

2012

## The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision Volume 4, Number 1

Edina Renfro-Michel  
*Montclair State University*

Larry Burlew  
*Montclair State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jcps>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), [Other Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), and the [Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Renfro-Michel, E., & Burlew, L. (2012). The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision Volume 4, Number 1. *The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 4(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.7729/41.2012>

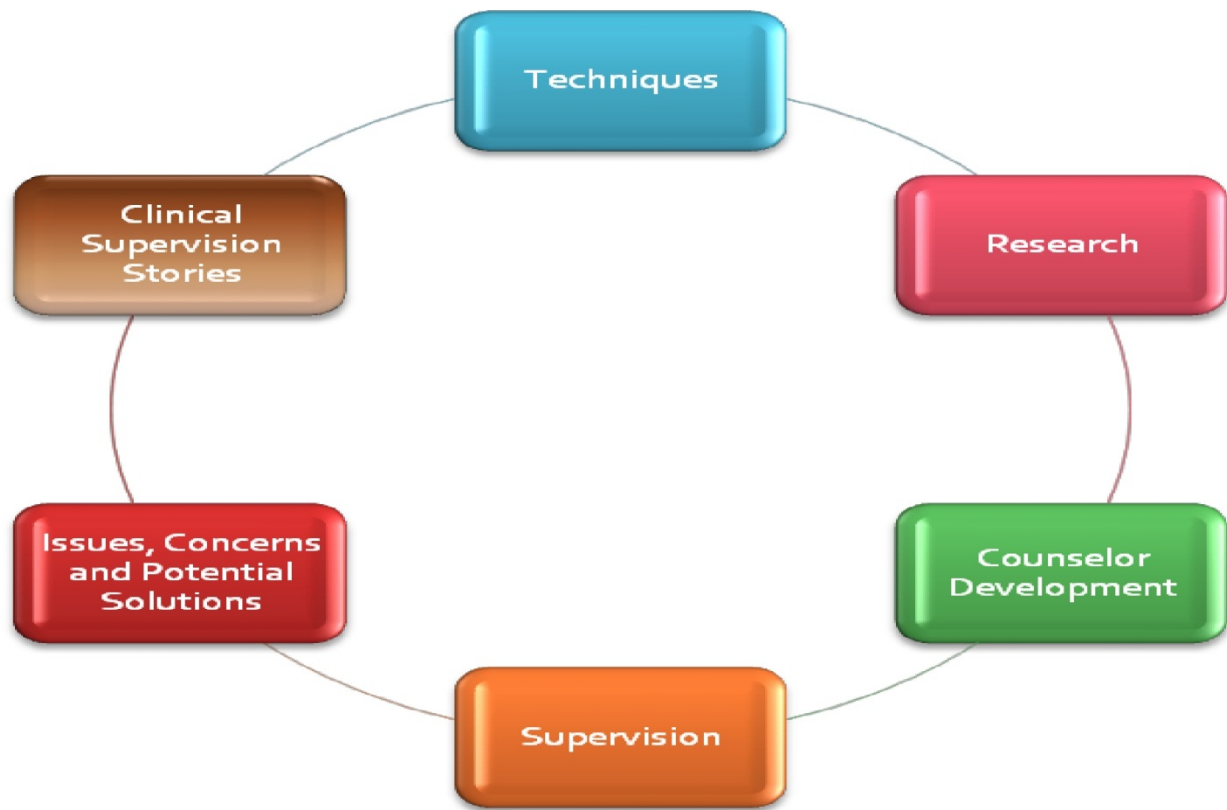
---

The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision Volume 4, Number 1

# The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision

Volume 4, Number 1  
Editors: Edina Renfro-Michel, Larry Burlew

April, 2012  
ISSN 2164-3288



**The Official Journal  
of the North Atlantic Regional Association for Counselor Education and Supervision**

**Editors**

Larry D. Burlew  
Edina Renfro-Michel  
Montclair State University

**Assistant Editors**

Jonathan Mazza  
Jennifer Midura  
Jessica Spera  
Montclair State University

**Editorial Board**

Vanessa Alleyne  
Montclair State University  
Ford Brooks  
Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania  
Beverly Burnell  
Plattsburg State University  
William Casile  
Duquesne University  
Kim Desmond  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Kathryn Douthit  
Rochester University  
Deborah Drew  
Husson University  
Harriet Glosoff  
Montclair State University  
Diana Hulse  
Fairfield University  
Jelane Kennedy  
The College of Saint Rose  
Leslie Kooyman  
Montclair State University

Gabriel Lomas  
Western Connecticut State University  
K. Elizabeth McDonald  
Walden University  
John Patrick  
California University of Pennsylvania  
Catherine Roland  
Montclair State University  
Susan Seem  
SUNY Brockport  
Angela Sheely-Moore  
Montclair State University  
Matthew Shurts  
Montclair State University  
Allison Smith  
Antioch University New England  
David J. Tobin  
Gannon University  
Jane Webber  
New Jersey City University  
Doug Weirich  
Adams Hanover Counseling Services

---

The mission of the *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision* is to provide a high quality platform for research, theory and practices of counselor educators, counselor supervisors and professional counselors. We believe the journal chronicles current issues, concerns and potential solutions that enable counselors to continue to grow and develop as practitioners, educators and human beings. The journal publishes high-quality articles that have undergone a thorough and extensive blind peer-review.

---

There are six general categories that help focus the content of the journal.

**Research.** These articles focus on research (qualitative, quantitative, mixed) in counselor preparation, professional development, supervision, and professional practice.

**Techniques.** These articles focus on professional models for teaching empirically grounded techniques used by professional counselors, as well as teaching and supervision techniques used in professional preparation programs.

**Counselor Development.** These articles include insightful commentary on means by which professional counselors can continue to develop professionally. Effective teaching strategies for counseling students as well as continuing education for experienced counselors will be highlighted.

**Supervision.** These articles specifically target ideas, research, and practice related to counselor supervision. These articles should investigate and discuss supervisory issues from a perspective applicable to site supervisors, counselor educators and/or clinical supervisors (e.g., supervising professionals working toward a professional counseling license).

**Issues, Concerns and Potential Solutions.** These articles identify and discuss significant issues facing the field of professional counseling with particular focus on issues in counselor preparation, professional development, and supervision. Exploration of these topics should include elaboration of the concerns as well as an examination of potential remedies or effective responses to the issues.

**Clinical Supervisors Stories.** These articles describe current issues in counselor preparation and supervision from the perspective of site supervisors. The emphasis on these articles should focus on the story of the issue, potential solutions and the uniqueness of the message. Authors are encouraged to forgo significant literature review and attend directly to the intended message to the field.

*The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision is an EBSCOHost affiliated journal. It is indexed under the Education Research Complete database.*

---

**Submission Guidelines:**

Because JCPS is an on-line journal, all correspondence and submissions are electronic. Authors are to submit manuscripts in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), or rich text format (.rtf). We do not accept Macintosh or WordPerfect formats. Submissions to the journal should be sent to:

[JCPSNARACES@Gmail.com](mailto:JCPSNARACES@Gmail.com)

Please use the following guidelines to attend to the details of manuscript submission.

1. All manuscripts must be the original, unpublished work of the authors. We do not accept manuscripts that are currently under review with other journals. The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision retains copyright ownership of all works published in said journal.
2. The editor of the journal will review each manuscript submitted. Once accepted for further review, the manuscript will be sent to at least two additional editorial board review members. Comments, suggestions and edits will be sent to authors. Authors and reviewers will remain anonymous during the process.
3. Manuscripts are not to exceed 30 pages.
4. The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision uses APA style. Authors must adhere to the 6th edition of the APA formatting and style. Manuscripts that do not utilize the APA 6th edition will not be considered for review.
5. All manuscripts should use 12-point Arial font, be double spaced including references and extensive quotes, allow 1" margins on all sides, and include an abstract of no more than 150 words.
6. All manuscripts must include keywords/phrases (between 5 and 10).
7. Manuscripts should follow this order (title page, key words, abstract, body, references, tables and figures, and, a brief biographical statement on each author).
8. For blind review, authors are to submit the title page as a separate document and should not have their names on the submitted manuscript.
9. The journal strives to return feedback and comments on submitted manuscripts in a timely fashion. In most cases, the lead author will be notified within 1 week of the receipt of the manuscript; the lead author will be notified as to the decision of the journal within 3 months of acknowledgement of receipt of manuscript. All correspondence will be between the editor of the journal and the lead author of the manuscript.

**Permissions:**

Copyright is held by the North Atlantic Regional Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (NARACES). NARACES grants reproduction rights to teachers, researchers and libraries for scholarly purposes on the condition that no fee for use or possession of copies is charged to the ultimate consumer of the copies.

**Publication:**

The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision is published bi-annually (April and November). Subscription is provided free of charge.

**NARACES Membership:**

Benefits include:

- The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision
- Conferences
- Newsletters
- Networking
- Leadership Opportunities

Dues (paid bi-annually):

*Professional Member \$32 (\$16 per year)*

*Student Member \$10 (\$5 per year)*

*First Year Professional \$16 (Free first year, \$16 second year)*

*Retired Professional FREE!*

Dues are collected for 2 years of membership. During even numbered years (i.e. 2008, 2010) NARACES holds its bi-annual conference. Your membership will expire the month of the conference. For your convenience, membership dues can be renewed as part of our regional conference registration fee. For more information or to join NARACES, visit us on the web at:

<http://www.naraces.org/index.html>

# The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision

---

April 2012   Volume 4   Number 1

---

## Editorial

Edina Renfro-Michel and Larry D. Burlew

## Featured Articles

## Research

---

### *Student-Counselor Development During the First Year: A Qualitative Exploration*

Cornelia A. Patterson & Dana H. Levitt

### *Influence of Mindfulness Practice on Counseling Skills Development*

Trevor J. Buser, Juleen K. Buser, Christina H. Peterson, & Don G. Seraydarian

### *Trainee Shame-Proneness and the Supervisory Process*

Cynthia Bilodeau, Reginald Savard, & Conrad Lecomte

## Practice

---

### *Using Movies to Teach Identity Development to Graduate Counseling Students*

Gloria Pierce & Claire J. Wooloff

# Editorial

---

In this edition of JCPS we included articles focusing on research and practice in counselor education and supervision. As per the mission of the journal, we welcome all submissions in the following categories: research, techniques, counselor development, supervision issues, informed practice, clinical supervisor's stories and book reviews related to counselor education and supervision.

The articles by Buser et al. and Patterson and Levitt focus on research areas related to beginning counselor training, while Bilodeau, Savard and Lecomte increase knowledge in the field of counselor supervision. Buser et al. utilized a quasi-experimental design to determine the effectiveness of brief and extended mindfulness practice as compared to a control group. Surprisingly, students did not need extended practice to benefit from the training. Patterson and Levitt utilized grounded theory to develop a constructivist sense making process theory to help counselor educators better understand the development of counselors-in-training. Bilodeau, Savard, and Lecomte's research added to the understanding of supervision working alliance by investigating the effect of counselor-in-training proneness to shame. Proneness to shame was inversely related to perceived relationship with supervisor, thus having a significant impact on counselor supervision.

Pierce and Wooloff provide practical examples of how to utilize movies to help students integrate identity development models into their understanding of clients. Pierce and Wooloff discuss the movies as part of an overall curriculum with self-assessments, role-plays and case studies.

We thank all of our dedicated reviewers who responded quickly to everything asked of them. We also thank our wonderful Editorial Assistants: Jonathan Mazza, Jennifer Midura, and Jessica Spera. They spend endless hours organizing the process, working with reviewers and authors, editing articles, and putting everything together. We also thank the NARACES Board for giving us the opportunity to continue to share practical research and knowledge with our members by appointing us as co-editors of the *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, even as Dr. Burlew steps down after this issue, leaving Dr. Renfro-Michel as sole editor.

Edina Renfro-Michel, Co-editor  
Larry D. Burlew, Co-editor

# Student-Counselor Development During the First Year: A Qualitative Exploration

---

Cornelia A. Patterson & Dana Heller Levitt

---

This qualitative study examined the experiences of 9 first-year master's-level counseling students. Data revealed that students progressed through a constructivist sense making process in which previous experiences as well as personal expectations were used to make sense of their current experiences. A comprehensive—yet tentative—grounded theory based on in-depth interviews and a focus group is described. Implications for counselor education are provided.

Keywords: Student-Counselor Development, First-Year Experience, Grounded Theory

---

Counselor educators and researchers alike have agreed that gaining insight into one's own progression as a counselor, during the training years and throughout one's own career, is a vital component of healthy counselor development (Donati & Watts, 2005; Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Woodside, Oberman, Cole, & Carruth, 2007). It is important to identify and examine factors that influence student development because "overlooking these needs and issues can have significant implications for both counselors and the clients they serve" (Furr & Carroll, 2003, p. 39). While research has endorsed the need to examine student-counselor development, much of the literature is focused on counselor trainees at the practicum and internship levels and does not include the formative development that occurs within the first year. Researching formative development is important because if educators have an understanding of how first-year counseling students perceive information, they can use that information to tailor classroom activities to better suit the needs of the students. Ronnestad and Ladany (2006) stressed the need to more

closely evaluate the training process as a whole while focusing on certain counseling skills and qualities. By examining counselors-in-training on an interpersonal and intrapersonal level, counselor educators can design appropriate educational experiences to facilitate healthy counselor growth (Furr & Carroll, 2003).

There is minimal literature that specifically explores first-year student-counselor development grounded in students' actual experiences. In a related study, Woodside et al. (2007) used a phenomenological approach to interview eight pre-practicum students about their experiences learning to be counselors. The authors explained seven themes: the journey, decision making, self-doubt, counseling is [sic], learning, boundaries, and differences. Stefano, Mann-Feder, and Gazzola (2010) utilized qualitative analysis of clients' written responses to participating in counseling with a beginning-level trainee counseling student and reported that the interpersonal qualities and skills of the beginning counselor were influential to the counseling experience.

The counseling literature has included research and insight into various



elements that may influence counselor trainee development. Research has looked at critical incidents in student development, theories of student learning, the role of reflection and how it influences the meaning associated with one's development, student cognitive development, and how counselor education pedagogy can be designed around the developmental level of students. Critical incidents refer to "significant learning moments, turning points, or moments of realization... identified as making a significant contribution to [one's] their professional growth" (Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006, p.88). Critical incidents have been examined in the context of student development (Furr & Carroll, 2003), during clinical practice (Howard et al., 2006), in multicultural training (Coleman, 2006), and overall counselor development (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Student learning theories help us understand how students learn and comprehend issues (Fong 1998; Granello, 2000; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998; Perry, 1970). To understand first-year student development, it is important to distinguish how theories of constructivism (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998), contextual learning (Granello, 2000), social-cognitive learning (Fong, 1998), and Perry's (1970) stage model of absolute thought to relativist thought have been applied to counselor education. In recent years, constructivism and experiential learning have been directly applied to student development (Burnett, Long, & Horne, 2005; Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2006; House, 2007). Reflection refers to "learning first to carry out smaller units of activity and then to string those units together in a whole design process; for the pieces tend to interact with one another and to derive their meaning and characters from the whole process in which they are embedded" (Schon, 1987, p. 158). Critical dialogue and reflection exercises allow the student to have an opportunity to discuss

and reflect on one's role as a student, counselor-in-training, and as an individual (Hoshmand, 2004; Woodside et al., 2007). Cognitive development and counselor pedagogy provide greater insight into the need for further exploration of the first-year experience.

Etringer, Hillerbrand, and Claiborn (1995) explored the transition as counseling students progressed from novice to expert counselors by reviewing literature in the development of expertise and found that entry level students most often possessed declarative memory structures that required information to be given in a factual manner as opposed to expert counselors who relied on procedural knowledge structures where information was categorized into relevant categories and could be more abstract in terms of delivery. Granello (2002) conducted comparable research on graduate student cognitive complexity and found that students regressed in their cognitive development when faced with new and unfamiliar tasks. Applying Perry's (1970) model to cognitive development in counseling students, Granello (2002) suggested that entry-level students integrated information in a very dualistic and dichotomous way and recommended that counselor educators attempt to push students to more multiplistic thinking. Brendel, Kolbert, and Foster (2002) evaluated the developmental effects of counselor training programs on both conceptual and moral reasoning levels and found that clinical work was influential in promoting students' cognitive complexity.

### **Counselor Education Pedagogy**

Sexton (1998) stated that the literature lacks a description of the art and science of counselor education and that the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs

(CACREP) sets forth the information that needs to be taught within counselor education programs but does not provide information on the most effective methods of presenting the material. Moreover, Nelson and Neufeldt (1998) reviewed the counseling pedagogy literature and found that most research focused on teaching specific concepts such as client conceptualization, theoretical acquisition, and specific counseling problems. While techniques and strategies are discussed, there is minimal research examining the process by which classes are intentionally delivered to meet the students' developmental needs, perhaps because we do not have a clear sense of these needs.

Granello and Hazler (1998) examined the sequencing of classes to ascertain the developmental aspects of a counselor education curriculum. In reviewing multiple developmental models, the authors concluded that counselor education programs should work to adapt their curriculum and teaching styles to meet the developmental level of the students. Furthermore, they stated the primary limitation was that "little of this research has been conducted on graduate students in counselor education" (Granello & Hazler, 1998, p.103). Given that development is one of the fundamental elements of the counseling profession, it is important to understand that development from the beginning of training. Unfortunately, there is little research to date that explores the early developmental processes for counselor trainees. A deeper understanding of the first-year experience can not only assist in increasing awareness of students' developmental needs but can also help counselor educators in designing and implementing curricula that align to those developmental needs (Granello & Hazler, 1998).

Our understanding of these developmental processes is limited to a broad categorization of the counselor trainee experience as it relates to overall development. While many studies included information about students during the first year, the research tends to focus on counselor trainees throughout their academic program and/or throughout their professional career and does not provide adequate understanding of the influence of the first year on one's development.

The purpose of this study, then, was to utilize grounded theory methodology to specifically look at student development within the context of the first year. Grounded theory methodology was most appropriate for this inquiry because it enabled the exploration and description of the context and setting while searching for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Understanding the first-year experience may help counselor educators to develop curricular experiences to meet the needs of students as they enter their training, and assist students to understand the challenges that they are experiencing as more normative in nature.

### **Method and Procedure**

As a result of the lack of research specifically with first-year master's students, a tentative theory, grounded in the experiences of the students, was an essential goal of this study. This grounded theory not only increases the knowledge base of student-counselor development, it has the ability to advise pedagogical techniques that are intentionally designed to match students' developmental levels. Furthermore, the grounded theory may serve as a catalyst for future research into student-counselor development.

## **Sampling Procedure, Setting, and Sample**

Upon Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, two rounds of in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher with nine first-year master's degree students from three Midwestern CACREP-accredited counseling programs. The primary author contacted the department chair at each university and requested a list of first-year students who they believed would be able to clearly articulate their experiences. The first interviews took place in early to mid-winter and the second interviews in early to mid-spring of the same year at each of the universities. All nine participants who were individually interviewed were females ranging in age from 23-37 years. Eight participants were Caucasian and one was Mexican-American; three went directly from undergraduate to graduate school while the other six had waited between 1-15 years before they entered the program. Six of the participants were school counseling students and the other three were on a clinical mental health counseling track.

In-depth interviews took place in the natural setting of each counseling program's university and each interview was recorded and transcribed by the primary author. A focus group was conducted after both rounds of interviews. The focus group was composed of six students from one university who volunteered to participate, of which two were involved in the initial round of interviews. This focus group gave students an opportunity to check the tentative theory for thoroughness and accuracy.

## **Data Collection and Analysis Process**

Two rounds of in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. Initial interview questions were (a) "Describe your

thoughts, feelings, and perceptions as a first-year counseling graduate student," (b) "What is it like being a first-year student in a counseling program?" (c) "What were your assumptions regarding being in a counseling program?" and (d) "What has been the most influential event or incident so far in your first year as a counseling student?" Analysis of the data was ongoing through the data collection phases.

Consistent with grounded theory data analysis procedures, the data from the first round of interviews were initially open coded. Open coding is the process that allows for the initial identification and categorization of concepts that emerge from data (Strauss & Corbin, 2007). Following the open coding process, the researcher engaged in axial coding to reassemble the data and to further develop the initial categories that emerged during the open coding process. During this time the researcher also compared the categories at the level of their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 2007).

Following the first round of interviews, four major themes began to emerge from the analysis: various influences on the students during their first-year experience, the personal meaning that was attributed to their experiences, the way in which students conceptualized knowledge, and how the students appraised their competence as emerging counselors. Using the same students from the first round in the second round, the next set of interview questions were designed to gather more in-depth information and meaning within each category. They included (a) "How have you come to understand what it means to be a counselor?" (b) "How did the time in which you decided to enter graduate school affect your experience during the first year?" (c) "What did you expect of yourself as a first-year counseling student?" and (d) "What have been the best aspects of your program

and what do you believe needs improvement?”

Axial coding revealed that participants' descriptions supported the relationships between the four conceptual categories through their respective properties and dimensions. Axial coding also allowed the researcher to re-conceptualize some properties to more accurately describe the themes. Next, selective coding was employed to enable the integration of the students' responses in terms of the categories, properties, and dimensions derived in the previous steps and to refine the emerging theory from the relationships found in the earlier analyses (Strauss & Corbin, 2007). Finally, a conditional matrix was used to integrate the categories, properties, and dimensions of the data and create a diagram which illustrated how the themes were incorporated into the grounded theory.

### **Researcher, Researcher Bias and Triangulation Procedures**

In qualitative research, the researcher is an integral component of the research and is the instrument for data collection and analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Creswell (2006) stressed the importance of identifying and bracketing researcher bias to avoid a priori assumptions which may skew the analysis of the data. The researcher identified the following assumptions: (a) first-year counseling students may experience a period of change in which they realize that the program is different than what they had expected, (b) the first year in a counseling program is influential in counselor development, and (c) students are affected by the use of different pedagogical techniques that may be new to them. Throughout the research process, the author strived to bracket these assumptions to preserve the credibility of the data and

employed several credibility and triangulation techniques.

To further increase the credibility of these research findings, the researcher utilized data, investigator, and theory triangulation. Data triangulation included interviewing students in different programs at different geographic locations. Investigator triangulation occurred by consulting with several faculty members during the coding processes in order to compare and check the data collection and interpretation and decrease the possibility of researcher bias. Theory triangulation involved comparing interview data with two existing theories, Karl Weick's sense making theory (1995) and constructivism (Cobb, 2005; Kelly, 1963). Finally, the researcher utilized additional triangulation techniques, such as prolonged engagement, by conducting two rounds of interviews over multiple occasions with the same participants, and utilizing a focus group to check the accuracy of the data categories, properties, dimensions, and the emerging theory.

### **Results**

To check the emergent theory for accuracy and to ensure that the themes were developed accurately the researcher presented the categories and the emergent theory to the participants in the focus group. The participants' responses confirmed the process element of their development throughout the first year. One participant stated, "I think it is definitely a process and not a linear one. Like I said, all of these categories are related and all apply to my experience." Another participant stated, "All of the categories are really interrelated and I can see how all of them correlate with my experience. The whole picture is really cool." Further, participants confirmed that students progress through a process in which

they make sense and construct an understanding of their experience based on four overriding categories: *affective experiences, meaning-making, knowledge conceptualization, and competence appraisal.*

Table 1 provides an overview of the categories, properties, and dimensions that emerged from the coding process.

Table 1

Category	Property	Dimension
Affective Experiences	Professor	Empowering-Disconnected
	Peer	Supportive-Lackadaisical
	Self	Positive-Negative
Meaning-Making	Professional Involvement	
	Motivation	Educational-Emotional
	Significance of the Counseling Degree	Personal-Professional
Knowledge Conceptualization	Source of Learning	Detail-Application
	Information Intensity	Low- High
	Information History	No previous knowledge-previous knowledge
Competence Appraisal	Self-Efficacy	High- Low
	Time Management	Overwhelming- Manageable
	Personal Expectation	Perfectionistic - Realistic

Table 1. Categories, properties, and dimensions derived from the data analysis.

As students reflected and discussed their experiences, it was evident that they had progressed and continued to move through a process whereby the four identified themes or categories (*affective experiences, meaning-making, knowledge conceptualization, and competence appraisal*) were integrated into an existing frame of reference. Moreover, as the students experienced their first year, the four overriding themes were used to compare present experiences with past experiences, evaluate experiences based on personal expectations, and attempt to establish an overall understanding of their experiences. This process was labeled the *constructivist sense making process*. The continuation of making sense of one's experiences was ongoing and continued to be revised and refined throughout the first year.

### Affective Experiences

Each participant described affective professional and personal experiences that were influential during their first year. Properties within this category included professor, peer, and self. The professor property included two dimensions: empowering and and/or disconnected. One participant said, "She [the professor] has a lot of experience and just in my personal contact with her I get an idea of what it is going to be like to be a counselor." On the other end of the dimension, a participant stated, "I think it is difficult because obviously the different professors bring in their own experiences. If one is more experienced in a certain kind of counseling that is all you really hear about in class."

The peer property also included two dimensions: supportive and lackadaisical. Several participants discussed appreciating the support they received from their peers. One participant stated, "I really liked [learning from peers during group work] and

it has made me feel really close to them.” On the other hand, participants described interactions in which they felt that their peers were lackadaisical and halfhearted about the program. This statement encapsulated the lackadaisical dimension: “I don’t like an attitude though where people think school needs to be easy. I don’t like intellectual laziness.”

Lastly, participants described how they internalized feedback and evaluations and described how that internalization had influenced their first-year experience in the counseling program. This property (self) ranged from positive to negative. Consistent with much of the student development literature, participants relied on evaluations and grades as a way to validate their strengths with positive statements like, “wow, I actually know what I’m doing” versus, “that [negative feedback] creates a lot of anxiety for me and sticks with me for a long time.”

### **Meaning-Making**

As students reflected on the meaning associated with learning new material as well as gaining awareness into the multiple facets of the counseling profession, they obtained a more holistic understanding of their experience. Essentially, meaning was derived from three properties: professional involvement, motivation, and significance of the counseling degree. In addition to students acknowledging the importance of professional involvement with comments similar to: (“It was nice to feel that I was a part of a larger organization,”), students also discussed the educational and emotional motivators (motivation) that either brought them to the counseling program or helped them to continue in the program. Students also compared motivators to other experiences that were meaningful to them. One student stated the following: “I hadn’t

planned to take time off but I know I wasn’t ready to go to grad school right after undergrad...Once I got into the program, it is a lot more of ‘this is where I should be’. This is what I want to be doing.” Participants also affirmed the personal and professional significance of seeking a counseling degree; one such example included the following statement: “I never intended to go to grad school for a counseling degree but after time, things that happened in my life guided me. That time was vital for me.”

### **Knowledge Conceptualization**

Students conceptualized the information learned in the first year and compared it against what they expected to learn. They then used that information to make sense of their overall experience. Properties within this category included the source of learning, information intensity, and information history. Students actively strived to make sense of what they were learning and attempted to incorporate the new information into their existing repertoire of knowledge and skills. When students experienced a preferred source of learning, whether it was detail-oriented (A participant stated, “I would like to see how it looks in the field instead of what it looks like in a text book...I want real examples”) or application based, the constructed understanding of their experience was likely to be more meaningful. For example: “I think the application part was unbelievably helpful...trying it was the best way for me to learn it, because if someone models it for you, you might just always try to follow the exact model and never be able to personalize it.”

Students also revealed that the higher the professors’ expectations were, the harder the students wanted to work, resulting in a feeling of accomplishment. In other words,

as students were making sense of what they were learning, the way in which the instructor presented the material and the expectation that the instructor had for the student was paramount to the students' willingness to want to learn. Students who made a meaningful connection to the material via the instructor's method were more likely to be able to conceptualize it, reflect on it, make sense of it, and truly understand it. These comments included statements such as: "I thought the classes would be, not more work but more demanding of me intellectually." Another participant stated, "I want the one professor that I can learn from for my practicum, even though she is one of my hardest professors." Finally, whether students had previous counseling knowledge (information history) was influential in how they conceptualized what they were learning. A participant stated, "I do not have any prior knowledge to hook onto and help me to really understand" whereas another stated, "A lot of things that we have learned, I can kind of relate to."

### **Competence Appraisal**

Participants described the different ways they measured their capabilities and competencies based on their personal expectations and assumptions. Properties within this category included self-efficacy, time management skills, and their own personal expectations. Students' assumptions and expectations in regards to their future practicum and internship experiences affected how they measured whether they felt adequately prepared. Regardless of whether students exhibited high ("I feel like I can approach a person and really help them") or low levels of self-efficacy ("I have a really hard time transferring knowledge into practical application...so that makes me nervous"),

students used assumptions regarding what they believed they ought to know as a way to measure their personal competence. Similarly, whether students deemed the time consumed by graduate school as manageable ("I have learned how to balance my time with work") or overwhelming ("It is hard when you have to balance things, home life and school life"), descriptions were based on past academic situations as well as assumptions regarding the amount of time they expected graduate work to take.

Finally, students discussed their expectations with regards to personal abilities as first-year students. Not only did students construct a reality and overall understanding based on previous experiences, this category specifically highlighted the personal expectations component in making sense of experiences. Participants ranged from perfectionistic ("I expected myself to know more and know what to do") to realistic ("I really expected myself to try and focus more on learning and less on achievement"). Students' personal expectations influenced how they performed during their first year as well as played a large part in the overall ability to make sense of the experience.

### **Constructivist Sense Making Process: An Emerging Theory**

Part of the triangulation process for this study involved comparing the data with two existing theories. Weick's (1995) sense making theory describes how individuals professionally develop by making sense of their new experience. Sense making is concerned with making retrospective sense of situations in which persons find themselves and is a process that is used to "construct, filter, frame, and render the subjective into something more tangible" (Weick, 1995, p. 14). Individuals in a social context interpret or make sense of new

experiences by viewing previous experiences in new ways (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Additionally, the process of sense making is fluid and dynamic. Sense making has no beginning or ending points and “people are always in the middle of things, which become things, only when those same people focus on the past from some point beyond it” (Weick, 1995, p. 43). The concept of sense making parallels constructivist theory in that it is based upon both developmental constructivism and social constructivism (McAuliffe, 2002).

Constructivism has been defined as the “notion that our beliefs and assumptions, many of which are theoretical and many of which are grounded in data, are products of the meanings that we make in our social context” (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998, p.77). Constructivism is a way of thinking that is based on actively creating a reality that is, or can be, social in nature, questioned, evaluated, and possibly reformulated (McAuliffe, 2002). Comparing the data with these existing theories served to check for consistencies and inconsistencies with the findings of the interview data.

This qualitative study sought to explore the experiences of first-year master’s degree counseling students. Students’ comments served as a basis for the development of a tentative, constructivist sense making process theory. In examining the overall theory, it became apparent that a variety of factors (affective experiences, meaning-making, knowledge conceptualization, and competence appraisal) were interacting simultaneously as students sorted out and made sense of their experiences. In understanding the constructivist sense making process, it is important to reiterate the process element of the theory and the dynamic nature of sense making. Figure 1 illustrates each of the categories, properties, and dimensions and how they are interrelated to the

constructivist sense making process. In the theory, students develop personal awareness and make sense of each of the four dimensions of their learning processes. The processes (affective experiences, meaning-making, knowledge conceptualization, and competence appraisal) occur simultaneously in a non-linear fashion throughout students’ early development in the first year. Students continued to discuss their experiences and conceptualize information based on what they were learning and what, and how, they expect to learn the information. One student stated, “If I wouldn’t have taken time off it would have changed my entire perspective on what I was learning and how I experienced this year. Your theory makes my experience make sense more and showed me how taking that time off influenced how I made sense of this year.”

It is important to note the constructivist sense making process involved both individual and social processes of constructing and making sense of one’s experiences. One student expressed the following. “I can see how I used my previous experiences...how my previous experiences influenced how I made sense of this year. I hadn’t really thought about it that way before but it makes sense. It is really interesting.” The application of the constructivist sense making process in counselor education curricula will further explicate the theoretical components and principles.

### **Implications for Counselor Education**

In addition to increased insight into student-counselor development, this research facilitates conversation about how student development affects learning and the effectiveness of pedagogy that is aligned with students’ developmental levels. With the understanding of the constructivist sense making process, counselor educators can



understand how their students are using the newly-learned material, making sense of it and comparing it with previous assumptions and/or experiences. vonGlaserfeld (2005) suggested that a constructivist attitude might reveal “the realization that students perceive their environment in ways that may be very different from those intended by the educators” (p. 7). Therefore, asking students to provide written reflections on course topics or engage in class discussion are ways that faculty can facilitate the connection between the students’ perceptions of the information and the content or message the instructor is conveying.

Skovholt and McCarthy (1988) emphasized that beginning students’ “readiness” to learn influenced whether an event would be deemed critical in their overall development. The present theory provides counselor educators with awareness of students’ learning readiness and how that readiness can be influenced by various pedagogical techniques such as giving concrete details and real world examples or applying the concept to a different, but similar, situation. Consistent with both constructivist theory and with this proposed theory, counselor educators can understand the processes students employ to make sense and construct their understanding of various experiences within the first year. Additionally, this information can assist counselor educators in gaining awareness into the need to process students’ previous experiences and expectations and discuss how their assumptions may or may not fit with their current experiences. Woodside et al. (2007) suggested that counselor educators could discuss with students the idea of counselor development to help promote their professional self-awareness. For example, utilizing self-exploration exercises and connecting students’ former experiences with why they chose to pursue counseling can facilitate

increased professional and personal self-awareness. Several texts (e.g., Echterling, Cowan, Evans, Staton, & McKee, 2007; Hazler & Kottler, 2005) have been written to help students learn about the journey that lies ahead. Such materials may be included as readings for courses early in the curriculum. This discussion could also take place in a supervisory context so that students understand how they are processing what they are learning and how they can apply the concepts in future clinical practice (Stoltenberg et al., 1998). In fact, the very idea of discussing the process of learning and how one’s knowledge can influence future learning opportunities is another useful strategy.

This theory of students’ experiences not only serves as a catalyst to examine students within their first year, but provides counselor educators with information that can be used to possibly revise and tailor curriculum and learning experiences to better suit the developmental needs of first-year counseling students. For example, in an Introduction to Professional Counseling course, faculty should provide more concrete examples of new concepts, while in second-year practicum and internship courses the examples should mimic students’ clinical experiences and be more applied in nature. The proposed grounded theory provides counselor educators with an understanding of counselors-in-training on both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels, which in turn can assist counselor educators in designing appropriate educational experiences that help link prior knowledge or schemata to new information that can be applied in new settings.

Students expressed the significance of counselor educators’ enthusiasm and willingness to provide a supportive and empowering environment for learning. Therefore, having discussions and sharing examples with first-year students, which

counselor educators themselves found to be influential when they were early in their development, provide first-year students with a context in which new material can be integrated. For example, one participant stated, “I can see how excited [the faculty] are to be in this field and how excited they get...It makes me excited to get out there and start my own career.”

Further, as students discussed their experiences, they consistently stressed the importance of deriving meaning from learning activities. Obtaining meaning was achieved not only by students actively participating in class or experiential activities in which skills were practiced, but meaning was also attributed to the level of intensity that instructors and professors required in their classes. When students were challenged to “think outside the box” or study and apply concepts, students expressed feelings of accomplishment and contentment. Conversely, students complained when they perceived activities as meaningless or professors as being too easy.

This theory also stresses the importance of increased performance expectations on the part of counselor educators. Students expressed that learning encompasses much more than a didactic classroom environment and desired a setting in which students work together, were challenged, and were held to high expectations. Students specifically expressed their dislike of open book tests (“the [open book] tests I thought were a little bit too easy”) and assignments that needed little rigor because they associated less meaning with easy assignments. One student stated, “Some of my other classes require lots of thinking, lots of active participating in class and I find that I learn much more.” Also, students stated that when counselor educators presented materials in more creative, dynamic, and applicable ways, it

strongly influenced students’ overall judgment of the importance of the material. A participant stated, “I feel like the manner in which the information was given to us was engaging. [The time] went by really fast because we were constantly doing things or talking about it and everyone was engaged and for me that is a really good way to learn.”

### **Limitations**

In spite of research bracketing and triangulation processes, several limitations exist and the results and implications for this study should be read with caution. A limitation of this study was the sampling procedure. While the researcher requested that department chairs provide names of students who they believed would be willing and able to clearly articulate their experience, as well as range in age, sex, and race as much as possible, several chairs expressed concern about identifying students without their permission. As a result, the recruiting primarily relied on volunteers who were willing to reflect and discuss their experience. After the first round of interviews, the researcher felt comfortable that the participants were indeed reflective and able to articulate their experiences and thus could be considered “information-rich”. Also, there was minimal racial diversity between the participants which resulted in the data coming from a primarily a homogeneous group of students.

A potential limitation of utilizing the grounded theory approach is that the tentative theory generated in this research is limited in terms of generalizability. Further, the sample size was quite small in comparison to sample sizes in quantitative studies. These factors, though, are not appropriate for the methodology and do not follow the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin,

2007). Information gleaned from this theory can lead to additional research and increased insight into student-counselor development and can assist counselor educators to better meet the needs to the students in their programs.

### **Conclusion**

An emergent theory outlining a constructivist sense making process provides insight into the experiences of first-year master's-level counseling students. To facilitate burgeoning counselors in the development of their own strengths and approaches to the counseling process and to strengthen one's own pedagogical practice, it is important to understand what takes place for students as they begin their journeys as counselors. Counselor educators are encouraged to explore myriad experiences of first-year students and to tailor curricular learning experience to provide the greatest possibility for self-growth and counselor development beyond the first year of academic preparation and throughout the counseling career.

## References

- Brendel, J. M., Kolbert, J. B., & Foster, V. A. (2002). Promoting student cognitive development. *Journal of Adult Development, 9*, 217-227.
- Burnett, J. A., Long, L. L. & Horne, H. L. (2005). Service learning for counselors: Integrating education, training, and the community. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development, 44*, 158-167.
- Cobb, P. (2005). Where is the mind? A coordination of sociocultural and cognitive constructivist perspectives. In C. T. Fosnot (Ed.), *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives and practice* (pp. 39-57). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Coleman, M. N. (2006). Critical incidents in multicultural training: An examination of student experiences. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 34*, 168-182.
- Creswell, J. W. (2006). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Donati, M., & Watts, M. (2005). Personal development in counsellor training: Towards a clarification of inter-related concepts. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 33*, 475-484. Doi: 10.1080/03069880500327553
- Echterling, L.G., Cowan, E., Evans, W.F., Staton, A.R., McKee, J.E., Presbury, J., & Stewart, A.L. (2008). *Thriving!: A manual for students in the helping professions (2nd ed.)*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Eriksen, K. P., & McAuliffe, G. J. (2006). Constructive development and counselor competence. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 45*, 180-192.
- Etringer, B. D., Hillerbrand, E., & Claiborn, C. D. (1995). The transition from novice to expert counselor. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 35*, 4-18.
- Fong, M. L. (1998). Considerations of a counseling pedagogy. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 38*, 106-113.
- Furr, S. R., & Carroll, J. J. (2003). Critical incidents in student counselor development. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 81*, 483-489.
- Granello, D. H. (2000). Contextual teaching and learning in counselor education. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 39*, 270-284.
- Granello, D. H. (2002). Assessing the cognitive development of counseling students: Changes in epistemological assumptions. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 41*, 279-293.
- Granello, D. H., & Hazler, R. J. (1998). A developmental rationale for curriculum order and teaching styles in counselor education programs. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 38*, 89-106.
- Hazler, R.J., & Kottler, J.A. (2005). *The emerging professional counselor: Student dreams to professional realities (2nd ed.)*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Hoshmand, L. T. (2004). The transformation potential of counselor education. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education, and Development, 43*, 82-90.
- House, R. (2007). The be-coming of a therapist: Experiential learning, self-education and the personal/professional nexus. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 35*, 427-440.
- Howard, E. E., Inman, A. G., & Altman, A. N. (2006). Critical incidents among novice counselor trainees. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 46*, 88-102.
- Kelly, G. A. (1963). *A theory of personality: The psychology of personal constructs*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

- Lambie, G. W., Hagedorn, W. B., & Ieva, K. P. (2010). Social-cognitive development, ethical and legal knowledge, and ethical decision making of counselor education students. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 49*, 228-246.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research (5th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McAuliffe, G. J. (2002). The heart and craft of teaching: What we know. In G. J. McAuliffe & K. Eriksen (Eds.), *Teaching strategies for constructivist and developmental counselor education* (pp. 1-25). Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey.
- Nelson, M. L., & Neufeldt, S. A. (1998). The pedagogy of counseling: A critical examination. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 38*, 71-86.
- Perry, W. G. Jr. (1970). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Ronnestad, M. H., & Ladany, N. (2006). The impact of psychotherapy training: Introduction to the special section. *Psychotherapy Research, 16*, 261-267.
- Schon, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Sexton, T. L. (1998). Reconstructing counselor education: Supervision, teaching, and clinical training revisited. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 38*, 2-5.
- Skovholt, T. M., & McCarthy, P. R. (1988). Critical incidents: Catalysts for counselor development. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 67*, 69-72.
- Skovholt, T. M., & Ronnestad, M. H. (1992). Themes in therapist and counselor development. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 70*, 505-515.
- Stefano, J. D., Mann-Feder, V., & Gazzola, N. (2010). A qualitative study of client experiences of working with novice counsellors. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 10*, 139-146. doi: 10-1080/14733141003770713
- Stoltenberg, C. D., McNeill, B., & Delworth, U. (1998). *IDM supervision: An integrated developmental model for supervising counselors and therapists*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- von Glasersfeld, E. (2005). Introduction: Aspects of constructivism. In C. T. Fosnot (Ed.), *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives, and practice* (2nd ed.), (pp. 3-7). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science, 16*, 409-421.
- Woodside, M., Oberman, A.H., Cole, K.G., & Carruth, E.K. (2007). Learning to be a counselor: A practicum point of view. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 47*, 14-28.

---

Please address correspondence to: Dana Heller Levitt at [levittd@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:levittd@mail.montclair.edu)

---

---

# Influence of Mindfulness Practice on Counseling Skills Development

---

Trevor J. Buser, Juleen K. Buser, Christina H. Peterson, & Don G. Seraydarian

---

This study assessed the impact of mindfulness practice, incorporated alongside a five-week counselor skills training model, on the counseling skills development of master's-level trainees (N = 59). Three groups of counseling students were studied: those who engaged in no mindfulness practice; those who engaged in a brief amount of mindfulness practice (five mindfulness practice sessions); and those who engaged in an extended amount of mindfulness practice (11 mindfulness practice sessions). The results showed improvements in counseling skills associated with mindfulness practice, although the brief and extended intervention groups did not significantly differ from one another.

*Keywords:* Mindfulness, Counseling Skills Development, Counselor Training, Counselor Education, Meditative Practice

---

In recent years, several authors have argued for the inclusion of mindfulness practice in counselor education (e.g., Christopher, Christopher, Dunnagan, & Schure, 2006; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Fulton, 2005; Greason & Cashwell, 2009; Grepmaier et al., 2007). Kabat-Zinn (1994) defined mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (p. 4). Other theorists, too, have understood mindfulness as the task of attending to current internal and external experience, rather than focusing on past or future issues (Bishop et al., 2004; Lau et al., 2006; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002; Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006). Attention is theorized to involve abilities for prolonged focus, ease in switching attention between different phenomena, and the inhibition of thought processes that might redirect focus away from immediate experience (Bishop et al., 2004). Additionally, mindfulness has been characterized by an attitude of acceptance. Bishop et al. (2004) suggested that

mindfulness involves curiosity and openness to present experience. Similarly, in his definition, Kabat-Zinn (1994) emphasized the nonjudgmental nature of mindfulness, whereby an individual accepts and explores current experience as it is, rather than seeking to change or manipulate it in some way.

Mindfulness, which is grounded in Buddhist meditative traditions, has been utilized within psychotherapeutic settings for the past few decades (Grepmaier, Mitterlehner, Rother, & Nickel, 2006). The use of mindfulness as an adjunct to psychotherapy has been explored with a wide range of psychological difficulties, including depression, panic disorder, eating disorders, and borderline personality disorder (Baer, 2006). Researchers have also found support for the therapeutic application of mindfulness in programs for anxiety and stress reduction (Lau et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2007).

Authors have recommended the incorporation of mindfulness in counselor

training for a variety of reasons—for example, as a means of developing attending skills (Greason & Cashwell, 2009), instilling methods for self-care (Christopher et al., 2006; Christopher & Maris, 2010), promoting empathic abilities (Fulton, 2005; Greason & Cashwell, 2009; Morgan & Morgan, 2005), and improving the mental health of counselors (Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007). Unfortunately, however, only a few studies have investigated the relationship between mindfulness practice and students' professional development in counseling. Greason and Cashwell (2009), for example, collected survey-based data from a sample of 179 master's- and doctoral-level counseling students. The results indicated that mindfulness was significantly related to students' counseling self-efficacy (i.e., students' confidence in their ability to fulfill the role of counselor), empathy, and attention (i.e., the ability to sustain attention and direct attention simultaneously to multiple, relevant stimuli). Furthermore, attention functioned as a mediator of the relationship between mindfulness and counseling self-efficacy.

Another pertinent study was conducted by Grepmaier et al. (2007). These researchers compared the clinical outcomes of psychotherapy interns who participated in daily meditation practice (1 hour/day) to the clinical outcomes of interns who were not engaged in meditation practice. Clients (N = 124) were randomly assigned to interns for therapeutic treatment. After a two-month intervention, clients who were treated by interns utilizing meditative practices reported a greater reduction in symptoms related to somatization, insecurity, obsessiveness, anxiety, anger, and psychoticism. They also reported that the therapeutic experience was more beneficial in clarifying presenting issues and problem-solving, compared to the reports of clients treated by interns who were not exposed to

meditation.

A stream of qualitative studies, emanating from the work of John Christopher and colleagues (Christopher et al., 2006; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Schure, Christopher, & Christopher, 2008), has also provided compelling support for the contribution of mindfulness to students' professional development. Christopher et al. (2006) studied counseling students' experiences in an elective course on the topic of self-care and mind/body medicine. This course involved regular, intensive mindfulness practice. At the end of the course, the researchers conducted a focus group with participants and analyzed their comments through inductive content analysis. One of the primary themes in this study pertained to participants' growing sense of clinical presence with clients. Students reported that, as a result of practicing mindfulness, they were able to focus more intently on clients during sessions and bring their full attention to the therapeutic encounter.

Similar findings were reached in a qualitative study by Schure et al. (2008). The focus of research was turned to students in this same course, which incorporated regular mindfulness practice. In this case, however, the researchers used inductive content analysis to examine the journal entries of participating students (N = 35) over a four-year period. The findings suggested that students experienced improvements in their clinical work as a result of practicing mindfulness. Specifically, students reported increased comfort with silence in counseling sessions, improved attention on clients and the therapeutic process during sessions, and a new appreciation for the importance of spiritual themes in counseling.

In sum, there exists support for the view that mindfulness practice is related to fundamental counseling abilities (e.g.,

attention and empathy), as well as students' self-efficacy in fulfilling the role of a counselor. It would be expected, therefore, that mindfulness practice may have a positive effect on students' counseling skills and their effectiveness with clients. Preliminary findings in this direction were reported by Grepmaier et al. (2007), who demonstrated that interns with meditating practice had better clinical outcomes than interns without meditating practice.

### **Limitations of the Research on Mindfulness in Counselor Education**

One of the limitations of this growing body of research, however, has been a heavy reliance on self-report data. With the exception of the Grepmaier et al. (2007) study, all of these investigations depended upon students' own evaluations of their interaction with clients (e.g., ability to sustain attention in session) and counseling-related abilities (e.g., levels of empathy toward others). Both Greason and Cashwell (2009) and Christopher and Maris (2010) noted the importance of incorporating observer ratings into future studies.

Additionally, no research to date (to the authors' knowledge) has explored the impact of mindfulness practice on the quality or development of students' counseling skills. In fact, the training literature has often been critiqued for its poor attention to measures of the quality of counseling responses (Brendel, Kolbert, & Foster, 2002; Cunningham & Stewart, 1983; Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2003; Fuqua, Johnson, Anderson, & Newman, 1984; Morran, Kurpius, Brack, & Brack, 1995). Although several recent training studies (e.g., Crews et al., 2005; Downing, Smaby, & Maddux, 2001; Little, Packman, Smaby, & Maddux, 2005; Schaeffe, Smaby, Maddux, & Cates, 2005; Smaby, Maddux, Torres-Rivera, & Zimmick, 1999; Urbani et

al., 2002) have assessed the occurrence of particular skills in session (i.e., skill acquisition), fewer have evaluated whether particular skills were utilized in a well-timed or well-developed manner by trainees (i.e., skills quality). Hence, a contribution to the field—and to the literature on mindfulness in counselor education, in particular—would be an examination of whether the development of students' counseling skills is increased through a training model featuring mindfulness practice.

The current investigation was designed to begin bridging these gaps in the literature on mindfulness in counselor education. Specifically, the goal of this research was to assess the impact of mindfulness practice, incorporated alongside a five-week counselor skills training model, on the students' counseling skills development. In view of research suggesting that mindfulness is related to empathy and attention (Christopher et al., 2006; Greason & Cashwell, 2009; Schure et al., 2008), we hypothesized that trainees with mindfulness practice would outperform trainees with no mindfulness practice on counseling skills development. A second purpose of this study was to determine whether an extended amount of mindfulness practice had a differential impact on the counseling skills development of trainees, compared to a brief amount of mindfulness practice. For the purposes of this study, we defined extended mindfulness practice as 11 mindfulness practice sessions and brief mindfulness practice as five mindfulness practice sessions. Research has supported the relationship between attention and length of meditation experience, showing that long-term meditators have better capacities for attention and concentration, compared to short-term meditators (Lazar et al., 2005; Valentine & Sweet, 1999). Thus, we hypothesized that trainees with an extended amount of mindfulness practice would



outperform trainees with a brief amount of mindfulness practice on counseling skills development.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Fifty-nine students participated in this study. All participants were enrolled in one of three sections of a three-credit Introduction to Counseling course at a CACREP-accredited master's-level program in the Northeast. The class met weekly for 2.5 hours. One section served as a control group ( $n = 20$ ), one served as a brief intervention group ( $n = 19$ ), and one served as an extended intervention group ( $n = 20$ ). This study, therefore, utilized a posttest-only comparison group quasi-experimental research design. Although this research made use of intact groups for its sample, sections of participants were randomly assigned to the control and intervention group conditions.

The control group participants were 77% female, 88% Caucasian, 6% African American, and 6% Asian/Pacific Islander. Participants reported a mean age of 28 ( $SD = 8.51$ ) and had completed an average of 3.53 graduate credits hours ( $SD = 4.77$ ) in counseling. Forty-five percent of them had prior experience with meditation/yoga. The brief intervention group participants were 94% female, 88% Caucasian, 6% Hispanic/Latino, 6% Multi-racial, and reported a mean age of 23.4 ( $SD = 1.93$ ). These students had completed an average of 2.14 graduate credit hours ( $SD = 3.98$ ), and 63% had prior experience with meditation/yoga. The extended intervention group participants were 88% female, 88% Caucasian, 6% Hispanic/Latino, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and reported a mean age of 25.6 ( $SD = 8.08$ ). Participants in this group had completed an average of 2.00 graduate credits hours ( $SD = 2.95$ ), and 75%

had prior experience with meditation/yoga. The same professor (second author) taught all three classes. This professor holds a doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision and has completed training in the use of mindfulness in psychotherapy.

### **Study Design and Procedure**

For all three groups, the introductory course in counseling included five weeks of counseling skills training, based on Ivey's (1971) Microcounseling model and Young's (2009) similar approach to training in his text, *Learning the Art of Helping*. In the Microcounseling model, students focus on the development of particular skills (e.g., reflecting feeling) each class period and eventually learn to integrate these skills in a counseling session. This portion of the class also included in-class skills practice, during which time students engaged in role-play counseling sessions with classmates and received feedback from the professor, peer observers, and advanced graduate student facilitators. Practice sessions ranged from 2-10 minutes, with the majority of practice sessions lasting between 6-10 minutes in duration. The course also involved seven weeks of lectures and discussions, which provided an orientation to the profession of counseling (e.g., history, ethics, and overviews of various types of counseling).

### **Control group**

The control group received five weeks of skills instruction and in-class skill practice, as described above. The control group, by virtue of not participating in mindfulness practice during class time, spent additional time discussing issues related to the didactic portion of this introductory course.

### **Intervention groups: Brief and extended mindfulness**

In addition to the skills training model described above, the brief and extended intervention groups received a presentation on mindfulness and in-class mindfulness practice sessions. For the brief intervention group, participants engaged in five weekly mindfulness practice sessions. These practice sessions ranged from 5-10 minutes each, followed by 10-15 minutes of group discussion about the mindfulness experience. For the extended group, participants engaged in 11 weekly mindfulness practice sessions. The mindfulness practice sessions for this group ranged from 5-20 minutes in duration, followed by 10-15 minutes of group discussion about the mindfulness experience.

In addition to the skills training model described above, the brief and extended intervention groups received a presentation on mindfulness and in-class mindfulness practice sessions. For the extended group, participants engaged in 11 weekly mindfulness practice sessions. The mindfulness practice sessions for this group ranged from 5-20 minutes in duration, followed by 10-15 minutes of group discussion about the mindfulness experience. In view of the restraints of the course syllabus, 11 weeks of mindfulness practice was considered the maximum amount of the intervention that could be accommodated in this particular class. For the brief intervention group, we decided to include approximately half of the amount of mindfulness practice provided to the extended group. Therefore, these participants engaged in five weekly mindfulness practice sessions. These practice sessions ranged from 5-10 minutes each, followed by 10-15 minutes of group discussion about the mindfulness

experience. Both the brief and extended intervention groups received the same presentation on mindfulness at the start of the intervention. For this presentation, the course instructor gave a lecture on the history of mindfulness practice, therapeutic applications of mindfulness, and its potential value in developing counseling skills and attention. In order to standardize aspects of the mindfulness intervention across groups, the instructor utilized tape recordings of mindfulness exercises, including sitting meditation, choiceless awareness, and loving kindness meditation. The sitting meditation focused attention on the sensations of breathing and the rhythm of the breath; the choiceless awareness meditation focused attention on body sensations and emotions; and the loving kindness meditation focused attention on feelings of benevolence toward other individuals and inwardly toward the self.

### **Data collection**

Participants completed brief questionnaires on demographic information and prior experience with yoga and mindfulness. At the end of the semester, participants completed a 10-minute taped counseling session, which was a standard assignment for the course. Participants were instructed to serve as a counselor in this counseling session and demonstrate skills taught in the course. In each session, advanced graduate students served in the role of client and were instructed to role-play a particular presenting issue. Participants of this study were instructed to demonstrate the following skills in the counseling session: door openers (i.e., "Tell me more about that"), open-ended questions, minimal encouragers, nonverbal attending skills, paraphrasing, reflecting feeling, summarizing, immediacy, and confrontation/noting a discrepancy.

Participants were informed that taped sessions would be evaluated by the instructor as part of the course grade and analyzed separately for the research study. The course professor was not involved in the evaluation of tapes for the research study. Rather, tapes were evaluated for this study by two Ph.D.-level instructors, both of whom currently teach in a graduate counseling program. Student tapes were randomly assigned to the raters, and the raters were blind to the group status of participants.

### **Study measure**

The dependent variable under review was counseling skills development. Raters observed the taped sessions and assessed the counseling skills development of participants with the Counseling Skills Scale (CSS; Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2003). This measure contains 22 items using a 5-point, Likert-type scale (ranging from -2 to 2). The score of 2 indicates that a counseling response is highly developed, well-timed, helpful communication, whereas the score of -2 rates a response as unhelpful, poorly timed, and harmful to the client. An additional response option is "NN," meaning that the particular counseling response listed in the item is "not necessary" to the session. The measure consists of six subscales, which correspond to four helping stages (Showing Interest, Encourages Exploration, Deepens Session, and Encourages Change) and two global conditions of effective counseling (Develops Therapeutic Relationship and Manages Session). Items address counseling responses or skills relevant to each stage or global condition. Per Eriksen and McAuliffe, subscale scores are the averages of the responses on the scale items. Previous research using this scale has shown high levels of internal consistency ( $\alpha = .91$ ) (Eriksen & McAuliffe,

2003). Moreover, Eriksen and McAuliffe reported evidence for the construct validity of the CSS. They found a significant increase in trainees' scores on the CSS after one semester of skills training.

For the purposes of this study, modifications were made to the CSS. Some items referred to skills that were outside the scope of this five-week training model and were not required to be demonstrated in students' final tape. The following items, therefore, were not evaluated in this study: observing themes and patterns, reflecting meaning and values, and evoking and punctuating client strengths. Additionally, two entire subscales, Encourages Change and Shows Interest and Appreciation, were removed for this study. We removed items associated with Encourages Change because, within the confines of a 10-minute session, we did not expect students to generate solutions or change in relation to the presenting issue. Moreover, although the vast majority of sessions (88%) were recorded on video-tape, seven tapes from the extended intervention group were recorded on audio-tape only, due to a technological failure. Therefore, in evaluating the sessions, the researchers did not use the Shows Interest and Appreciation subscale of the CSS, which addresses nonverbal communication skills. Previous researchers have shown no differences in the assessment of verbal communication skills associated with the format of taped sessions (specifically, audio- versus video-taped formats; Dent, Brown, Dowsatt, Tattersall, & Butow, 2005).

Therefore, the modified measure was composed of the remaining subscales: the Encourages Exploration subscale included 4 items, which tapped the skills of questioning, requesting concrete and specific examples, paraphrasing (reflection of content), and summarizing. Reliability was acceptable for this subscale in the

current study ( $\alpha = .72$ ). The Deepens the Session subscale included 3 items, which tapped the skills of reflecting feeling, immediacy, and challenging/pointing out discrepancies (in this sample,  $\alpha = .64$ ). The two final subscales in the original CSS had one item each: Develops the Therapeutic Relationship (e.g., displays genuineness, empathy, acceptance, and positive regard) and Manages the Session (e.g., opens and closes session appropriately, structures session throughout in a smooth manner, and maintains client focus on important concerns). As noted previously, these two subscales assess global conditions of effective counseling. For the purposes of this study, these two subscales were combined to make up the Develops the Therapeutic Relationship subscale. This decision was informed by authors (Kottler & Shepard, 2011), who have characterized the counseling relationship as comprised of both facilitative counselor attitudes (e.g., genuineness, empathy, and positive regard) and the counselor's ability to structure sessions. Moreover, we added two items to this final subscale, in order to assess issues that arise in skills training courses: appropriate self-disclosure and ability to tolerate intense affect. The latter referred to the counselor's capacity to delve into the client's negative affect without resorting to rescuing behavior (Gladding, 2008) or a premature movement to solutions (McAuliffe & Lovell, 2006). These additions were also meant to identify global items that impact the therapeutic relationship. Coefficient Alpha for the Develops the Therapeutic Relationship subscale in this study was 0.89.

Two raters made use of the modified CSS in evaluating taped counseling sessions for this research. Raters met for two training sessions in the use of this scale. Training sessions included a review of three counseling sessions, independent rating of

skills based on the modified CSS, and discussion of items on the scale until consensus was reached for each item in regard to the sessions. Following this practice with the modified CSS, the raters independently used the scale to evaluate the counseling skills development of participants, as demonstrated in taped counseling sessions. Each rater was randomly assigned tapes from multiple groups by the course instructor, who was aware of the group condition of each participant. Each taped session was evaluated by one rater. As noted above, raters were blind to the group condition of participants. Inter-rater reliability, calculated using a 10-subject subset of participants, was strong for two of the scales at  $r = .77$  for Encourages Exploration and  $.91$  for Develops the Therapeutic Relationship. The inter-rater reliability for Deepens the Session, however, was unacceptable ( $r = .52$ ). Therefore, scores associated with the Deepens the Session subscale were not included in analyses of the study.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Given that the class used in this study was an introductory course and the first in a sequence required for the counseling program, an assumption of this research design was that the control, brief intervention, and extended intervention groups did not differ in mean counseling skills prior to the intervention. As noted in the description of demographics, the mean amount of credits completed for each group ranged from 2.00-3.53, indicating that most participants had completed less than one graduate class or approximately one class, depending on the group. All participants, therefore, were beginning their course of study in the graduate counseling program.

Because assignment to group condition was not random, however, the groups were statistically compared on potentially confounding variables. Chi-square analysis was performed to compare the groups on previous participation in yoga/meditation (yes/no), gender, and ethnicity. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also performed to compare the groups on age and number of credit hours completed in the counseling program. There were no significant differences between the groups on any of these variables ( $p > .05$ ).

### Principal Analyses

To assess the impact of varying levels of mindfulness intervention on counseling skills, a univariate ANOVA was performed for each of the two counseling skills subscales. Results were interpreted with a bonferroni correction ( $\alpha/n$  or  $p < .025$ ) to control for type 1 error. The dependent variables for the analysis were the mean scores for two subscales of the CSS, viz., Encourages Exploration and Develops the Therapeutic Relationship. The effect of group was significant for Encourages

Exploration ( $p = .01$ ) and Develops the Therapeutic Relationship ( $p = .018$ ; see Table 1).

Post hoc comparisons indicated that both the brief and extended intervention groups had significantly higher scores on the Develops the Therapeutic Relationship subscale than the control group, although the brief and extended intervention groups did not significantly differ from one another. On the Encourages Exploration subscale, only the extended intervention group had significantly higher scores than the control group, while the control and modest intervention groups and the modest and extended intervention groups did not differ significantly from each other. A review of effect sizes in the pairwise comparisons indicated a medium effect of the brief intervention when compared to the control on both Develops the Therapeutic Relationship and Encourages Exploration (Cohen's  $d = .77$  and  $.67$ , respectively). There was a large effect of the extended intervention when compared to the control (Cohen's  $d = .92$  and  $.82$ , respectively).

Table 1: Analyses of Variance Comparing Groups on Counseling Skills Development

Variable	Group Mean Scores (SD)			Univariate F (2,56)	Mean difference <sup>a</sup> P<.05	Effect size ( $d$ ) <sup>a</sup>		
	Control	Brief	Extended			C to B <sup>b</sup>	C to E	B to E
Develops Relationship	0.17 (0.95)	0.85 (0.81)	0.98 (0.80)	5.049	C<B,E <sup>b</sup>	0.77 <sup>c</sup>	0.92 <sup>d</sup>	0.16
Encourages Exploration	0.10 (0.99)	0.66 (0.66)	0.86 (0.85)	4.336	C<E <sup>b</sup>	0.67 <sup>c</sup>	0.82 <sup>d</sup>	0.26

<sup>a</sup> Pairwise comparisons  
<sup>b</sup> C=control, B=brief intervention group, E=extended intervention group  
<sup>c</sup> medium effect  
<sup>d</sup> large effect

## Discussion

In view of research and theoretical conjectures supporting the inclusion of mindfulness in counselor education (Anderson, 2005; Christopher et al. 2006; Fulton, 2005; Greason & Cashwell, 2009), this study sought to examine whether a skills training course with regular mindfulness practice led to improvements in counseling skills development, compared to a control group condition receiving the standard skills training model only. An additional purpose of the study was to assess whether an extended amount of mindfulness practice led to higher levels of counseling skills development, compared to a brief amount of mindfulness practice.

The results of this study indicated that the brief and extended mindfulness intervention groups significantly outperformed the control group on the Develops the Therapeutic Relationship subscale. There was no statistically significant difference on this scale between the brief and extended intervention groups. In terms of the Encourages Exploration subscale, participants in the extended intervention group outperformed control group participants. There was no statistically significant difference on this scale between the brief and extended intervention groups or between the brief intervention and control groups. However, on this subscale, the direction of difference between the control group and brief intervention group was in the expected direction (*viz.*, the brief intervention group outperformed the control group), and the effect size of this difference was medium ( $d = .67$ )—an effect which was larger than the difference between the brief and extended intervention groups ( $d = .26$ ). The lack of statistical significance for the difference between control and brief intervention groups is potentially explained by the small sample size in our study. This

small sample size may have resulted in the failure of a medium effect size to reach statistical significance. Consequently, it appears premature to conclude that extended mindfulness practice was preferable for improvements on the Encourages Exploration subscale, compared to the brief mindfulness practice.

Taken together, the findings of the current study suggested that mindfulness practice contributes to improvements in global counseling skills (e.g., building a therapeutic relationship, managing the session, tolerating affect, and engaging in appropriate self-disclosure) and specific counseling skills (e.g., questioning, paraphrasing, requesting examples, and summarizing). The implication, therefore, is that mindfulness may foster the development of a range of counseling skills. The results of this study warrant further investigation into the mechanism(s) of change behind the influence of mindfulness on counseling skills development. Several potential pathways exist by which mindfulness practice could influence counseling skills. For example, previous researchers have documented a positive relationship between mindfulness and empathy (Greason & Cashwell, 2009). In addition, participants in the Schure et al. (2008) study described their increased ability to focus on the therapeutic process as a result of mindfulness practice. Thus, it is possible that enhanced empathic and focusing abilities contributed to the mindfulness groups' differences in counseling skills, relative to the control group. Students who lack sustained focus may experience difficulties in tracking main themes, which could, in turn, impact their skills of paraphrasing and questioning. Likewise, if mindfulness is associated with gains in empathic abilities, it appears likely that students with mindfulness practice would be more capable of facilitating an

accepting, caring therapeutic relationship with clients.

In addition, mindfulness practice may influence counseling skills through providing an opportunity for experiential learning about the nature of counseling. Students enter counselor education with preconceived assumptions about counseling and helping others (Schein, 1999). In our experience, many students assume that helping another individual, or counseling an individual, involves minimizing the other person's distress and leading the person to a solution or positive change. By operating from this mindset, students often forego the painstaking work of delving into another person's difficulties and, instead, resort to behaviors that avert attention from the client's pain (e.g., rescuing behavior; Gladding, 2008) or initiate a premature movement to solutions (McAuliffe & Lovell, 2006). Such solutions are not grounded in a more complex understanding of the client's situation, and the client is less likely to feel understood or gather new insights into the difficulty.

Mindfulness practice, therefore, may encourage students to slow down for a few moments, sit with present sensations and feelings, and recognize the value of exploring the subtleties of experience. Put another way, mindfulness may facilitate a "reperceiving" regarding the nature of counseling (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 378). This hypothesized mechanism of change, involving a shift in students' beliefs about counseling, mirrors changes that participants have reported in similar studies. As one student reported in a study by Christopher and Maris (2010), mindfulness practice facilitated a movement away from the need to "guide" or "inform" clients to the willingness to "witness and support without rushing in to take charge" (p. 122). When discussed in the context of results from the current study, students who do not feel a

rush to solve a client's problem and who feel at ease sitting with a client's difficulty would be expected to display better skills on the Develops the Therapeutic Relationship and Encourages Exploration subscales. Specifically, students would be expected to have improved skills in areas such as displaying care toward a client and tolerating the affect of a session. In addition, students would be expected to engage in exploration of the client's concerns (through skills such as questioning, paraphrasing, and summarizing), rather than offering the client advice for a way to solve those concerns.

It was hypothesized that more mindfulness practice would be associated with greater gains in skill effectiveness, given research showing a link between length of meditation experience and counseling-related capacities (e.g., attention; Lazar et al., 2005; Valentine & Sweet, 1999). The results of the study, however, showed no differences between the brief and extended intervention groups on the counseling skills under review. It may be that the potency of the extended intervention (that is, the duration and quantity of mindfulness practice sessions) did not diverge enough from that of the brief intervention. In our study, the lengthiest mindfulness practice session for the extended group was 20 minutes, compared to 10 minutes for the brief intervention group. The two intervention groups also differed by quantity of mindfulness practice sessions, with the brief group receiving 5 sessions compared to the extended group's 11 sessions. Other studies (e.g., Christopher et al., 2006; Schure et al., 2008) have integrated a far more intensive package of mindfulness training than was completed by the extended group in this study. Christopher et al. (2006) dedicated 75 minutes of each class, which met twice per week over the course of a semester, to the teaching and practicing of various forms of

mindfulness. It may be that differences exist between intensive (75 minutes per class) and brief (10 minutes per class) mindfulness interventions, but not between the extended and brief mindfulness interventions used in this study. Alternatively, it is possible that benefits derived from extended mindfulness practice, compared to brief mindfulness practice, did not register in the 10-minute counseling sessions utilized by this study. For example, if sustained attention is assumed to be a positive outcome of mindfulness practice (Greason & Cashwell, 2009), then researchers may need to evaluate longer counseling sessions (e.g., 40-minute sessions), in order to discern the benefits of mindfulness practice.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The study had a number of strengths, including its unique focus on mindfulness in counselor training. Previous researchers have documented positive relationships between mindfulness and various constructs related to counseling (e.g., Christopher et al., 2006; Greason & Cashwell, 2009; Schure et al., 2008). This study, however, was distinctive in its attention to the relationship between mindfulness practice and counseling skills development. The internal validity of the study was another strength. The study employed a quasi-experimental design, which supported claims for the causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The presence of a control group, for instance, accounted for a number of rival explanations (e.g., Hawthorne effect) of the change in the dependent variable. Moreover, the study's design allowed for temporal precedence of independent variable, relative to the dependent variables, which further supported claims for a causal relationship between variables. Last, the integration of blind observer ratings addressed concerns in

the literature regarding an over-reliance on self-report data (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Greason & Cashwell, 2009).

The study was limited in several ways, as well. The external validity was weakened due to the convenience sampling method. Participants were sampled from one university, which undermined the researchers' ability to make inferences about the wider population of counseling students. The internal validity of the study was also compromised by the use of intact groups, rather than groups created through random assignment. Without random assignment of participants to groups, it is possible that, prior to the intervention, groups differed on their counseling skills or on another variable, which may have differentially affected the outcome. Further, without a pre-test of counseling skills, it is unknown whether participants differed on baseline counseling skills development. Participants' shared early status in the counseling program, relative comparability on demographic characteristics, and the random assignment of the treatment to groups, however, diminished the likelihood of such confounds.

### **Implications for Counselor Education**

The results of this study suggested that mindfulness practice may contribute to counseling skills development, as evidenced by improvements in the brief and extended intervention groups relative to the control group. Counselor educators are, therefore, encouraged to consider the implementation of mindfulness practice in coursework for trainees. Given that mindfulness practice has already been incorporated within a number of therapeutic approaches (Baer, 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Segal et al., 2002), models of mindfulness training are readily available. Mindfulness practice may be particularly relevant to coursework on



clinical skills, counseling theories, and field education experiences, since mindfulness is a current therapeutic approach for a variety of presenting issues.

For example, mindfulness practice could be included in a counseling theories course in class sessions on behavior therapy. Several models of behavior therapy, such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (Linehan, 1993a, 1993b) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (Segal et al., 2002), use mindfulness as part of the treatment model. Students could be exposed to these treatment models and be invited to engage in mindfulness practice during class time. Mindfulness could also be incorporated in courses which discuss the importance of counselor self-care. Authors have discussed the problems of burnout among counselors (Lee, Cho, Kissinger, & Ogle, 2010; Wilkerson, 2006), and mindfulness has been proposed as a self-care practice which could avert counselor burnout (Christopher & Maris, 2010). In addition, researchers have documented that mindfulness practice decreases stress among counseling psychology trainees (Shapiro et al., 2007). Likewise, in a study of counseling professionals, participants reported that mindfulness practice offered a range of personal benefits (Rothaupt & Morgan, 2007).

The results of the current investigation indicated that large amounts of mindfulness practice may not be necessary for students to see gains in counseling skill development. In skills associated with the development of a therapeutic relationship, it appeared that students benefited from even five sessions of brief meditation, followed by group discussion of the experiences. This finding suggests that, even in coursework with high levels of content demands, brief mindfulness practice might be introduced to yield observable changes in skill outcomes.

## **Conclusion and Directions for Future Research**

More research is needed in a variety of areas related to this study. The literature on mindfulness would benefit from a replication of this study, with the addition of assessments for variables that potentially mediate the relationship between mindfulness and counseling skills development. As hypothesized by other theorists (e.g., Greason & Cashwell, 2009), it may be that mindfulness contributes to improvements in attention, which in turn, lead to increased counseling skills development. Alternatively, given research indicating (1) that mindfulness practice contributes to reductions in anxiety (Lee et al., 2007), and (2) that anxiety is inversely related to both empathy (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998) and counseling self-efficacy (Larson et al., 1992), it may be that mindfulness practice helps students reduce their anxiety and, in turn, carry out counseling functions more effectively.

Additionally, although the level of intervention did not result in significant differences between the brief and extended groups on skills development, it is possible that higher levels of intervention will have a significant impact on other outcomes variables (e.g., attention, anxiety, or counseling self-efficacy). Future research should include attention to such variables and assess which variables contribute most to group separation and which are essentially irrelevant.

Finally, future research should explore whether a significant difference in counseling skills development exists between participants of a brief mindfulness intervention (similar to the one provided in this study, e.g., 5-10 minute weekly practice sessions for five weeks) and a highly intensive mindfulness intervention (similar to that provided by Christopher et al., 2006,

or the typical Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program; Kabat-Zinn, 1990, e.g., 75-minute practice sessions over the course of the entire semester). If there is no difference in outcome measures between highly intensive and brief mindfulness interventions, then the case could be made for more economical, brief form of intervention—particularly in view of time constraints in most counselor education programs.

## References

- Anderson, D. T. (2005). Empathy, psychotherapy integration, and meditation: A Buddhist contribution to the common factors movement. *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 45*, 483-502. doi: 10.1177/0022167805280264
- Baer, R. A. (Ed.). (2006). *Mindfulness-based treatment approaches: Clinician's guide to evidence base and applications*. New York: Academic Press.
- Bishop, S. R., Lau, M., Shapiro, S., Carlson, L., Anderson, N. D., Carmody, J., . . . Devins, G. (2004). Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 11*, 230-241. doi: 10.1093/clipsy.bph077
- Brendel, J. M., Kolbert, J. B., & Foster, V. A. (2002). Promoting student cognitive development. *Journal of Adult Development, 9*, 217-227. doi: 10.1023/A:1016056227344
- Christopher, J. C., Christopher, S. E., Dunnagan, T., & Schure, M. (2006). Teaching self-care through mindfulness practices: The application of yoga, meditation, and qigong to counselor training. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 46*, 494-509. doi: 10.1177/0022167806290215
- Christopher, J. C., & Maris, J. A. (2010). Integrating mindfulness as self-care into counseling and psychotherapy training. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 10*, 114-125. doi: 10.1080/14733141003750285
- Crews, J., Smith, M. R., Smaby, M. H., Maddux, C. D., Torres-Rivera, E., Casey, J. A., & Urbani, S. (2005). Self-monitoring and counseling skills: Skills-based versus interpersonal process recall training. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 83*, 78-85.
- Cunningham, N. & Stewart, N. (1983). Effects of discrimination training on counselor trainee response choice. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 23*, 47-61.
- Dent, E., Brown, R., Dowsatt, S., Tattersall, M., & Butow, P. (2005). The Cancode interaction analysis system in the oncological setting: reliability and validity of video and audio tape coding. *Patient Education and Counseling, 56*, 35-44. doi: 10.1016/j.pec.2003.11.010
- Downing, T. K. E., Smaby, M. H., & Maddux, C. D. (2001). A study of the transfer of group counseling skills from training to practice. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 26*, 156-167. doi: 10.1080/01933920108415735
- Eriksen, K., & McAuliffe, G. (2003). A measure of counselor competence. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 43*, 120-133.
- Fulton, P. R. (2005). Mindfulness as clinical training. In C. K. Germer, R. D. Siegel, & P. R. Fulton (Eds.), *Mindfulness and psychotherapy* (pp. 55-72). New York: Guilford Press.
- Fuqua, D. R., Johnson, A. W., Anderson, M. W., & Newman, J. L. (1984). Cognitive methods in counselor training. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 24*, 85-95.
- Gladding, S. T. (2008). *Groups: A counseling specialty (5<sup>th</sup> ed.)*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Greason, P. B., & Cashwell, C. S. (2009). Mindfulness and counseling self-efficacy: The mediating role of attention and empathy. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 49*, 2-19.

- Grepmair, L., Mitterlehner, F., Loew, T., Bachler, E., Rother, W., & Nickel, M. (2007). Promoting mindfulness in psychotherapists in training influences the treatment results of their patients: A randomized, double-blind, controlled study. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics, 76*, 332-338. doi: 10.1159/000107560
- Grepmair, L., Mitterlehner, F., Rother, W., & Nickel, M. (2006). Promotion of mindfulness in psychotherapists in training and treatment results of their patients. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 60*, 649-650. doi: 0.1016/j.jpsychores.2006.04.003
- Ivey, A. E. (1971). *Microcounseling innovations in interviewing training*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living*. New York: Delta.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York: Hyperion.
- Kottler, J. A., & Shepard, D. S. (2011). *Introduction to counseling: Voices from the field* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Larson, L. M., Suzuki, L. A., Gillespie, K. N., Potenza, M. T., Bechtel, M. A., & Toulouse, A. L. (1992). Development and validation of the counseling self-estimate inventory. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 39*, 105-120. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.39.1.105
- Lau, M. A., Bishop, S. R., Segal, Z. V., Buis, T., Anderson, N. D., Carlson, L., . . . Devins, G. (2006). The Toronto mindfulness scale: Development and validation. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 62*, 1445-1467. doi: 10.1002/jclp.20326
- Lazar, S. W., Kerr, C. E., Wasserman, R. H., Gray, J. R., Greve, D. N., Treadway, M. T., . . . Fischl, B. (2005). Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness. *NeuroReport: For Rapid Communication of Neuroscience Research, 16*, 1893-1897. doi: 10.1097/01.wnr.0000186598.66243.19
- Lee, S. H., Ahn, S. C., Lee, Y. J., Choi, T. K., Yook, K. H., & Suh, S. Y. (2007). Effectiveness of a meditation-based stress management program as an adjunct to pharmacotherapy in patients with anxiety disorder. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 62*, 189-195. doi: 10.1016/j.jpsychores.2006.09.009
- Lee, S. M., Cho, S. H., Kissinger, D., & Ogle, N. T. (2010). A typology of burnout in professional counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 88*, 131-138.
- Linehan, M. M. (1993a). *Cognitive-behavioral treatment of borderline personality disorder*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Linehan, M. M. (1993b). *Skills training manual for treating borderline personality disorder*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Little, C., Packman, J., Smaby, M. H., & Maddux, C. D. (2005). The skilled counselor training model: Skills acquisition, self-assessment, and cognitive complexity. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 44*, 189-200.
- McAuliffe, G., & Lovell, C. (2006). The influence of counselor epistemology on the helping interview: A qualitative study. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 84*, 308-316.
- Morgan, W. D., & Morgan, S. T. (2005). Cultivating attention and empathy. In C. Germer, R. D. Siegel, & P. R. Fulton (Eds.), *Mindfulness and psychotherapy* (pp. 73-90). New York: Guilford Press.
- Morran, D. K., Kurpius, D. J., Brack, C. J., & Brack, G. (1995). A cognitive-skills model for counselor training and supervision. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 73*, 384-389.

- Rothaupt, J. W., & Morgan, M. M. (2007). Counselors' and counselor educators' practice of mindfulness: A qualitative inquiry. *Counseling and Values, 52*(1), 40-54.
- Schaeffle, S., Smaby, M. H., Maddux, C. D., & Cates, J. (2005). Counseling skills attainment, retention, and transfer as measured by the skilled counseling scale. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 44*, 280-292.
- Schein, E. H. (1999). *Process consultation revisited: Building the helping relationship*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Schure, M. B., Christopher, J., & Christopher, S. (2008). Mind-body medicine and the art of self-care: Teaching mindfulness to counseling students through yoga, meditation, and qigong. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 86*, 47-56.
- Segal, Z. V., Williams, J. M. G., & Teasdale, J. D. (2002). *Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression: A new approach to preventing relapse*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Shapiro, S. L., Brown, K. W., & Biegel, G. M. (2007). Teaching self-care to caregivers: Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on the mental health of therapists in training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 1*, 105-115. doi: 10.1037/1931-3918.1.2.105
- Shapiro, S. L., Carlson, L. E., Astin, J. A., & Freedman, B. (2006). Mechanisms of mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 62*, 373-386. doi: 10.1002/jclp.20237
- Shapiro, S. L., Schwartz, G. E., & Bonner, G. (1998). Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on medical and premedical students. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 21*, 581-599. doi: 10.1023/A:1018700829825
- Smaby, M. H., Maddux, C. D., Torres-Rivera, E., & Zimmick, R. (1999). A study of the effects of a skills-based versus a conventional group counseling training program. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 24*, 152-163. doi: 10.1080/01933929908411427
- Urbani, S., Smith, M. R., Maddux, C. D., Smaby, M. H., Torres-Rivera, E., & Crews, J. (2002). Skills-based training and counseling self-efficacy. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 42*, 92-106.
- Valentine, E. R., & Sweet, P. L. G. (1999). Meditation and attention: A comparison of the effects of concentrative and mindfulness meditation on sustained attention. *Mental Health, Religion, & Culture, 2*, 59-70. doi: 10.1080/13674679908406332
- Wilkerson, K. (2006). An examination of burnout among school counselors guided by stress-strain-coping theory. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 87*, 428-437.
- Young, M. (2009). *Learning the art of helping* (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

### Author Note

Trevor J. Buser, Assistant Professor, Rider University, Department of Grad Education, Leadership, & Counseling, Memorial Hall 202-M, 2083 Lawrenceville Rd., Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

Juleen K. Buser, Assistant Professor, Rider University, Department of Grad Education, Leadership, & Counseling, Memorial Hall 202, 2083 Lawrenceville Rd., Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

Christina Hamme Peterson, Assistant Professor, Rider University, Department of Grad Education, Leadership, & Counseling, Memorial Hall 202, 2083 Lawrenceville Rd., Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

Don G. Seraydarian, Visiting Professor, Assistant Professor, Rider University, Department of Grad Education, Leadership, & Counseling, Memorial Hall 202, 2083 Lawrenceville Rd., Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

---

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Trevor J. Buser at [tbuser@rider.edu](mailto:tbuser@rider.edu)

---

# Trainee Shame-Proneness and the Supervisory Process

---

Cynthia Bilodeau, Reginald Savard, & Conrad Lecomte

This study examined the influence of trainee shame-proneness on the supervisory process. A longitudinal design was employed to measure alliance ratings and perceived session impact of 43 counselor trainees undergoing a 5-session supervision process. Analysis of covariance revealed a significant relationship between supervisee shame-proneness and supervisory working alliance  $F(4, 126) = 3.38, p = .0116$ . Independent samples *t*-tests revealed high shame-prone supervisees rated significantly lower impact  $t(41) = 2.53, p = .02, d = 1.1$ . Implications for the practice of supervision are discussed.

*Keywords:* Shame, Supervision, Supervisory Alliance, Supervisory Process, Counselor Development

---

Shame is as an internal, panic-like reaction encompassing feelings of helplessness, anxiety and the wish to hide or disappear (Graff, 2008; Morrison, 1994). It is thought to stem from the humiliation of personal failure or threat of failure and the fear of rejection (Hahn, 2001; Talbot, 1995; Zupancic & Kreidler, 1999). Research has linked shame-proneness to problematic relationships (Covert, Tangney, Maddux, & Heleno, 2003) and to fear of intimacy (Lutwak, Panish, & Ferrari, 2003) in community samples, suggesting shame-prone individuals may struggle in the development and maintenance of meaningful relationships. Furthermore, studies using experimental paradigms have linked state-induced shame to passive avoidance in social relationships (Chao, Cheng, & Chiou, 2011).

In the process of counseling supervision, shame inevitably arises as counseling trainees are required to expose their personal and professional lacunas to their supervisors (Buechler, 2008; Hahn, 2001). This is thought to be an important part of the learning process and relies on the

development of a strong relationship between supervisor and supervisee (Ladany, Ellis & Friedlander, 1999). Because shame-prone individuals are known to experience difficulties in interpersonal relationships, they are thought to experience supervision as problematic and to struggle within the supervisory hour (Graff, 2008). The mere threat of experiencing shame is thought to trigger a host of avoidant and resistant behaviors interfering in the process of supervision for trainees who are shame-prone (Farber, 2003; Hahn, 2001; Yourman, 2003). There is, however, little empirical evidence in support of these theoretical assumptions. Only three empirical studies discussing the impacts of shame and shame-proneness on the process of supervision could be found. These studies linked psychotherapy trainee shame-proneness to overall less satisfactory experiences of supervision (Doherty, 2005) and psychotherapy trainee non-disclosure to shame-related avoidance (Ladany, Hill, Corbett, & Nutt, 1996; Yourman & Farber, 1996). Although these studies have provided some preliminary evidence for the

negative effects of shame and trainee shame-proneness in supervision, methodological limitations threaten the validity of these findings. Indeed, research in supervision has been criticized for its sparseness, lack of psychometric rigor, and for its excessive reliance on cross-sectional and retrospective studies (Ellis, D'Iuso & Ladany, 2008; Ellis & Ladany, 1997; Watkins, 2011). Unfortunately, the research investigating shame in supervision is of no exception. Only the study by Doherty (2005) actually measured trainee shame-proneness using a psychometric instrument with evidence of validity and reliability. The two other studies were based on self-report descriptions and researcher interpretations. Furthermore, all of these studies have relied on retrospective data. The temporal nature of the supervisory alliance has yet to be measured.

To summarize, most of the literature concerning trainee shame-proneness and its effects in supervision is theoretical and remains largely unsupported empirically. It remains unclear whether shame-prone trainees actually perceive their supervisory experiences differently than their counterparts and whether the supervision process is affected by this factor. Examining the possible influence of trainee shame-proneness on the supervision relationship could hold valuable implications for the practice of supervision, in providing empirical support for the theoretical and clinical literature and suggesting that trainee shame-proneness could influence the counseling supervision process. Furthermore, exploring supervisee shame-proneness would expand the existing knowledge of counselor education and supervision by providing insight into trainee-experienced shame, a critical experiential variable to consider in the effort to enhance the quality of training and supervision.

### **Shame-proneness and the Supervisory Working Alliance**

The supervisory working alliance is the process variable of supervision that refers to the collaboration between supervisor and supervisee based on mutual agreement concerning the goals and tasks of supervision, as well as a strong emotional bond (Bordin, 1994). The supervisory working alliance has been identified as a key element to effective supervision (Ladany, Ellis & Friedlander, 1999). Moreover, the quality of the supervisory working alliance is thought to be reflective of the strength of the overall supervisory relationship (Sterner, 2009). According to Patton and Kivlighan (1997), the working alliance is most directly affected by the dispositional characteristics of the participants. Exploring trainee shame-proneness as a variable that influences the supervisory alliance is important for understanding the mediating factors in the process of supervision affecting the development of optimal supervisory practice and training.

### **Shame-proneness and Session Impact**

Session impact refers to a participant's internal reactions to sessions. More specifically, session impact refers to a session's immediate effects on participants and their post-session affective state (Stiles, 1980). Stiles and Snow (1984) suggest session impact ratings mediate between process and outcome. In therapeutic settings, research has linked session impact to client improvement (Stiles, Shapiro, & Firth-Cozens, 1988, 1990) and has found session impact ratings to significantly predict termination (Mallinckrodt, 1993). Only one study has been conducted in a supervisory setting (Martin, Goodyear, & Newton, 1987). In that study, session impact was



found to vary more for supervisees than for supervisors. Investigating the influence of trainee shame-proneness on their internal reactions to sessions over the course of a supervisory process may provide important information on the perceived experience and effectiveness of supervision.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of trainee shame-proneness on the supervisory process. In a previous study, we looked at whether alliance ratings would differ based on level of shame-proneness and found no significant differences between the high and low shame-prone groups (Bilodeau, Savard & Lecomte, 2010). However based on the literature, which suggests that shame-proneness would significantly influence the supervisory process, we further investigated the role of trainee shame-proneness as a continuous variable influencing the supervisory alliance. We also chose to include another measure of process: session impact. Two hypotheses were made:

- There is a significant relationship between trainee shame-proneness and the perceived strength of their supervisory working alliance;
- Trainees scoring high on shame-proneness perceive significantly less positive supervisory session impact than lower-scoring supervisees.

### **Method**

#### **Design and Participants**

The sample for this study was comprised of 43 first year master's level counseling students enrolled in a career counseling course. The trainees attended

approximately fifteen hours of lecture. The lecture content included an overview of career counseling models, the counseling process, the counseling alliance, theories of transition and change, reactions to loss of employment and the process of disintegration. As part of the course requirements, trainees met with one client currently experiencing difficulty integrating the employment market or making a career decision in a five-to-ten session counseling process. Simultaneously, trainees also engaged in an individual five-session supervisory process with a supervisor throughout their counseling sessions. The attrition rate for our sample from the first to the fifth supervision session was 37%. The modalities used in supervision were videotapes of each of their trainees' sessions with their client and trainee process notes. Trainees were asked to complete questionnaires immediately following each of the supervisory sessions. Participating trainees consisted of 36 females and 7 males. The average age was 30.1 years with a standard deviation of 8.6. They averaged 6.8 years of post-secondary education with a standard deviation of 1.5.

### **Measures**

#### **Impact**

A French version of The Session Evaluation Questionnaire Form 5 (SEQ) was used as a measure of session impact. The SEQ developed by Stiles (1980) was initially aimed at measuring dimensions of immediate impacts of a counseling session and later was used to measure immediate impacts of a supervision session (Burke, Goodyear, & Guzzard, 1998; Kivlighan, Angelone & Swafford, 1991; Lichtenberg & Goodyear, 2000; Martin et al., 1987). The SEQ is composed of 21 bipolar adjectives normally rated on a 7-point scale allowing

participants to rate how they evaluate their session and how they feel concerning the supervision session. The items of the SEQ are divided into 2 sections: Session evaluation and post-session mood. The respondents are instructed to circle the appropriate number to show how they feel about the session. Each section yields two dimensions: two independent evaluative dimensions of participants' perceptions of their sessions, called Depth and Smoothness, and two dimensions of their post-session mood, called Positivity and Arousal. Depth refers to a session being perceived as powerful, valuable and deep as opposed to weak, ordinary and shallow. Smoothness refers to a session's comfort, relaxation, and pleasantness. Positivity refers to feelings of confidence and clarity as well as happiness and the absence of fear or anger, whereas Arousal refers to feeling active and excited as opposed to quiet and calm (Stiles & Snow, 1984). Friedlander, Bernardi and Lee (2010) reported a total SEQ alpha of .85 and Stiles, Reynolds, Hardy, Rees, Barkham and Shapiro (1994) reported alpha coefficients of .90 for Depth, .92 for Smoothness, .90 for Positivity and .80 for Arousal. Alpha coefficients in our study were .93 for total SEQ, .89 for Depth, .89 for Smoothness, .88 for Positivity, and .71 for Arousal. Stiles et al. (1994) also provided evidence for convergent validity with the Session Impact Scale yielding significant correlations ranging between .06 and .72. The alpha coefficient for the total SEQ in our study was .93.

### **Alliance**

A French version of the Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory-Trainee version (SWAI-T) was used as a measure of supervisory working alliance. The SWAI-T was developed by Efstation, Patton, and Kardash (1990) and was designed to

measure the trainee-supervisor relationship in counselor supervision. The measure was based conceptually on the works of Greenson (1967), Pepinsky and Patton (1971), and Bordin (1983). The trainee scale contains 19 items in two subscales: Rapport and Client Focus. Rapport refers to the trainee's perception of support from the supervisor. Client Focus refers to the trainee's perception of the emphasis the supervisor placed on promoting understanding of the client. The items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 7 (almost always). SWAI scale scores have been reported by Efstation et al. (1990) to have acceptable estimates of reliability. Reliability coefficients of internal consistency ranged from .77 to .90 for the trainee scales. Alpha coefficients were .86 for the total SWAI-T. Subscales alphas were reported as .90 for Rapport and .77 for Client Focus. Convergent Validity was established with the Supervisory Styles Inventory (SSI). Modest yet significant correlations ranged between .23 and .26. Reliability coefficient for the SWAI-T in our study was .87. In our study, alpha coefficients were .86 for the total measure, .88 for Rapport and .81 for Client Focus.

### **Shame-proneness**

A French version of The Internalized Shame Scale (ISS) was used as a measure of shame-proneness. Designed by Cook (1989) this scale is informed by the theoretical conceptions of authors such as Kaufman (1989), Lewis (1971) and Tomkins (1987). The most recent version of the scale published in 2001 and the one used in our study consists of 24 items describing feelings or experiences with 6 items from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale as fillers. Participants responded on a 5-point scale indicating how often they feel this way. A Reliability coefficient of internal

consistency of .95 was reported by Cook (2001). The alpha coefficient in our study was .91.

## **Procedures**

The researchers met with the trainee participants during the second class lecture prior to the start of supervision and trainees were invited to participate in the research on a volunteer basis. Refusal to participate did not bear any impact on their role as students in the class. All participants were informed of their right to retract themselves from the study at any time and confidentiality was assured for all participants. Consent forms were signed and sealed envelopes identified by numerical code containing the questionnaires were handed out. Trainees were instructed to complete the ISS and demographic questionnaire prior to starting their supervision sessions. The ISS was also completed after the final supervision session. All trainees were asked to complete the SEQ and the SWAI-T immediately following each of their five supervision sessions. All completed forms were returned in sealed envelopes to the researcher and all participants were informed that their responses were confidential and that their supervisor would not see the results.

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Analysis**

Prior to the start of analysis, we attempted to verify the stability of reported shame-proneness scores. A paired samples *t*-test revealed no significant differences in shame-proneness reported by trainees prior to the start of supervision sessions and after the last supervision session  $t(26) = .92, p = .36$ . According to Cook (2001); "Scores of 50 or higher are indicative of painful, possibly problematic levels of internalized

shame" (p.12). Six of the 43 supervisee participants had scores of 50 or higher on the first administration of the ISS and were thus classified in the "high shame-proneness group". The other 37 supervisees were classified in the "moderate shame-proneness group".

### **Major Analysis (Hypothesis testing)**

To test our first hypothesis, which predicted a significant relationship between trainee shame-proneness and reported strength of the supervisory working alliance across the five supervision sessions, we conducted repeated measures analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with shame-proneness as a covariate in the model and time as a within subjects effects. Data from each subject was used even if it was only partial due to attrition along the way. There were 118 missing observations of the 295 observation included in the analysis resulting in a missing data rate of 40%. Results are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

The results indicated that the relationship between trainee shame-proneness and their perceived alliance varied significantly over time  $F(4, 126) = 3.38, p = .0116$ . Upon further investigation, however, we found no significant variations between each individual consecutive each session. Therefore, our conclusions must be cautionary. We can only express a tendency in the beginning (Session 1) for the relationship to be positive and in the end (Session 5) for the relationship to be negative. That is, after the first supervision session there was a tendency that the higher the reported trainee shame-proneness, the higher their reported strength of supervisory working alliance. In the end, this tendency had changed and the higher the reported trainee shame-proneness, the lower their reported strength of supervisory working alliance.

Results concerning the SWAI-T subscales indicated no significant relationship between the subscale client focus and trainee shame-proneness over the course of the five supervisions  $F(4, 126) = 2.08, p = .09$ . However, we did find that the relationship between the subscale rapport and trainee shame-proneness varied significantly over the course of the five supervision sessions  $F(4, 126) = 3.72, p = .007$ . Upon further investigations we found no significant variations between each individual consecutive session. Therefore, our conclusions must again be cautionary. We can only express a tendency in the beginning (Session 1) for the relationship to be positive and in the end (Session 5) for the relationship to be negative. That is, following the first supervision session, there was a tendency that the higher the reported trainee shame-proneness, the higher the reported rapport. However, by the end of the fifth supervision session, this tendency had changed and the higher the reported trainee shame-proneness, the lower the reported rapport.

*Table 1*  
*Summary of analysis of covariance between supervisee reported supervisory working alliance and supervisee shame-proneness over the course of the 5-session supervisory process*

Alliance	Df	F	p
SWAI-T total	126	3.38	.011*
SWAI-T Rapport	126	3.72	.007*
SWAI-T Client focus	126	2.08	.09

*Note.* \*Indicates significant result

Our first hypothesis therefore was confirmed. We found a significant relationship between trainee shame-proneness and their perceived strength of the supervisory working alliance. We also found that this relationship varied over time. However, the variations from session to session were not significant and the relationship did not always vary in the same direction.

To test our second hypothesis, which predicted high shame-prone trainees would perceive significantly less supervisory impact than more moderately shame-prone trainees, independent sample *t*-tests were conducted on the mean scores of all five supervision sessions for each participant. Results are summarized in Table 3. The independent sample *t*-tests revealed significant differences between perceived session impact of high and moderately shame-prone trainees  $t(41) = 2.53, p = .02, d = 1.1$ . More specifically, high shame-prone trainees perceived significantly less overall impact than moderate shame-prone trainees. In the session-evaluation section, high shame-prone trainees reported significantly lower scores  $t(41) = 3.02, p = .004, d = 1.32$  on the smoothness yet there was no significant difference on the depth scale  $t(41) = -0.14, p = .89, d = .06$ . Concerning post-session mood, both the sub-scale positivity and the sub-scale arousal revealed significantly lower scores for high shame-prone trainees than for moderately shame-prone trainees  $t(41) = 2.03, p = .05, d = .89$  and  $t(41) = 2.92, p = .006, d = 1.28$  respectively.

Our second hypothesis therefore was confirmed. Significant differences between high and moderate shame-prone supervisees and perceived impact were found.

**Table 2**  
*Covariance parameter estimates for the total supervisory working alliance strength and rapport sub-scale over the course of the 5-session supervisory process*

Time	n	Estimate	df	t	SE	p
Total alliance strength						
1	43	.27	126	1.58	.17	.12
2	40	.06	126	.33	.17	.74
3	37	.08	126	.50	.17	.62
4	31	-.23	126	-1.28	.18	.20
5	27	-.15	126	-.82	.19	.42
Rapport sub-scale						
1	43	.19	126	1.58	1.67	.10
2	40	.05	126	.41	.11	.68
3	37	.07	126	.57	.12	.57
4	31	-.17	126	-1.38	.12	.17
5	27	-.09	126	-.68	.12	.50

**Table 3**  
*T-tests comparing perceived impact of high and moderate shame-prone supervisees*

Session impact	Moderate shame-prone		High shame-prone		T	p	Cohen's d
	n	M(SD)	n	M(SD)			
Total	37	7.71(.89)	6	6.77(.48)	2.53	.02*	1.1
Depth	37	8.14(.85)	6	8.19(.69)	-0.14	.89	.06
Smoothness	37	7.56(1.20)	6	6.03(.61)	3.02	.004*	1.32
Positivity	37	7.93(1.15)	6	6.93(.80)	2.03	.05*	.89
Arousal	37	7.22(1.02)	6	5.92(1.03)	2.92	.006*	1.28

*Note.* \* indicates significant results

### Discussion

Results from this repeated measures study over five supervision sessions suggests that trainee shame-proneness does influence the supervisory process. A significant relationship was found between trainee reported strength of supervisory working alliance and trainee shame-proneness. It is worthwhile to note however, that only the rapport subscale fluctuated, so much so as to influence the total alliance score. Rapport refers to the trainee's perception of support from the supervisor.

These results provide an explanatory factor for previous research by Yourman and Farber (1996) and Ladany et al. (1996), who reported shame was often cited as reasons trainees kept secrets from their supervisors. That is, the support trainees perceive from their supervisors may be of particular importance in diminishing or increasing the negative effects of shame and promoting a trusting environment conducive to learning.

Also important to note is the fact that this relationship was not linear. In the beginning there was a positive relationship between rapport and shame-proneness. This

relationship changed gradually over time and was inverted by the end of the supervisory process. We observed in the first session that the higher the trainee's proneness to experiencing shame was, the higher they rated the strength of their supervisory working alliance. However, by the last session we found that the higher the trainee's shame-proneness was, the lower they reported the strength of their supervisory working alliance. Although these findings only indicated a trend, they are relevant to clinical practice in light of discussions by Hahn (2001) and Buechler (2008) who suggest that shame is an inevitable consequence of the demands of exposure in supervision. There is an element of self-scrutiny that trainees enter into as they are being evaluated by persons whose opinion deeply matter to them. According to Buechler, this self-scrutiny naturally leads to shame. As a defense mechanism, trainees may idealize their supervisors to protect themselves from their shame experiences (Hahn, 2001). Hahn suggests that trainee's inhibited sense of emotional awareness early on in the supervisory relationship can cause supervisees to view their supervisors as possessing unrealistic insights into relationships but that this usually attenuates over time.

The trainees in our study were first-year counseling students with little counseling and supervision experience. Shame related to exposure and pressure to be seen in a positive light in the wake of the first session without yet knowing their supervisors could explain the early positive alliance ratings from the higher shame-prone supervisees. The trainee's higher ratings of the supervisory alliance in the first sessions may have been reflective of their attempt to align themselves positively with their "idealized" supervisors to diminish the intensity of their shame experience. As the supervision sessions progressed, however,

higher shame-prone trainees and their supervisors may have simply not been able to develop the supervisory alliance optimally enough to attenuate the experienced shame, hence explaining the inverse relationship observed at the end of the supervisory process.

Our findings that trainee shame-proneness is inversely related to their alliance rapport strength by the final and fifth supervision session is aligned with previous shame research (Covert, Tangney, Maddux, & Heleno, 2003; Lutwak, Panish, & Ferrari, 2003) and indicate that higher levels of shame-proneness could hinder the development of strong supervisory working alliances. As well, the learning and change process of the trainee could be hindered through defense maneuvers that Hahn (2001) describes as passive withdrawal. That is, particularly high shame-prone supervisees may avoid emotionally engaging with their supervisors to avoid exposure to the humiliation associated with shame. Supervisor and trainee dyads unable to address the shame or establish a secure base may have more difficulty feeling safe in the supervisory setting as the supervision progresses. There is then a risk for the supervision to develop into a dysfunctional process where an atmosphere conducive to emotional awareness and self-reflection is thwarted (Hahn, 2001). Greater attention and emphasis on establishing a safe and trusting learning environment may be necessary for the positive evolution of all supervisory processes.

The results concerning session impact also shed important light on the influence of shame-proneness in supervision. Although overall perceived session impact was reported as significantly lower for higher shame-prone trainees, results from each subscale varied. High shame-prone trainees reported significantly

lower scores on all of the subscales except Depth. Depth refers to a session being perceived as powerful, valuable, and deep. Although no studies in supervision could be found to explain these findings, studies from the counseling research provide a basis for interpreting these results. Previous research by Stiles et al. (1988, 1990) found that therapist-rated depth was related to client improvement. Also in the same line, Tryon (1990) linked client and counselor perceptions of depth in a first session to initial engagement and the client's return for a subsequent session. This seems to suggest that although the emotional experience of the supervisory process is experienced as more difficult for high shame-prone supervisees, they are not actually less engaged in the process and do not perceive themselves as having learned or improved any less than their counterparts. Particularly high shame-prone supervisees may view themselves as equally engaged and as having learned as much as their peers in an attempt to protect themselves from the shameful experience of admitting otherwise, even to themselves (Hahn, 2001).

These results should be interpreted in light of their limitations. Our study was conducted in the context of only one university counseling course and trainees met with clients experiencing similar career-related difficulties. Essentially, this is a first step to empirically looking at shame-proneness in the process of supervision and replication of these findings with larger and more diverse samples is necessary to establishing sound empirical support for the theoretical literature. The quasi-experimental design of our study did not allow for an equivalent randomly assigned non-experimental group. Without random assignment, it is difficult to rule out threats to internal validity. Furthermore, 13 of the

43 trainees shared the same supervisor limiting the generalizability of the results. Other limitations of the study include the moderate attrition rate, the presence of unknown mediating factors such as feedback from peers or professors, and threats to internal validity inherent in post-facto and self-report studies.

Despite these limitations, this study has important implications for counselor training and for the practice of supervision. As an important step towards providing empirical support for the theoretical literature, this study suggests shame is an important factor to consider in the training and supervision of counselors. Our results suggest trainee shame-proneness alters how supervision is perceived and experienced and highlights the importance of a strong supervisory alliance in mediating the negative effects of trainee shame-proneness in supervision. Supervisors may benefit from focusing on developing the emotional bond aspect of the supervisory alliance. In doing so, supervisors facilitate a safe and trusting environment for trainees to learn about and address shame-related issues. In the same sense, they also act as models for their trainees in teaching them how to manage similar shame issues that may arise in the counseling relationship. This contributes to both the personal and professional development of counselor trainees leading to increased quality of services provided to their own clients. Future research in the field of shame and supervision would benefit from replicating these findings with larger and more diverse samples. It would also be valuable to measure aspects of the supervisory process and shame without relying on self-report instruments, perhaps through more objective measures such as observation.

## References

- Bilodeau, C., Savard, R., & Lecomte, C. (2010). Examining supervisor and supervisee agreement on alliance: Is shame a factor? *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 44(3), 272-282. Retrieved from <http://cjc-cc.ualgary.ca/cjc/index.php/rcc/article/view/943/784>
- Bordin, E. S. (1983). Supervision in counseling: II. Contemporary models of supervision: A working alliance based model of supervision. *Counseling Psychologist*, 11, 35- 42. doi: 10.1177/0011000083111007
- Bordin, E. S. (1994). Theory and research on the therapeutic working alliance: New directions. In A. O. Hovarth & L. S. Greenberg (Eds.), *The working alliance: Theory, research, and practice* (pp.13-37). Oxford, England: John Wiley & Sons.
- Buechler, S. (2008). Shaming psychoanalytic candidates. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 28, 361-372. doi: 10.1080/07351690801962430
- Burke, W. R., Goodyear, R. K., & Guzzard, C. R. (1998). Weakenings and repairs in supervisory alliances. A multiple case study. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 52, 450-462. Retrieved from <http://www.ajp.org>.
- Chao, Y. H., Cheng, Y. Y., & Chiou, W. B. (2011). The psychological consequence of experiencing shame: Self-sufficiency and mood-repair. *Motivation and Emotion*, 35, 202-210. doi: 10.1007/s11031-011-9208-y
- Cook, D. R. (1989). *Internalized Shame Scale (ISS)*. University of Wisconsin, Stout.
- Cook, D. R. (2001). *Internalized Shame Scale: Technical manual*. Toronto, Ontario: Mutli-Health Systems inc.
- Covert, M. V., Tangney, J. P., Maddux, J. E., & Heleno, N. M. (2003). Shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, and interpersonal problem solving: A social cognitive analysis. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 22, 1-12. doi: 0.1521/jsep.22.1.1.22765
- Doherty, E. J. (2005). The role of internalized shame in clinical supervision (Doctoral dissertation, Fielding Graduate University, 2005). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 67, 538.
- Efstation, J. F., Patton, M. J., & Kardash, C. M. (1990). Measuring the working alliance in counselor supervision. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 37, 322-329. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.37.3.322
- Ellis, M. V., D'Iuso, N., & Ladany, N. (2008). State of the art in the assessment, measurement, and evaluation of clinical supervision. In A.K., Hess, & T. H. Hess (Eds.), *Psychotherapy supervision: Theory, research, and practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp 473-499). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Ellis, M. V., & Ladany, N. (1997). Inferences concerning supervisees and clients in clinical supervision : An integrative review. In C. E. Watkins, Jr. (Ed.), *Handbook of psychotherapy supervision* (pp. 447-507). New York: Wiley.
- Farber, B. A. (2003). Self-Disclosure in psychotherapy practice and supervision: An introduction. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 59, 525-528. doi: 10.1002/jclp.10156
- Friedlander. M. L., Bernardi, S., & Lee, H. H. (2010). Better versus worse family therapy sessions as reflected in clients' alliance-related behaviour. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 57(2), 198-204. doi: 10.1037/a0019088



- Graff, G. (2008). Shame in supervision. *Issues In Psychoanalytic Psychology, 30*, 79-94. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psych&AN=2008-14517-006&lang=fr&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Greenson, R. R. (1967). *The technique and practice of psychoanalysis*. New York: International Universities Press, Inc.
- Hahn, W. K. (2001). The experience of shame in psychotherapy supervision. *Psychotherapy, 38*, 272-282. doi: 10.1037/0033-3204.38.3.272
- Kaufman, G. (1989). *The psychology of shame*. New York : Springer Publishing Company.
- Kivlighan, D. M., Angelone, E. O., & Swafford, K. G. (1991). Live supervision in individual psychotherapy: Effects of therapists' use and clients' evaluation of session effect and working alliance. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 22*, 489-495. doi: 10.1037/0735-7028.22.6.489
- Ladany, N., Ellis, M. V., & Friedlander, M. L. (1999). The supervisory working alliance, trainee self-efficacy, and satisfaction. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 77*(4), 447-455. Retrieved from <http://www.counseling.org>
- Ladany, N., Hill, C. E., & Corbett, M. M., & Nutt, E. A. (1996). Nature, extent, and importance of what psychotherapy trainees do not disclose to their supervisors. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 43*, 10-24. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.43.1.10
- Lewis, H. B. (1971). *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*. New York : International Universities Press.
- Lichtenberg, J. W., & Goodyear, R. K. (2000). The structure of supervisor-supervisee interactions. *The Clinical Supervisor, 19*, 1- 24. doi: 10.1300/J001v19n02
- Lutwak, N., Panish, J., & Ferrari, J. (2003). Shame and guilt: Characterological vs behavioral self-blame and their relationship to fear of intimacy. *Personality and Individual Differences, 35*(4), 909-916. doi: 10.1016/S0191-8869(02)00307-0
- Mallinckrodt, B. (1993). Session impact, working alliance, and treatment outcome in brief counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 40*, 25-32. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.38.2.133
- Martin, J. S., & Goodyear, R. K., & Newton, F. B. (1987). Clinical supervision: an intensive case study. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 18*, 225-235. doi: 10.1037/0735-7028.18.3.225
- Morrison, A. P. (1994). The breadth and boundaries of a self-psychological immersion in shame: A one-and-a-half person perspective. *Psychoanalytic dialogues, 4*(1), 19-35. Retrieved from <http://www.tandf.co.uk>
- Patton, M. J., & Kivlighan, D. M. (1997). Relevance of the supervisory alliance to the counseling alliance and to treatment adherence in counselor training. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 44*, 108-115. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.44.1.108
- Pepinsky, H. B., & Patton, M. J. (1971). *The psychological experiment: A practical accomplishment*. New York: Pergamon.
- Sterner, W. R. (2009). Influence of the supervisory working alliance on supervisee work satisfaction and work-related stress. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 31*, 249-263. Retrieved from <http://amhca.metapress.com>
- Stiles, W. B. (1980). Measurement of the impact of psychotherapy sessions. *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology, 48*, 176-185. doi: 10.1037/0022-006X.48.2.176
- Stiles, W. B., Reynolds, S., Hardy, G. E., Rees, A., Barkham, M., & Shapiro, D. A. (1994). Evaluation and description of psychotherapy sessions by clients using the Session

- Evaluation Questionnaire and the Session Impacts Scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 41, 175-185. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.41.2.175
- Stiles, W. B., Shapiro, D. A., & Firth-Cozens, J. A. (1988). Do sessions of different treatments have different impacts? *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 35, 391-396. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.35.4.391
- Stiles, W. B., Shapiro, D. A., & Firth-Cozens, J. A. (1990). Correlations of session evaluations with treatment outcome. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 29, 13-21. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.usherbrooke.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyh&AN=1990-17870-001&lang=fr&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Stiles, W. B., & Snow, J. S. (1984). Counseling session impact as viewed by novice counselors and their clients. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 31, 3-12. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.31.1.3
- Talbot, N. L. (1995). Unearthing shame in the supervisory experience. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 49(3), 338-349. Retrieved from <http://www.ajp.org>.
- Tomkins, S. S. (1987). Shame. In Nathanson, D. L. (Ed.), *The many faces of shame* (pp. 133-161). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Tryon, G. S. (1990). Session depth and smoothness in relations to the concept of engagement in counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 37, 248-253. doi: 10.1037/a0014338
- Yourman, D. B., & Farber, B. A. (1996). Nondisclosure and distortion in psychotherapy supervision. *Psychotherapy*, 33, 567-575. doi: 10.1037/0033-3204.33.4.567
- Yourman, D. B. (2003). Trainee disclosure in psychotherapy supervision: The impact of shame. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 59(5), 601-609. doi: 10.1037/0033-3204.33.4.567
- Watkins, C. E. (2011). Toward a tripartite vision of supervision for psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapies: Alliance, transference-countertransference configuration, and real relationships. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 98(4), 557-588.
- Zupancic, M. K., & Kreidler, M. C. (1999). Shame and the fear of feeling. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 34(3), 29-34. Retrieved from <http://www.wiley.com>

### Author Note

Cynthia Bilodeau, Ph.D., department of Professional Guidance at the Université de Sherbrooke.

Reginald Savard, Ph.D., is a Professor in the department of Professional Guidance at Université de Sherbrooke.

Conrad Lecomte, Ph.D., is an Honorary Professor in the department of Psychology at Université de Montréal as well as an Associate Professor in the department of Psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal.

---

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Cynthia Bilodeau at  
Cynthia.Bilodeau@usherbrooke.ca

---

# Using Movies to Teach Identity Development to Graduate Counseling Students

---

Gloria Pierce & Claire J. Wooloff

---

This article provides an overview of identity development models and their importance in conceptualizing clients' presenting problems. It offers instructional methods for teaching identity development to students in a graduate counseling program and addresses relevance and application to actual practice.

*Keywords: Identity Development Models, Graduate Education, Counselor Education, Diversity, Counseling, Racial, Ethnic, Feminist, Gay, Lesbian*

---

According to Salazar and Abrams (2005), graduate students in counseling are in information overload much of the time, because many of them enter programs lacking awareness about issues such as race, ethnicity, gender, social class and sexual orientation. Therefore, it is a daunting process for students to be able to assimilate and apply identity development models. For students to gain familiarity and confidence in applying the models, graduate curricula should emphasize the relevance of identity development to the helping relationship. This may occur in many of the master's-level classes that discuss developmental issues (e.g. multicultural counseling and human development across the lifespan). Alongside traditional teaching methods of readings and didactic lecture, difficult-to-teach concepts like identity development can be brought alive through viewing feature films or film clips (Higgins & Dermer, 2001).

The use of movies in counselor education has been documented in the literature. Higgins and Dermer (2001) discussed the integration of popular movies

as an innovative technique for teaching counselors-in-training the skills needed to work with couples and families. Koch and Dollarhide (2000) applied the viewing of the movie *Good Will Hunting* to teaching a counseling theories class. Toman and Rak (2000) recommend activities using films for several counseling courses: diagnosis, counseling theories, interventions and ethics. Tyler and Reynolds (1998) presented a model for incorporating feature films into a course for teaching group counseling. Movies have also been used in teaching other similar disciplines. Alexander (2006) assessed graduates' perception of the value of using film as a teaching tool in medical education. Graduate students in a southeastern family practice residency program were surveyed. Alexander found that film clips were perceived as an enjoyable and welcome break from traditional didactic approaches and added variety to the curriculum. The students also perceived that film clips and the material associated with them were easier to retain. In psychology, an undergraduate class focused on teaching psychopathology through film (Fleming, Piedmont, & Hiam, 1990). The use of movies in teaching has a

strong pedagogical basis, and can be applied to counselor trainees' and new practitioners' understanding of the complex models of identity development.

A tripartite instructional approach can accomplish these goals through (a) reading and self-assessments, (b) video case studies, and (c) role plays. Each of these methods used on their own has limitations. Lectures and readings may reduce innovative thinking (Browne, Hoag and Berilla, 1995). Video case studies allow for live-action vignettes but do not permit mutual interaction between counselor and client (Higgins & Dermer, 2001). Role-plays are viewed by Cleghorn and Levin (1973) as the most comprehensive technique for acquiring skills, but role-playing can be an overwhelming experience for the beginning counselor (Higgins & Dermer, 2001). However, used in tandem, with an awareness of their limitations, these instructional methods increase students' affective, cognitive, and behavioral complexity by surfacing attitudes and assumptions, expanding knowledge, and building skills.

### **Developing the Curriculum**

#### **Assessments**

After becoming familiar with the models through assigned readings, counseling students assess their own development using instruments provided by the theorists or other practitioners. For example, Bargad and Hyde (1991) constructed a version of the feminist identity development scale (FIDS) in 1991. Similarly, Parham and Helms (1985) based their racial identity scale on Cross'(1980) Black identity development model. The womanist identity attitude scale (WIAS) designed by Helms (1996) is useful in assessing the development of Black women.

As identity is not a one-dimensional concept, the use of more than one scale, or a scale such as the Self-Identity Inventory (SI) (Sevig, Highlen & Adams, 2000) could be used. Individuals completing the SI may consider multiple identities and intersections of identities rather than limiting themselves to a single identity dimension.

Taking these scales in or outside of class and discussing the results provides an opportunity to think about the ways elements of personal identity and the sociopolitical forces that shape identity offer experiences of privilege or oppression. Gaining insight into their own developmental processes gives students an experiential basis for understanding their clients' attitudes, behavior, and perceptions and recognizing that for all clients, certain aspects of identity are more salient than others to the process of therapy (Worell & Remer, 2003).

#### **Video Case Studies**

Self-reflection paves the way for further learning to take place through the analysis of characters in well-known films. These video case studies are the methodological centerpiece of the learning process. First, students view commercially-produced films that are readily available for rental at a nominal cost. After considering the characters within the framework of the models, they share their individual analyses in small groups. A lively discussion involving the entire class follows, in which students become aware that the differing perceptions of their classmates are themselves reflections of identity development. This realization alone is an important outcome: "As students wonder how particular people are reacting to the film, they are learning one of the most important intercultural skills—how to see

events from the other's point of view” (Summerfield, 1993, p. 30-31).

Certain films have proven to be especially useful for this type of analysis because of their compassionate, sensitive portrayal of characters. Favorites include *The Color Purple* (1985), *Rambling Rose* (1991), *Frances* (1983), *Thelma and Louise* (1991), *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991), and *Dolores Claiborne* (1995). Analysis can take several forms. Students can identify how specific characters manifest characteristics of particular stages of development and compare them to each other in a contextual approach. For example, the movie *Rambling Rose* (1991) depicts two women at very different stages of identity development and illustrates how the characters' consciousness affects their decisions and the lives of those around them (Harlin, Kassar, Scherick, & Willingham, 1991).

Another method of analysis is to trace the movement of one character throughout the course of the film. For instance, two characters whose growth is stunningly apparent are Celie in *The Color Purple* (1985) and Thelma in *Thelma and Louise* (1991) (Spielberg, Kennedy, Jones, Marshall, & Spielberg, 1985; Scott, Gitlin, O'Brien, Khouri, & Scott, 1991). At risk for multiple forms of oppression (racial, gender, and sexual orientation), Celie can be understood in terms of the womanist model (Parks, 1996) or Cass' (1979) gay/lesbian identity model as her self-concept undergoes radical change. Thelma's experiences illustrate several stages of feminist identity development: her servitude to her husband (passive-acceptance), the rape trauma (revelation), her bonding with Louise (embeddedness). Her psychological journey takes her from a state of near oblivion about her life situation to one of brutal clarity, a transformation she expresses with the words,

“Something has crossed over in me,” and “I've never been so awake.”

Choices of films are plentiful, therefore it should be easy to avoid films that reinforce stereotypes or provide insensitive portrayals of a particular minority group (Pinterits & Atkinson, 1998). Counselor educators should become familiar with the content of the movie and reflect on their own thoughts and feelings that arise while watching before showing it to classes for discussion (Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993).

Ponterotto, Utsey and Pedersen (2006) mention two movies that “are excellent sources for seeing how different levels of racial identity development play out in real life characters” (p272): *The Color of Fear* (1994) and *Do the Right Thing* (1989) (Mun Wah 1994 & Lee, 1989). *The Color of Fear* (1994) features an interracial, interethnic group of nine men who are attending a retreat to talk about issues of race, oppression, prejudice and privilege. *Do the Right Thing* (1989) features Spike Lee as a young man living in a Black and Puerto Rican neighborhood in Brooklyn, as tensions rise on the streets. After the viewing(s), students are asked to try to place the different characters in their respective stages of identity development for their racial groups. An evidence-based rationale is required for their stage placements. Both films depict members of several different racial and ethnic groups at varying levels of racial and ethnic identity development. Ponterotto, Utsey and Pedersen (2006) also provide general stimulus questions for both movies and lists of other movies for use in the counseling classroom.

### **Role Plays**

Practical application to counseling is the third focus of learning. Role play exercises build on students' investment in

the film characters they feel they have come to know and care about. Role plays can be structured as individual counseling sessions with any one of the characters at any point in their life story, and written case information, or a genogram can be provided for the film clients with more complex stories (Toman & Rak, 2000). For instance, there is general agreement that Louise Sawyer in *Thelma and Louise* (1991) is at the third stage of feminist identity development (Downing & Roush, 1985) and that had she received post-traumatic counseling after she was raped in Texas, she might have resolved the rage that drove her to kill Thelma's attacker. A role play, therefore, might involve Louise as a survivor of sexual assault and another student as her counselor.

Even more engaging and fascinating is to role play a group counseling session with several of the film characters. In this format, students are able to see developmental contrasts clearly and to experience the power of a group to raise clients' consciousness in a supportive atmosphere. They also notice that clients in certain stages of development are well-suited to group-based intervention while those at other stages make more progress in individual counseling (McNamara & Rickard, 1989).

Role-playing can also demonstrate the pitfalls associated with counselor-client mismatches. Students can observe how therapy is hindered by a regressive mismatch, that is, one in which the client has progressed beyond the counselor. They might also explore the dynamics of a progressive therapeutic relationship (i.e., one in which the counselor is at a later stage of development than the client) and those of a congruent relationship where both are at roughly the same developmental level. Effective processing of the role plays allows students to confront their own identity issues

and to examine how they affect the counseling process. It also shows the models' usefulness as a guide to clients' internal landscapes.

### **Implications for Practice**

The advantages of using identity development models in counseling are numerous. First, it encourages attention to the counselor's own growth. Second, using the model reduces stereotyping as counselors come to realize that any two clients in the same minority group may have very different outlooks and feelings. Third, the model enables the counselor to take on the client's perspective, "to enter her world with a lens that more clearly matches her own" (Worell & Remer, 1992, p. 282). Fourth, identity development models help clients to connect with sources of strength and pride that the dominant culture devalues. Fifth, counselors and clients come to understand sources of stress in a new light and respond to them in more positive ways. Feminist development theory, for example, may give counselors another way to evaluate what occurs when counseling female clients. To begin with, identity development model theory removes the heavily pathological orientation of traditional counseling, recognizing the impact of external, cultural factors that contribute to clients' emotional pain and problems in living. A woman's anger may be seen as a natural development rather than a psychological disorder or an irrational reaction. Thus, client symptoms are reframed as "strategies for coping with an unhealthy environment" (Worell & Remer, 1992, p. 92).

Furthermore, models help to address issues that arise at various stages of development. For instance, it is common for women in stage one of feminist identity (passive-acceptance) to see themselves as victims, have "rescue fantasies" (Greenspan,

1983), and wish for the counselor to rescue them. Discussing this world view can encourage the client to weigh the costs and benefits of her overreliance on others. A power analysis of her relationships with men can “help her to discover for herself the role sexism plays in her problems” (McNamara & Rickard, 1989, p. 186).

One note of warning, however, is sounded by Salazar and Abrams (2005). They remind us that although there are many similarities in the ways individuals move through the developmental process, racial and ethnic identity development is not experienced the same by each group, nor is identity development in other cultural groups (women, people with disabilities, sexual minorities) the same as racial or ethnic identity. Also, the experience of sexism or homophobia is not identical to the experience of racism.

Cognizance of the feelings that accompany their own stage of development enables counselors to recognize when therapeutic effectiveness is in danger of being compromised, as in the case of a mismatch between client and counselor. For example, the anger of a revelation-level counselor might result in inappropriate directiveness, frustration, and intolerance toward the passive-acceptant client because of the client's attitudes about male authority and her relationships with men. The counselor might be reluctant to focus on client concerns in these areas and unconsciously allow a judgmental strain to contaminate the therapeutic relationship. In such cases, referral to another therapist would be indicated.

In general, counselors at later levels of development are probably best equipped to help any client work through issues and feelings, negotiate life tasks and transitions, and continue the process of growth.

## **Conclusion**

A developmental perspective deemphasizes pathology and meshes well with the emphasis on growth and human possibility that informs counseling practice. Identity development models provide a framework for understanding clients' life experience and interpreting it within the context of power and the social structure. Development is seen as a process of becoming aware of the psychological and behavioral effects of power and oppression, coming to terms with it, and progressing to a sense of personal power and self-esteem. The models also heighten counselor sensitivity to diversity and help them evaluate their own ability to engage in helping relationships with various client populations. By assessing their own identity development and that of their clients, counselors can better understand the dynamic interaction between them and thus counsel more effectively and empathically.



## References

- Alexander, M. A. (2006). A graduate survey of cinemeducation. In M.A. Alexander, P. Lenahan, & A. Pavlov (Eds.), *Cinemeducation: A comprehensive guide to using film in medical education*, (pp. 183-185).
- Bargad, A., & Hyde, J. S. (1991). Women's studies: A study of feminist identity development. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 15, 181-201.
- Brooks, M. (Producer), & Clifford, G. (Director). (1983). *Frances* [Motion picture]. United States of America: EMI Films.
- Browne, M. N., Hoag, J. H., & Berilla, B. (1995). Critical thinking in graduate programs: Faculty perceptions and classroom behavior. *College Student Journal*, 29, 37-43.
- Cass, V. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4, 219-235.
- Cleghorn, J., & Levin, S. (1973). Training family therapists by setting learning objectives. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 8, 285-294.
- Cross, W. E. (1980). Models of psychological nigrissance. In R. L. Jones (Ed.), *Black Psychology* (pp. 81-98). New York: Harper and Row.
- Downing, N. E., & Roush, K. L. (1985). From passive-acceptance to active commitment: A model of feminist identity development. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 13, 695-709.
- Fleming, M. Z., Piedmont, R. L., & Hiam, C. M. (1990). Images of madness: Feature films in teaching psychology. *Teaching of Psychology*, 17 (3), 185.
- Greenspan, M. (1983). *A new approach to women and therapy*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hackford, T. (Producer), Mulvehill, C. (Producer), & Hackford, T. (Director). (1995). *Dolores Claiborne* [Motion picture]. United States of America: Castle Rock Entertainment.
- Harlin, R. (Producer), Kassir, M. (Producer), Scherick, E. J. (Producer), & Willingham, C. (Director). (1991). *Rambling Rose* [Motion picture]. United States of America: Carolco Pictures.
- Helms, J. E. (1996). *Reflections on racial identity, race relations, and culture: Collected works of Janet E. Helms*. Topeka, KS: Content Communications.
- Higgins, J. A., & Dermer, S. (2001). The use of film in marriage and family counselor education. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 40, 182.
- Koch, G., & Dollarhide, C. T. (2000). Using a popular film in counselor education: Good Will Hunting as a teaching tool. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 39, 203.
- Lear, N. (Producer), Meyer, A. (Producer), Avnet, J. (Producer), Duvall, S. (Producer), Gillen, A. M. (Producer), Kerner, J. (Producer), Ling, B. (Producer), Love, D. (Producer), Matsubara, Y. (Producer), Silverman, S. (Producer), Taylor, T. (Producer), Lindstrom, L. (Producer), Huberty, M. (Producer), Robdell, R. (Producer), & Avnet, J. (Director). (1991). *Fried green tomatoes* [Motion picture]. United States of America: Universal Studios.
- Lee, S. (Producer & Director). (1989). *Do the Right Thing*. [Motion picture]. United States of America: Universal Studios.
- McNamara, K., & Rickard, K. M. (1989). Feminist identity development: implications for feminist therapy with women. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 32, 184-189.
- Mun Wah, L. (Producer & Director) (1994). *The Color of Fear*. {Videotape}. Berkeley, CA: Stir Fry Productions,

- Parham, T. A., & Helms, J. E. (1985). The relationship of racial identity attitudes to self-actualization and affective states of Black students. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 74*, 431-440.
- Parks, E. E., Carter, R. T., & Gushue, G. V. (1996). At the crossroads: Racial and womanist identity development in Black and White women. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 74*, 624-631.
- Pinterits, E. J., & Atkinson, D. R. (1998). The diversity video forum: An adjunct to diversity sensitivity training in the classroom. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 37*(3), 203.
- Ponterotto, J. G., & Pedersen, P. B. (1993). *Preventing prejudice: A guide for counselors and educators*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Ponterotto, J. G., Utsey, S. O. & Pedersen, P. B. (2006). *Preventing prejudice: A guide for counselors, educators, and parents*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Salazar, C. F., & Abrams, L. P. (2005). Conceptualizing identity development in members of marginalized groups. *Journal of Professional Counseling: Practice, Theory & Research, 33*, 47-59.
- Sevig, T. D., Highlen, P. S., & Adams, E. M. (2000). Development and validation of the Self-Identity Inventory (SII): A multicultural identity development instrument. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 6*, 168-18.
- Scott, R. (Producer), Gitlin, M. P. (Producer), O'Brien, D. (Producer), Khouri, C. (Producer), & Scott, R. (Director). (1991). *Thelma and Louise* [Motion picture]. United States of America: MGM.
- Spielberg, S. (Producer), Kennedy, K. (Producer), Jones, Q. (Producer), Marshall, F. (Producer) & Spielberg, S. (Director). (1985). *The color purple* [Motion picture]. United States of America: Warner Brothers.
- Summerfield, E. (1993). *Crossing cultures through film*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural.
- Toman, S. M., & Rak, C. F. (2000). The use of cinema in the Counselor Education curriculum: Strategies and outcomes. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 40*, 105.
- Tyler, J. M., & Reynolds, T. (1998). Using feature film to teach group counseling. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 23*, 7-21.
- Worell, J., & Remer, P. (1992). *Feminist perspectives in therapy: An empowerment model for women*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Worell, J., & Remer, P. (2003). *Feminist perspectives in therapy: Empowering diverse women*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

### Author Note

Gloria Pierce is a professor in the graduate counseling program at Montclair State University. Her research interests include ecofeminism, poststructural feminism and pedagogy, feminist mentoring, and ecotherapy. Her scholarly work has been published in the *Journal of Humanistic Education and Development*, *Adultspan*, *Transformations*, *Feminist Teacher*, and other academic journals. She holds a doctorate in education from Columbia University.

---

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Gloria Pierce at [pierceg@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:pierceg@mail.montclair.edu)

---