrollment is as follows: first year 53.6%, second year 24.1%, and third year 22.3%. The distribution for counseling psychology graduate students was as follows: first year 51.6%, second year 21.9%, and third year 26.5%. The par-

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