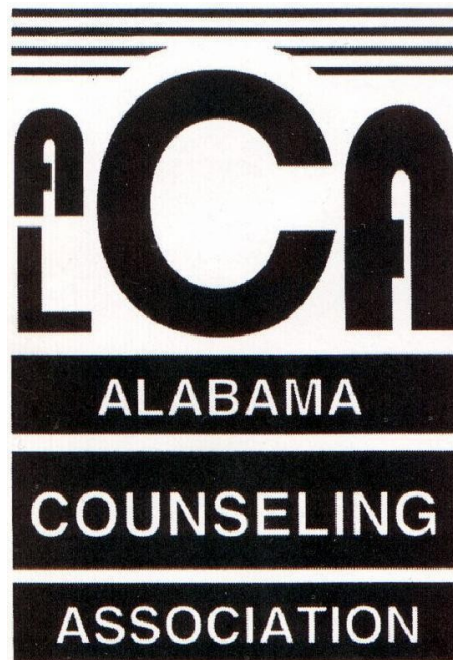


The Alabama Counseling Association Journal, Volume 37, Number 1

**The Alabama Counseling Association**  
**JOURNAL**



Enhancing human development throughout the lifespan

Promoting public confidence and trust

in the counseling profession

Caring for self and others

Acquiring and using knowledge

Respecting Diversity

Empowering leadership

Encouraging positive change

### Letter From the Editor

Is the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs and the American School Counseling Association Contributing to School Counseling Being Viewed as “Less Than?”

According to the 2009 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards, “Entry-level degree programs in Career Counseling, School Counseling, and Student Affairs and College Counseling are comprised of approved graduate-level study with a minimum of 48 semester credit hours, entry-level degree programs in Addiction Counseling and in Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling are comprised of approved graduate-level study with a minimum of 60 semester credit hours, and beginning July 1, 2009, all applicant programs in Clinical Mental Health Counseling must require a minimum of 54 semester credit hours or 81 quarter credit hours for all students. As of July 1, 2013, all applicant programs in Clinical Mental Health Counseling must require a minimum of 60 semester credit hours or 90 quarter credit hours for all students” (<http://www.cacrep.org/template/index.cfm>).

At the same time, state departments of education across the country routinely set standards and requirements under which students seeking school counseling as a career must meet in order to become certified. Currently, CACREP sets degree requirements for school counseling at a minimum of 48 hours, while other entry level programs are moving or have moved to 60 semester credit hours.

School counseling has often been perceived as less “clinical” than the other professions within counselor education. In many counselor education programs, the courses school counselors are required to complete are radically different than courses students in clinical mental health or marriage/couples/family are required to complete. Courses in the clinical mental health and marriage/couples/family degree are designed to be more “clinical” in content, focusing not only on pedagogy but also on diagnosis and treatment. Courses in school counseling programs often focus on school counseling program development, advocacy, social justice, collaboration, leadership, implementation of the American School Counselor Association National Model, program and intervention evaluation and how to use data.

One can hardly argue with the need for additional coursework and knowledge in our entry-level graduate programs given the characteristics, diagnoses, and treatment of individuals in our society. My questions to the profession are, “Is there a mixed message being sent with school, career, and student affairs counseling with CACREP minimum hours being less than the other concentrations?” And if so, “What message is being sent to school counseling students and school counseling counselor educators?” Further more, “Do instructors in programs which have different entry level concentrations (e.g., marriage/couple/family; clinical mental health; school counseling) view students in the school counseling concentration differently than students in the other concentrations? And if so, “Does that matriculate down to how students view each other in terms of “professional identity?”

Fall 2011  
Table of Contents

<b>Articles</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Cross Curriculum Modules in Counseling and Instructional Leadership</b>	<b>4</b>
William K. Kiser, Ed.D. Nancy J. Fox, Ed.D. Mary M. Owens, Ph.D.	
<b>Female Childhood Sexual Abuse Survivors: An Existential Exploration and Implications for Therapists</b>	<b>12</b>
Kathy D. Robinson, Ph.D. Kimberly Mills, Ph.D. Ms. Amanda L. Strickland	
<b>Increasing Counselor Self-Awareness: The Role of Cognitive Complexity and Metacognition in Counselor Training Programs</b>	<b>25</b>
R. Tyler Wilkinson	
<b>The Effects of Student Involvement on Graduate Student Satisfaction: A Pilot Study</b>	<b>34</b>
Ms. Kelsey Farley Ms. Mallory McKee Michael Brooks, Ph.D.	
<b>When Values and Ethics Conflict: The Counselor's Role and Responsibility</b>	<b>40</b>
Glenda R. Elliott, Ph.D.	

## **Cross Curriculum Modules in Counseling and Instructional Leadership**

William K. Kiser, Ed.D., Instructional Leadership Program, Department of Educational Resources, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama.

Nancy J. Fox, Ed.D., Counselor Education Program, Department of Educational Resources, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama.

Mary M. Owens, Ph.D., Instructional Leadership Program, Department of Educational Resources, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama.

### **Abstract**

School Counselors and Instructional Leaders have demanding roles in school settings with collaborative goals for enhanced student achievement. The purpose of the article is to explore the School Counselor-Instructional Leader relationship and provide feedback about the integration of cross curriculum training modules for school counseling and instructional leadership programs in higher education. Jacksonville State University has implemented Master's level cross curriculum modules in a two-part project. Part one involves bringing Instructional Leadership faculty into a Counselor Education course to enhance leadership qualities. Likewise, part two brings Counselor Education faculty in an Instructional Leadership course conducting modules that teach the requirements for quality school counseling programs. The cross curricular modules have been implemented over a three year time period with candidates from both programs yielding more improved awareness of specific roles and opening communication channels for candidates from both programs.

### **Cross Curriculum Modules in Counseling and Instructional Leadership**

Educational leaders, principals to superintendents, are responsible for the success of all instructional programs, a challenging, but exciting assignment. One part of this assignment is administrative support for school counseling programs. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) provides counselors with a curriculum in order to maintain high standards for counseling programs. Alabama, as do many states, also provides counselors with a state plan aligned to ASCA's curriculum. Crucial to the success of the program and its benefits to students are mutual trust, principal-counselor communication, and respect and understanding (College Board, 2009a). However, the overwhelming daily responsibilities of school counselors and administrators often leave little time for communication. In addition to lack of time for communication and the building of trust and a shared vision, both groups of educators may not adequately understand each other's roles.

Professors from educational leadership and school counseling programs point out that lack of training is a challenge to developing strong partnerships between school counselors and principals. There has been little or no collaboration between counselor education programs and educational leadership programs. School counselors and principals must discuss their professional skills in order to work as a team to strengthen the school improvement

process. Principals who work with counselors to strengthen school improvement create partnerships that affect everyone within the community. (Mallory & Jackson, 2007).

The counseling program is an integral part of the school community. Counselors provide individual, small, and large group guidance. However, group-counseling sessions may not be scheduled or may be scheduled less often. This may be due to counselors being assigned non-counseling duties at the local school. These activities include registration and scheduling of all new students, coordinating or administering high-stakes testing, performing disciplinary actions, covering classes when teachers are absent, performing clerical duties, and preparing Individual Educational Plans (IEP's) (Mallory & Jackson, 2007). In response to an ASCA survey, counselors who indicated they did not utilize small group counseling, identified several factors why group work was not supported in their schools (College Board, 2009b). These factors include large caseloads, administrative duties, lack of support from administrators and faculty, and lack of parental support, especially from parents living in small towns. As a result, school counselors may not be able to fully deliver quality counseling programs.

Counseling programs that have made a difference in improving student achievement are numerous. Many elementary counselors have integrated academic interventions within small group settings by using small groups to help increase learning behaviors and personal/social development of students (Steen & Kaffenberger, 2007). One program organized by a school counselor as part of a school improvement program to reduce infractions that kept students out of class involved spending time with the principal. High-school students who were assigned detention for minor infractions spent 30 minutes of the detention hour walking on the school's track with the principal. The principal used this time listening to the concerns of students, which was helpful in building relationships with them. Another counselor worked with the school improvement team to develop strategies addressing the needs of the school's growing Hispanic population (Mallory & Jackson, 2007).

Accreditation standards for both school counselors and administrators only briefly mention the counselor-principal relationship, as these standards focus on the content areas of their respective fields. That the roles of educational leaders and school counselors may be misunderstood suggests that higher education institutions perhaps consider bridging the gap for these two kinds of students as they complete initial certification programs at the master's level. Therefore, the question is, "How can university pre-service programs address the needs of both school counselors and leaders and bridge the gap of communication and understanding between them?"

At Jacksonville State University (JSU), Instructional Leadership and School Counseling faculty have begun to plan and implement cross-program training modules as a possible solution to bridging the gap between administrators/principals and counselors. The training modules are conducted by faculty from the two programs and range in time from 30 minutes to an hour over one to two class meetings. The Instructional Leadership faculty conducts modules for the School Counseling Program in leadership, ethics, and the principal's role in using counselors as key members of the school leadership team. The School Counseling faculty conducts modules for the Instructional Leadership Program in counseling curriculum of the *ASCA Model* and *State Plan*, postsecondary transition counseling, and the counselor's role. At the present time, the modules have been presented to each of the two groups of students separately, but in the future the module on the

principal's role in using counselors as leadership team members will be conducted jointly, giving both groups of students the opportunity for interaction and discussion relative to the topics. Three modules—the Leadership Module for School Counselors, the Principal's Role in Using Counselors as Key Team Members, and the *ASCA National Model* and *Alabama Comprehensive Model* for School Leaders—have been developed, and others are in stages of development.

### **The Leadership Module for School Counselors (SC Module One)**

This module, conducted by Instructional Leadership faculty, focuses on the relationship and interaction of building-level leaders—the principal and the school counselor. These are positions the beginning counselor or administrator will fill and should be of most interest to pre-service graduate students.

The module begins with a frank discussion of students' current conceptions of the school counselor role as "helper-responders" rather than that of "...proactive leaders and advocates for the success of all students," which House and Sears (2002) saw as an essential part of equity in the education of all students and in the overall school improvement process. These authors believed counselors do not involve themselves in proactive roles for several reasons: inadequate pre-service training, conflicting roles, administrators who fail to use counselors' skills, pliable and overly accommodating counselor behavior, and other stakeholders (such as parents and community members) who insist upon their agendas for counselors.

Discussion focuses on the need for school counselors to be assertive and to develop the political skills needed to establish their leadership role in managing and implementing the comprehensive counseling and guidance program in their school. Such program management includes classroom guidance activities; group activities to respond to students' interests or needs; interdisciplinary curriculum development, as teams of teachers and counselor(s) integrate subject matter with the school guidance curriculum; and parent workshops and instruction (*Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance State Model for Alabama Public Schools*, 2003). With such comprehensive responsibilities, counselors cannot accept a role that includes tasks unrelated to the counseling and guidance program.

Following these discussions students are provided in-depth information on the principal-counselor relationship from a recent College Board survey and monograph: *Finding a Way: Practical Examples of How an Effective Principal-Counselor Relationship Can Lead to Success for All Students* (College Board, 2009b). In the summer of 2008, the College Board used a survey from this document with more than 2300 principals and counselors across the nation. Of this sample, 15% were principals and 85% were counselors. Students review the document and related survey data. Using the survey, students are asked to rate the schools in which they currently teach on characteristics of an effective principal-counselor relationship with the ten-item survey "*Taking One Step Forward: A Self-Assessed Tool.*"

Discussion continues on the importance students assigned to various characteristics (scale 1-5) and the extent to which they believed these characteristics are found in their school (also scale 1-5). As a classroom activity, the leadership faculty shares how the *JSU* counseling student ratings compare to those of the national sample and also how the *JSU* current students in pre-service leadership programs compared to the national sample.

As did the national sample, the *JSU* school counseling majors and leadership majors most often agree on the major issues that should drive their relationships—mutual trust and respect, communication, and shared vision and decision making. However, leadership students have a more positive view of the principals' relationships with counselors than do the counseling students of that same relationship. The national sample also showed this difference in terms of the ten characteristics of the survey instrument: open communication that provides input to decision-making; opportunities to share ideas on teaching, learning, and school-wide initiatives; sharing information about needs within school and community; school counselor participation on leadership team; joint responsibility in development of goals and their assessment; mutual trust between principal and counselor; shared vision on what is meant by student success; mutual respect between principal and counselor; and a collective commitment to equity and opportunity (College Board, 2009b).

The Leadership Module ends with a discussion of what each of the ten characteristics means in terms of everyday school behavior on the part of both school counselor and principal. Probably the most important responsibility of the counselor is to find a way to communicate to the principal what he or she needs to know, to back up these efforts with data, and to understand the principal's perspective in dealing with larger issues (College Board, 2009b).

#### ***The ASCA National Model and ALSDE Comprehensive Module for Leaders (IL Module One)***

The *ASCA National Model* (American School Counselor Association, 2005) has placed a curriculum in the hands of school counselors in the United States to deliver personal, social, academic, and career education to students. As mentioned before, many states, such as Alabama, have state curriculum plans aligned with the *ASCA National Model (Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Model for Alabama Public Schools, 2003)*. The curriculum is in place for delivery in counseling programs at elementary, middle, and high school levels, yet delivery seems to be the stumbling block for school counselors. There may be many contributing factors; however, reviewing a few of these can possibly expand others' view to see from the school-counseling chair.

The most prominent recent research of school counselor views involves a survey of over 1200 elementary, middle, and high school counselors in Alabama by Dahir, Burnham, and Stone (2009). The survey asked school counselors their perception of school counseling programs. Results for the elementary level confirmed previous literature that indicated emphasis is placed on the strong personal social growth of their students, the need to implement large-group guidance, and strong program management with little or no involvement in career development. Surveys of middle school counselors, although less prevalent in the literature, garnished some new findings that contradicted previous research. Middle school counselors seemed to be delivering programs more closely aligned with the *ASCA National Model*. High-school counselors reaffirmed the traditional priorities of individual counseling, educational and career planning, and preparing for postsecondary opportunities for all students. The authors suggested specialized professional development opportunities for school counselors similar to those opportunities offered teachers. In an additional article also specific to Alabama, the authors stated, "overwhelmingly, the school counselors revealed that principals or other administrators (not counseling coordinators) viewed school counseling in a traditional fashion" (Burnham, Dahir, & Stone, 2008, p. 8).

School counselors believed administrators were not aware of the “State Model” and as a result expressed frustration. Eighty-five percent of those surveyed viewed working closely with school administrators and teachers on school improvement issues as a high priority (p.13). In a subsequent study examining common practices of Alabama school counseling programs concerning counseling and non-counseling duties Chandler, Burnham, & Dahir (2008) found concerns related to role issues and that counselors and principals view counseling duties differently. Evident in the results of this study was a pattern that counselors were “automatically assigned clerical and administrative tasks” (p.50).

In a survey of 337 practicing school principals in Iowa (127 women and 207 men) Leuwerke, Wade, Walker, and Shi (2009) found over half of participants reported no exposure to the ASCA National Model including its four components of counseling (foundation, delivery system, management system, and research). A second part of the study reviewed the impact of different types of information about professional school counseling and administrators’ perceptions of how counselors should allocate their time. The principals’ view of time allocations across delivery mechanisms was most impacted by the description of the *ASCA National Model* and exposure to any type of information about school counseling impacted ratings of time for responsive services. Principals’ recommendations regarding counselors’ time allotments were impacted by exposure to different types of information about school counseling. A third finding of the study was that principals thought that appropriate tasks were more important than inappropriate tasks. This research demonstrated that a “brief, non-dynamic information set can impact principals’ view of how counselors should spend their time and decreased their view of the importance of inappropriate tasks” (p.8).

Although the Counselor Education and Instructional Leadership faculty at *JSU* already recognized the need for curriculum exchanges, the studies reviewed herein led to further development of training modules. The *ASCA National Model* and specifically the *Alabama Comprehensive Model* are simply shared with Instructional Leadership students to begin an awareness of, and interest in, an effective counseling curriculum. Counselor Education faculty come to Instructional Leadership courses and prompt an awareness, an interest, and an exposure to the curriculum. Discussions center upon the roles of both the school counselor and school administrator. A future plan for evaluating the effectiveness of cross curriculum modules will include emailing a copy of the survey “*Taking One Step Forward: A Self-Assessment Tool*” (College Board, 2009b) to instructional leadership and counseling students after they have worked in respective educational positions for a year. Both programs communicate with their graduates via newsletters and email communication. Programs also use data from surveys of graduates for program improvement.

### **The Principal’s Role in Using Counselors as Key Members of the Leadership Team Module (IL/SC Module One)**

IL/SC Module One, also conducted by the Instructional Leadership faculty, is presented to students in the instructional leadership program as well as students in the school counseling program. The module focuses on the principal’s role in using counselors as key members of the school leadership team. The module begins with a discussion of effective leadership and the instructional role of the principal. Principals are ultimately responsible for the success of the instructional program, which includes the counseling and guidance program.



The mission, vision, and goals of the school can best be met by the principal empowering the faculty. The effective principal identifies and establishes leaders in each program area and invites them to become part of the school leadership team. The leadership team is given the power to advocate for their programs and student needs. The principal provides the team with opportunities to share information about student needs and the leadership team is included in the decision-making process.

This module includes a discussion of leadership and the skills of effective school leaders. Gorton and Alston (2009) defined leadership as “those activities engaged in by an individual or members of a group that contribute significantly to development and maintenance of role structure and goal direction” (p.5). Gorton and Alston described the difference between administrators and leaders. Administrators are concerned primarily with maintaining rather than changing established structures, programs, and goals. Leaders, on the other hand, are concerned with initiating changes in established structures, programs, and goals. “An administrator can become a leader by attempting to introduce change, but is not a leader simply because he or she happens to occupy what has been referred to as a leadership position” (p.6).

To exercise leadership, a principal must try to influence the faculty. The principal must possess knowledge and skills in utilizing group dynamics. An essential priority for the principal in working with a leadership team is the development of cohesiveness and trust. Group cohesiveness is the degree to which the faculty is attracted to the group, are willing to take personal responsibility for the tasks assigned to the group, and are willing to engage in cooperative actions to achieve the mission, vision, and goals of the school.

Members of the leadership team must feel that their membership is valued and that they can make an important contribution to the effectiveness of the programs of the school. Goal sharing is essential for leadership team members. They must understand the mission, vision, and goals of the school and the extent to which these goals are compatible with members' personal goals. Finally, team members must have a spirit of cooperation and collaboration. The principal and the leadership team must be able to work cooperatively among themselves (Gorton and Alston, 2009).

The second part of the module includes a discussion of the roles of the principal, counselor(s), and teachers in implementing the school counseling program as described in the *Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Model for Alabama Public Schools* (2003). The principal must understand the role of school counselors and provide the necessary support for counselors to fulfill their roles just as administrators must understand the roles of faculty in each program area. The principal must provide input into program development and encourage support and participation of all school personnel.

The school counselor must assume a leadership role for managing and implementing the comprehensive counseling and guidance program in the school. Counselors are responsible for the delivery and evaluation of services to all students and must work directly with students individually as well as in small and large groups. In addition to serving students and responding to their social needs, counselors are consultants to administrators, teachers, parents, and others. The counselor must also coordinate activities within the school that are related to student welfare.

Since teachers have the greatest contact with students, they are in the best position to recognize and help provide for the needs of the students. Open communication with counselors provides adequate opportunities for student-counselor contact. Teachers can help counselors deliver programs that facilitate the academic, career, personal and social development of students. Teacher support, input, and expertise make it possible for the school counseling program to become an integral part of the total education program in the school (*Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Model for Alabama Public Schools*, 2003).

The final part of the module focuses on how effective principal-counselor relationships can lead to success for all students. The students read and discuss case studies of how principals in various schools have developed positive working relationships with counselors in developing an effective leadership team. They are provided a copy of *Finding a Way: Practical Examples of How an Effective Principal-Counselor Relationship Can Lead to Success for All Students* (College Board, 2009b). The case studies of actual elementary, middle, and high schools included in this monograph provide the final discussion in the module for counseling and instructional leadership students.

The JSU Counseling and Instructional Leadership faculties will continue to develop and implement cross curriculum modules. Faculty will analyze the checklist evaluations from modules and completed presentations. Data from surveys of practicing counselors and administrators will be analyzed at the end of each school year. Based upon these data, current modules may be revised for implementation, or modules on new topics may be developed. In the future, both faculties wish to see the modules become not only a sharing of information but also activities imbedded into additional courses or into the internships of these two programs.

### Conclusion

In our effort to enhance the counselor-principal relationship, cross-curriculum training modules have been developed. Although implementation has been approximately three years, the feedback from counseling and instructional leadership students has been positive. The authors contend that both programs have strengthened primarily as a result of awareness and communication. As predicted by the national study, the dialogue between both faculty and students developed a better understanding of counseling and leadership roles.

### References

- Alabama State Department of Education [ALSDE] (2003). *Comprehensive counseling and guidance model for Alabama public schools (state plan)*. Bulletin 2003, No.89.
- American School Counselor Association (2005). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author
- Burnham, J. Dahir, C. & Stone, C. (2008). A snapshot in time: 1244 school counselors speak out about the Alabama state plan. *Alabama Counseling Association Journal*, 34(1), 1-17.
- College Board (2009a). *A closer look at the principal-counselor relationship: A Survey of Principals and Counselors*. Retrieved Electronically October 1, 2009, from

<http://advocacy.collegeboard.org/publications>

College Board (2009b). *Finding a way: Practical examples of how an effective principal-counselor relationship can lead to success for all students*. Retrieved Electronically October 1, 2009, from <http://advocacy.collegeboard.org/publications>

Chandler, J., Burnham, J., & Dahir, C. (2008). Counseling versus non-counseling duties: Examining the past and present in school counseling. *Alabama Counseling Association Journal*, 34(1), 44-59.

Dahir, C., Burnham, J., & Stone, C. (2009). Listen to the voices: School counselors and comprehensive school counseling programs. *Professional School Counseling*, 12(3), 182-192.

Gorton, R. & Alston, J. (2009). *School leadership and administration: Important concepts, case studies& simulations*. McGraw Hill. New York, NY.

House, R. & Sears, S. (2002). Preparing school counselors to be leaders and advocates: A critical need in the new millennium. *Theory Into Practice*, 41(3), 154.

Leuwerke, W., Wade C., Walker, J., & Shi, Q. (2009). Informing principals: The impact of different types of information on principals' perceptions of professional school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, 12(4). 263-271.

Mallory, B. & Jackson, M. (2007). Balancing the load: How to engage counselors in school improvement. *Principal Leadership*, 7(8), 35-37.

Steen, S. & Kaffenberger, C. (2007). Integrating academic interventions into small group counseling in elementary school. *Professional School Counseling*. 10(5), 516-519.

# Female Childhood Sexual Abuse Survivors: An Existential Exploration and Implications for Therapists

Kathy D. Robinson, Ph.D., Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, Counseling & School Psychology, Auburn University.

Kimberly T. Mills, Ph.D., Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, Counseling & School Psychology, Auburn University.

Amanda L. Strickland, M.Ed. candidate of Clinical Mental Health Counseling, Auburn University.

## Abstract

In the United States, annual prevalence factors indicate that 25% of women are reported survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Existential concerns and basic purposes within the physical, social, personal and spiritual dimensions of female CSA survivors' worldviews are explored. The recognition and meanings of existential purposes and concerns for CSA survivors are described. Following, implications of these explorations for CSA therapists are identified.

## An Existential Exploration and Implications for Therapists

Sexual abuse comprises inherent variations depending upon the age of children, the specific act committed by an adult, and the type of relationship between an adult and child (Lowenthal, 1996; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005). Physical contact sexual abuse includes perpetrator behaviors such as fondling and forced intercourse or penetration. Further, non-contact sexual abuse includes perpetrator behaviors such promoting sexual activity of children as well as permitting children to watch pornography or witness sexual intercourse (The Norma J. Morris Center, 1995). Scannapieco and Connell-Carrick (2005) provide three differing definitions of sexual abuse and generally conclude that sexual abuse involves any sexual activity with a child where consent is not or cannot be given" (p. 12). Individuals who have endured these experiences are referred to as survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) survivors (Wilken, 2009).

Although accurate childhood sexual abuse rates are difficult to obtain, Pereda, Guilera, Forns, and Gomez-Benito (2009) concluded that approximately 25% of women in the United States are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. In their meta-analysis of the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse across an international sample of 22 countries, the researchers projected that 19.7% of women experience sexual abuse before the age of 18. Africa was reported as having the highest prevalence rate (34%) and Europe was reported as having the lowest prevalence rate (9%). In a similar study of an Australian sample (Dunne, Purdie, Cook, Boyle, & Najman, 2003), 34% of women reported non-penetrative sexual abuse (e.g., inappropriate touch behaviors such as fondling) during childhood while 12% reported penetrative sexual abuse (e.g., rape).

Sexual abuse occurs across all communities, regardless of gender, race, religion, cultural heritage, or socioeconomic status (Bass & Davis, 2008; Pereda et al., 2009). For example, Dunne et al. (2003) reported significant rates of males that experience non-penetrative sexual abuse (16%) as well as unwanted sexual penetration (4%). The circumstances

surrounding the sexual abuse may be a reflection of cultural differences, a child's social world, and/or the family environment. Certain family characteristics have been associated with a higher prevalence of abuse: An insecure parenting attachment, a lack of parental supervision, and a family history of sexual abuse have been common factors associated with victimization (Fieldman & Crespi, 2002).

For many individuals, the process of coping with traumatic histories may continue well into adulthood. Researchers have found that women who report having a history of sexual abuse are more likely to participate in unwanted sexual experiences as adults than those without histories (Walsh, Blaustein, Knight, Spinazzola, & Van der Kolk, 2007). As individuals struggle to overcome trauma and advance to a place of healing, they may experience shame (Bass & Davis, 2008). Additionally, victims may deny and distort their recollections of the unwanted sexual experience. In a recent study of sexual abuse survivors, women frequently reported feeling confused and paralyzed by their experiences (Rahm, Renck, & Ringsberg, 2006). The authors proposed that such feelings may later lead to repressed memories, thereby preventing the ability to process confusing and paralyzing emotions.

A CSA survivor who enters counseling may initially experience a feeling of disengagement with the ability to accept one's self and to understand her world (Phillips & Daniluk, 2004). The sense of disengagement is a primary focus of therapeutic interventions. Grossman, Sorsolie, and Kia-Keating (2006) exemplified the focus on disengagement of an effective therapist for sexual abuse survivors to enhance physical and mental wellbeing: "One crucial dimension of survivors' recovery is finding a way to "make sense" of what happened to them in the past, and to make some kind of meaning of the place the abuse has in their current lives" (p. 434). A therapist's responsibility is to provide a safe environment for which a sexually abused client can explore her traumatic history as well as ways to reintegrate into society.

Considering the prevalence of CSA as well as the detrimental effects of CSA on development and later life experiences, therapists will likely counsel survivors of sexual abuse. Much of the research conducted in the area of CSA has incorporated the use of cognitive-behavioral theory and practical approaches in ways to address client needs. Using the cognitive-behavioral framework, therapists teach clients how to identify cognitive distortions and skills that will alleviate presenting symptoms (Chard, 2005; Owens & Chard, 2001). Previous research regarding existential therapy has primarily focused on the general area of trauma as opposed to the more specific topic of sexual abuse (Jenmorri, 2006 & Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Therefore, this article will address CSA from an existential perspective specifically focused on basic purposes and concerns within the physical, social, personal and spiritual dimensions of female CSA survivors' worldviews. Recognition of the purposes and concerns will be described and the implications of existential explorations for CSA therapists will be identified.

### **Existential Nature, Purposes, and Concerns for Female CSA Survivors**

Emmy van Deurzen's (2002) existential perspective outlined the basic principles that depict the relationship between persons and the world. In brief, humans live within four universal dimensions in relationship to the world including (a) Umwelt, (b) Mitwelt, (c) Eigenwelt, and (d) Uberwelt. The authors of this article will refer to each, respectively, as the physical, social, personal, and spiritual dimensions. Existentialism believes the dimensions subjectively exist for all people. The four dimensions are interconnected and continually

condition each other (May, 1983). Physical consists of the natural world; this is our biological dimension. Vontress (1979) suggested that the physical dimension is the “life support system” (p. 118). The social dimension is the public world sphere, where interactions and relationships with other human beings exist. Personal is the psychological dimension in which a person develops or experiences a sense of identity and ownership. Lastly, the spiritual dimension is where an individual searches for value beyond the self. Believing in purpose as well as inferring meaning of existence constitutes psychological awareness in the spiritual dimension.

Within each dimension, individuals engage the process of insightful interaction with the world. The physical dimension reminds individuals that their surroundings are in a constant state of change. Persons can choose to develop life goals and implement actions to attain their goals or to remain inflexible and refuse to change (Kasser & Sheldon, 2004). Our social dimension refers to interactions among humans. Individuals infer meaning from feedback they receive from others regarding social interaction. Such feedback influences individual behavior. In the personal dimension of an existential perspective, individuals develop the capacity for self-awareness and self-relatedness. They are able to reflect on their reality within the world (May, 1983). Lastly, within the spiritual dimension individuals create a significant relationship with a higher being. Persons may develop commitment and dedication to remain obedient to an authority figure (Vande Kamp, 2009).

Emmy van Duerzen (2002) suggested our human existence is paradoxical by nature in regard to the existential dimensions. That is, people are often hindered by concerns for living although they strive to meet the basic purposes within each dimension. A basic purpose, as defined by van Duerzen (2002) is an “ideal value that a person knowingly or unknowingly strives for” (p. 139) relevant to each dimension. She implies that individuals will settle for less than desirable goals, as a way to dodge unwanted circumstances that compromise their aspirations for existence. This paradox is particularly important for survivors of sexual abuse. Potential life concerns experienced by CSA survivors relevant to each dimension will be discussed in the following sections.

### **Physical Dimension Purposes and Concerns**

The physical world is the most foundational of the dimensions. A purpose in the physical world is to create harmony with the environment. Emmy van Duerzen (2002) suggested health, strength, happiness and life as basic purposes a person strives for in her physical world. Cole reported that a loss of control over an environment is often contributed to a survivors’ loss of body integrity and safety (as cited in Kearney-Cooke & Striegel-Moore, 1996). Shattered assumptions about the world and self are in need of repair for CSA survivors. It is difficult and often inconceivable for survivors to find meaning through attempts to comprehend “why” she was abused (O’Dougherty-Wright, Crawford, & Sebastian, 2007).

Emmy van Duerzen (2002) stressed the importance of exploring the structural relationship between a client’s understanding of how she interacts in environments and how she perceives the natural world. This exploration provides therapists insight in how a client interprets her existence. Parts of a client’s natural world, as indicated by van Duerzen (2002), include: “body image, ability to stave off illness, fitness or weakness, attitudes towards food, sex and procreation” (p. 63). CSA survivors who do not recover from their trauma may experience existential concerns within the physical world.

The environments in which the abuse occurred may lead to safety concerns. The relationship between sexual abuse and safety is exemplified by Fisher (2005) when she described how a home or an interpersonal relationship that was thought to be safe and secure transpires as a haven for “secrecy and terror” (p. 11). The need to maintain silence regarding abuse or the fear of repercussions due to disclosure may allow CSA to never resurface in a survivor’s life (Lundqvist, Svedin, & Hansson, 2004). Keeping secrets is often a way for a survivor to elude exposure. That is, a CSA survivor can attempt to avoid any further danger or eradication in the world (Fisher, 2005); however, survivors are at an increased risk for revictimization. Specifically, researchers Messer and Long as well as Beitchman, Zuker, Hood, DaCosta, Akman, and Cassavia reported that CSA survivors are at a higher risk for sexual and physical assaults from spouses or romantic partners than nonsurvivors (as cited in Whiffen, Judd & Aube, 1999). Janoff-Bulman and Frantz suggest that such revictimizing events may result in a survivor losing her sense of purpose and meaning in life as she develops a lack of trust regarding her safety in the world (as cited in O’Dougherty-Wright et al., 2007).

Females may develop poor body images and suffer other adverse effects from sexual abuse. It is not uncommon for a survivor to imagine her body as a source of “vulnerability, shame and betrayal” (Kearney-Cooke & Striegel-Moore, 1996, p. 306). The ability to regain control, which was once denied by an abusive experience, of one’s body may lead to the development of eating disorders such as anorexia and/or bulimia (Fisher, 2005). In contrast, Kearney-Cooke and Striegel-Moore (1996) stated that the survivors who see themselves as too attractive may intentionally gain weight to avoid re-victimization. Eating too little or too much is an emotional coping strategy victims employ to reconnect to themselves (Fisher, 2005) as well as to redeem control (Kearney-Cooke & Striegel-Moore, 1996). Another behavioral consequence related to sexual abuse regards sexual interactions. There is abundant research regarding sexual difficulties and enduring effects for adult survivors of CSA. According to Sprei and Courtois (as cited in Cobia, Sobansky & Ingram, 2004), approximately 50% of females who experienced CSA report sexual dysfunction in their adult lives. Durlak suggests that sexual dysfunction may include sexual desire disorders and inhibited female orgasms (as cited in Cobia et al., 2004). Finkelhor and Browne (1985) reported additional difficulties from CSA survivors that included “aversion to sex, flashbacks to the molestation experience, difficulty with arousal and orgasms, and vaginismus, as well as negative attitudes toward their sexuality and their bodies” (p. 534). Lastly, Herman (as cited in Feinauer, Callahan, & Hilton, 1996) stated that victims may experience re-traumatization with intimate partners due to sexual difficulties when relationships are initiated.

### **Social Dimension Purposes and Concerns**

The social dimension describes the interaction between an individual and the environment. Emmy van Duerzen (2002) suggested the social world will serve the purpose of success, power, belonging, and love. People encounter various groups and social situations on a daily basis, including cultural and societal affiliations. How an individual experiences her presence in social interactions will determine her view of the social world. The experience of a social dimension lacks isolation. That is, individuals do not act in isolation. Persons are constantly responding to societal demands, which sometimes involve evaluating the actions and ideas of others. A major dilemma facing individuals in this dimension is that the world

does not represent a static existence of peace. When faced with this realization, an individual may also experience disillusionment.

For CSA survivors, trauma represents the ultimate experience of disenchantment. Women who endured CSA will encounter a wide variety of emotions that impact their relationship with the world. Finkelhor and Browne (1985) described the distress involved in child victimization through a unique framework. The authors propose a model, which describes four trauma-producing factors associated with CSA including: (1) *Traumatic sexualization* refers to the experience of developmentally inappropriate sexual contact; (2) *betrayal* occurs in children when their trust in others is violated; (3) perpetrators of sexual abuse also invoke a sense of *stigmatization* in the child through blaming, demeaning, and threatening behaviors; and (4) *powerlessness* refers to the feeling of helplessness and the inability of the child to protect herself. Each factor may result in various interpretations for survivors; however, generally, the CSA survivor will experience confusion and distorted self-concepts from the presence of one or multiple factors. Self-concept and self-worth is a differentiating characteristic between individuals that experience sexual abuse and individuals that do not experience sexual abuse. In a sample of college students, Murthi, Servaty-Seib, and Elliott (2006) found that women with a history of childhood sexual abuse scored lower on measures of self-concept than women with no history of abuse.

As children, CSA survivors were unprotected by some adults and manipulated by others. Because personal rights were violated, these women are often more vulnerable than non-CSA persons and prone to be targets of poor treatment by others. This realization greatly affects how sexual abuse survivors interact and respond to the world. Woldsdorf and Zlotnick (2001) noted that sexual abuse survivors are likely to develop insecure attachment styles in which they exhibit avoidance and anxiety in interpersonal relationships.

Later life experiences are often impacted by the negative experience of CSA. In a sample of college women, researchers found that individuals with more severe abuse histories were more likely to rely on an avoidant coping style. The women that employed an avoidant coping style also increased levels of trauma symptomatology and were more likely to report sexually coercive experiences as adults (Fortier, DiLillo, Messman-Moore, Peugh, DeNardi, & Gaffey, 2009). An inability to cope with reality may lead individuals to participate in destructive behaviors. In addition, overall mental health is greatly affected in individuals with sexual abuse histories related, but not limited, to an increased likelihood of psychological diagnoses and substance abuse (see Polusny & Follette, 1995, for a review). Specifically, Koltz-Flitter, Elhai, and Gold (2003) identified scale elevations in the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory among sexual abuse survivors in the areas of posttraumatic stress disorder, dissociation, and depression. Callahan, Price, and Hilsenroth (2003) found that adult survivors of sexual abuse reported higher psychological distress, including elevated depression and anxiety scores, and declined interpersonal functioning than nonvictims. To support Callahan et al. (2003), Feerick and Snow (2005) found that social anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder were more common among women with sexual abuse histories. In an investigation of adult survivors, Barker-Collo (2001) found that self-blaming and suicide attempts were a common experience for adult women with CSA histories.



### **Personal Dimension Purposes and Concerns**

In the personal dimension, individuals discover the capacity to relate to themselves and others in an intimate manner. Emmy van Duerzen (2002) stated a personal world gives purpose to integrity, freedom, authenticity, and certainty. This process must begin at the individual level. Each person creates an identity by defining what is important to her through consideration of thoughts, feelings, and ideas. In doing so, she creates a feeling of stability and comfort. The ability to accept oneself may at times be compromised by how others view the individual. Essential to acceptance is the incorporation of personal assets and weaknesses with one's self-definition. When individuals develop self-acceptance and become confident in their ability to stand alone, they can create beneficial and meaningful relationships with others. One of the primary challenges of the sexual abuse survivor is developing confidence to form a secure relationship with another.

Phillips and Daniluk (2004) described some of the struggles involved in the identity development of these women. The commonalities included feelings of disconnection and isolation as well as feeling defined by the sexual abuse experience. Further, the women reported feeling as if they needed to portray a facade for the public world. Such feelings and beliefs may influence a survivor to conceal identity and portray an inauthentic image for friends or family members as well as in public. A rupture in interpersonal relationships is not uncommon for CSA survivors. In a longitudinal exploration of female survivors, Liang, Williams, and Siegel (2006) found that more severe sexual trauma in childhood was correlated with greater marital dissatisfaction. Similarly, in studying the impact of sexual abuse on survivor's partners, Oz (2001) found that spouses reported feeling frustrated with the slow-paced healing process. Dennerstein, Guthrie, and Alford (2004) reported that sexually abused women were more likely to have fewer children and fewer intimate relationships as compared to non-abused women.

### **Spiritual Dimension Purposes and Concerns**

Emmy van Duerzen (2002) identified the basic intentions of the spiritual dimension as truth, perfection, wisdom, and goodness. Gilcrest (as cited in Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996) defined spirituality as "what individuals hold sacred in their lives, what is most important to them at the essence of their being" (p. 253). Spirituality is a multifaceted construct that embraces religious, existential, and unstructured orientations (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996). Further, spirituality provides a method for understanding personal environments and is not limited to one faith (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996). Emmy van Duerzen (2002) identified the spiritual world in existential terms as the "domain of experience where people create meaning for them and make sense of things" (p. 87).

Spiritual coping may take positive and negative forms. Gall (2006) observed that survivors of CSA who utilized positive spiritual coping strategies reported feeling as if the strategies aided them in the process of inference and provided inner strength. In contrast, CSA survivors may experience negative perceptions within their spiritual world, leaving them with feelings of personal discontentment. A tendency for CSA survivors is to cling to more negative views of God resulting in decreased spiritual well-being (Murray-Swank & Pargament, 2005). Murray-Swank (2004) reported additional spiritual struggles of survivors that include spiritual disconnection, anger at God, isolation, and feelings of abandonment by God (as cited in Murray-Swank and Pargament, 2005).

The tension between a traumatic history and hope for better life experiences leave survivors with feelings of despair (Ganje-Fling and McCarthy, 1996). This tension in conjunction with a lack of faith may lead survivors to question their meaning and purpose in life. As a result, a survivor may view the world as evil and imperfect; thus, there is little hope for the future.

### Implications for Therapists

CSA has a profound impact on survivors' lives. Existential concerns in the four dimensions may develop and linger throughout the span of their lives. The perceived severity of a sexual abuse experience a determinant of survivor perceptions and acceptance of her and the world they inhabit. Emmy van Deurzen (2002) suggested that striving for basic purposes within all dimensions must be embarked upon before the client becomes irrevocably disconnected from existential meaning in life. The dimensions are interlinked and interrelated and require working through ornate difficulties. From an existential approach, conceptualizing the survivor's concerns related to her sexual abuse experience requires a therapist to explore all dimensions of a survivor's worldview to effectively address individual needs.

Existentialism sees opportunities for new developments in the midst of a crisis (Jacobsen, 2006). Fisher (2005) described how new developments may arise from a crisis through a therapist: "Existential work can help the survivor acknowledge and embrace her autonomy by allowing her to reconnect with her inner knowing and begin to trust her perceptions of the world" (p. 26). Yalom (1980) suggested that the client's level of awareness leads to increased insight of how contributing factors may lead to later life difficulties. *Focusing* is a tool a therapist can utilize in promoting awareness of the disharmony in the CSA survivor's physical dimension. Gendlin (as cited in Fisher, 2005) defined focusing as "an internal aura that encompasses everything you know about the given subject at a given time – encompasses it and communicates it to you all at once, rather than detail by detail" (p. 30). He formed six steps that guide a therapist in focusing. The steps involve clearing, sensing, finding, resonating, questioning, and receiving (see Fisher, 2005, for a review).

From the social dimension perspective, the therapist wants to produce an environment that allows clients to incorporate opposing views of the self. The counselor will assist the client in expressing her subjective view of the world as well as identify areas in which she may hold unrealistic views. Encouraging clients to accept limitations and understand motivations for particular behaviors is another goal in the social dimension. Lastly, the counselor will help the client explore interactional patterns with others and encourage her to be flexible in alter and adopt interpersonal behaviors (van Deurzen, 2002).

For CSA survivors, past trauma is incorporated into the self in such a way that victims define their identities by their abuse histories. Existential therapy provides an opportunity for survivors to reclaim their identities in a way that is meaningful to them. The therapist who utilizes this framework must understand how each client perceives her existence. The formation of the I-Thou relationship utilizes a present-centered focus in which the client interacts intimately with the counselor. Yalom (1989) described this dynamic as a reflective experience in which the client is held accountable in observing the interactions during therapy. The survivor eventually realizes that the way she responds to the therapist is similar to the way she responds to others in her social world. In forming this relationship the counselor gains insight into the client's world, thereby being more able to understand

her subjective view (Corey, 2001). Many CSA survivors are plagued by external forces related to their sexual abuse experience. When this occurs, the counselor must encourage the client to identify ways in which she continues to maintain her identity as a survivor. Through establishment of the here-and-now focus, the client is able to take responsibility for her behavior (Yalom, 1989).

Day (2009) explored the integration of both narrative and existential therapies in applying treatment interventions to survivors. The author proposed the idea that therapy is enriched when clients are able to share the content of their experiences through storytelling followed by processing story themes through underlying meaning. The therapist offers a supportive relationship by engaging in genuine interactions that promotes co-exploration in working with the client. The existential therapist is one who empowers the client and instills hope by offering empathic and accepting responses. Therapy is a safe place where the client is able to connect with emotions and develop new congruent perspectives about her self-identity. Ultimately, the survivor is able to re-establish her sense of self and create new purpose and meaning in life.

In exploration of the personal dimension, therapists need to assist clients in finding inner fulfillment. Survivors are encouraged to regain intimacy with the self by exploring what is most meaningful to them. Clients are distracted from letting others define them through negative undertones. Instead, they are challenged to find creative ways to define themselves through personal characteristics. Group counseling offers an active approach for sexual abuse survivors to gain a sense of normalcy so they may accomplish goals together in creating a meaningful life post sexual abuse (Corey, 2001). Through the process of self-exploration, the therapist and group members support each other while increasing their ability to be honest. Survivors learn to identify the things that give them meaning while expanding personal and worldviews. As clients develop more self-awareness, the therapist directs the clients to the action-oriented, freedom, phase of the therapeutic process (Yalom, 1989).

Scheidlinger (2004) described the benefits of implementing group psychotherapy with survivors of traumatic experiences. The author contends that the group process serves as a form of treatment used to ameliorate psychological issues. Specifically, Scheidlinger described the existential group as one in which clients engage in a process of self-examination simultaneously exploring meaning in their lives. This process allows the client to develop self-awareness and engage in responsible decision-making.

Individual counseling has also been found to benefit for clients dealing with traumatic life issues (Fisher, 2005). Logotherapy describes a specific existential framework that promotes faith and hope in possibilities for renewed living. Clients engage in a process of four sequential phases that enables them to develop a sense of value in their lives. During the first phase clients engage in a process of differentiation whereby they learn to avoid over identification with the trauma. The second phase entails the therapist assisting the client in attitude modification through the facilitation of a Socratic-dialogue technique in which he or she explores what gives meaning to life. Symptom reduction follows as clients learn to cope and become aware that new options are available. Finally, clients maintain their current level of functioning by engaging in constant reflection of their values and purpose in life (Schulenberg, Hutzell, Nassif, & Rogina, 2008).

The spiritual dimension can be complicated for a CSA survivor. Although some clients will adhere to negative views of spirituality due to abuse, many maintain the spiritual beliefs

they held before sexual abuse occurred. Gall (2006) conducted a study assessing spiritual coping in relation to a current life event. One hundred and one adult survivors of CSA volunteered to participate in the study. The study's results showed that survivors who embraced anger with God had a tendency to display higher levels of depressive mood. In contrast, survivors who employed positive spiritual coping experienced lower levels of anger and depressive moods. The role of spirituality should not be overlooked in a survivor's current life functioning. Survivors of sexual abuse may perceive life as worthless. When feeling worthless, an individual may consider spiritual questions regarding the value of life and the meaning of death. It is important for therapists to reframe a worthless mindset to a meaningful mindset in an effort to enhance a CSA survivors living experience (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996).

Exploring the spiritual dimension of a survivor is discovering the person's existing views on life, how she makes sense of the world, and "what it is she lives for and would be willing to die for" (van Deurzen, 2002, p. 87). Allowing exploration of circumstances, beliefs, fears, and defenses, as well as the relationship between them in how they work together to create their life experiences, will often lessen the blame survivors take for their abuse (Feinauer, 2003). This is referred to by Feinauer (2003) as allowing the client to increase "respect for the uniqueness" (p.212) or herself. Through this process, the client will become committed to change and grow as a person existing in society. Gange-Fling and McCarthy (1996) caution therapists to be aware of potential pitfalls when addressing spiritual issues which include premature spiritual interventions, blurring of boundaries, countertransference and failure to refer (see Gange-Fling & McCarthy, 1996, for a review).

### **Conclusion**

The tenets of existential therapy may serve as a foundational base in the exploration of CSA survivors' worldview. Just as the worldviews interrelate, so do the tenets of the theory. Basic dimensions of the human condition to explore with clients may include: the capacity of self-awareness, freedom and responsibility, striving for identity and relationships to others, the search for meaning, anxiety as a condition of living, and awareness of death and nonbeing (Corey, 1996).

The importance of the inter-relatedness of existential perspective dimensions should be considered by a therapist. The neglect of one dimension makes it difficult to understand the phenomena of the survivor's world. Existentialism used as a philosophy or theory in therapy may benefit clients by helping them understand their choices to regain power and assume responsibility for their futures. The role of the therapist is to create an environment of open exchange within the counseling setting (e.g., Socratic-dialogue). Survivors should find comfort in exploring their inner-most thoughts and concerns. Regardless of the chaos in personal worlds, the therapist can be a co-explorer to empower the CSA survivors in finding clarity, purpose and meaning for their lives.

## References

- Barker-Collo, S. L. (2001). Adult reports of child and adult attributions of blame for childhood sexual abuse: Predicting adult adjustment and suicidal behaviors in females. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 25*(10), 1329-1341. doi:10.1016/S0145-2134(01)00278-2
- Bass, E., & Davis, L. (2008). *The Courage to Heal* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Callahan, K. L., Price, J. L., & Hilsenroth, M. J. (2003). Psychological assessment of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse within a naturalistic clinical sample. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 80*(2), 173-184. doi: 10.1207/S15327752JPA8002\_06
- Chard, K. M. (2005). An evaluation of cognitive processing therapy for the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder related to childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 73*(5), 965-971. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.73.5.965
- Cobia, D. C., Sobansky, R. R., & Ingram, M. (2004). Female survivors of childhood sexual abuse: Implications for couples' therapists. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families, 12*(3), 312-318. doi: 10.1177/1066480704264351
- Corey, G. (1996). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
- Corey, G. (2000). *Theory and Practice of Group Counseling* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
- Corey, G. (2001). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
- Day, K. W. (2009). Violence survivors with posttraumatic stress disorder: Treatment by integrating existential and narrative therapies. *Adultspan Journal, 8*(2), 81-91.
- Dennerstein, L, Guthrie, J. R., & Alford, S. (2004). Childhood abuse and its association with mid-aged women's sexual functioning. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 30*(4), 225-234. doi: 10.1080/00926230490422331
- Dunne, M. P., Purdie, D. M., Cook, M. D., Boyle, F. M., & Najman, J. M. (2003). Is sexual abuse declining? Evidence from a population-based survey of men and women in Australia. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 27*, 141-152. doi:10.1016/S0145-2134(02)00539-2
- Feerick, M. M., & Snow, K. L. (2005). The relationships between childhood sexual abuse, social anxiety, and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder in women. *Journal of Family Violence, 20*(6), 409-419. doi: 10.1007/s10896-005-7802-z
- Feinauer, L. L., Callahan, E. H., & Hilton, H. G. (1996). Positive intimate relationships decrease depression in sexually abused women. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 24*(2), 99-106. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

- Feinauer, L. (2003). Existential well-being as a factor in the adjustment of adults sexually abused as children. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 31*(3), 201-213. doi: 10.1080/01926180301118
- Fieldman, J. P., & Crespi, T. D. (2002). Child sexual abuse: Offenders, disclosure, and school-based initiatives. *Adolescence, 37*(145), 151-161. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Finkelhor, D., & Browne, A. (1985). The traumatic impact of child sexual abuse: A conceptualization. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 55*(4), 530-541.
- Fisher, G. (2005). Existential psychotherapy with adult survivors of sexual abuse. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 45*(1), 10-40. doi: 10.1177/0022167804269042
- Fortier, M. A., Dilillo, D, Messman-Moore, T., Peugh, J., Denardi, K. A., & Gaffey, K. J. (2009). Severity of child sexual abuse and revictimization: The mediating role of coping and trauma symptoms. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 33*(3), 308-320. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2009.01503.x
- Gall, T. L. (2006). Spirituality and coping with life stress among adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect 30*(7), 829-844. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2006.01.003
- Ganje-Fling, M. A., & McCarthy, P. (1996). Impact of childhood sexual abuse on client spiritual development: Counseling implications. *Journal of Counseling & Development. 74*(3), 253-258. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Grossman, F. K., Sorsoli, L., & Kia-Keating, M. (2006). A gale force wind: Meaning making by male survivors of childhood sexual abuse, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 76*(4), 434-443. doi: 10.1037/0002-9432.76.4.434
- Jacobsen, B. (2006). The life crisis in an existential perspective: Can trauma and crisis be seen as an aid in personal development. *Journal of Existential Analysis, 17*(1), 39-53.
- Jenmorri, K. (2006). Of rainbows and tears: Exploring hope and despair in trauma therapy. *Child and Youth Care Forum, 35*(1), 41-55. doi: 10.1007/s10566-005-9002-7
- Kasser, T., & Sheldon, K. M. (2004). Nonbecoming, alienated becoming, and authentic becoming: A goal-based approach. In J. Greenberg, S. Koole, & T. Pyszczynski (Eds.), *Experimental existential psychology* (pp. 480-491). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Kearney-Cooke, A., & Striegel-Moore, R. H. (1996). Treatment of childhood sexual abuse in anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa: A feminist psychodynamic approach. In M. Schwartz & L. Cohn (Eds.), *Sexual abuse and eating disorders* (pp. 155 – 187). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Koltz-Flitter, J. M., Elhai, J. D., & Gold, S. N. (2003). MMPI-2 F scale elevations in adult victims of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 16*(3), 269-274. doi: 10.1023/A:1023700208696
- Liang, B., Williams, L. M., & Siegel, J. A. (2006). Relational outcomes of childhood sexual trauma in female survivors. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 21*(1), 42-57. doi: 10.1177/0886260505281603

- Lowenthal, B. (1996). Education implications of child abuse. *Intervention in School & Clinic*, 32(1), 21-26. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Lundqvist G., Svedin, C. G., & Hansson, K. (2004). Childhood sexual abuse: Women's health when starting in group therapy. *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry*, 58(1), 25-32. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- May, R. (1983). *The discovery of being: Writings in existential psychology*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Murray-Swank, N. A. (2004, December). *Integrating spirituality in trauma treatment*. Research presentations at Loyola College in Maryland, Columbia, Maryland.
- Murray-Swank, N. A., & Pargament, K. I. (2005). God, where are you? Evaluating a spiritually-integrated intervention for sexual abuse. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 8(3),191-203. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Murthi, M., Servaty-Seib, H. L., & Elliott, A. N. (2006). Childhood sexual abuse and multiple dimensions of self-concept. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 21(8), 982-999. doi: 10.1177/0886260506290288
- The Norma J. Morris Center. (1995). *Survivor to thriver. Manual and workbook for adult survivors of child abuse who want to move-on with life*. San Francisco, CA: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.ascasupport.org/\\_downloads/survivor\\_to\\_thrivers.pdf](http://www.ascasupport.org/_downloads/survivor_to_thrivers.pdf)
- O'Dougherty-Wright, M., Crawford, E., & Sebastian, K. (2007). Positive resolution of childhood sexual abuse experiences: The role of coping, benefit-finding and meaning-making. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22(7), 597-608. doi: 10.1007/s10896-007-9111-1
- Owens, G. P., & Chard, K. M. (2001). Cognitive distortions among women reporting childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 16(2), 178-191. doi: 10.1177/088626001016002006
- Oz, S. (2001). When the wife was sexually abused as a child: Marital relations before and during her therapy for abuse. *Sexual & Relationship Therapy*, 16(3), 287-298. doi:10.1080/14681990120064540
- Pereda, N., Guilera, G., Forns, M., & Gomez-Benito, J. (2009). The prevalence of child sexual abuse in community and student samples: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29, 328-338. doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2009.02.007
- Phillips, A., & Daniluk, J. C. (2004). Beyond survivor: How childhood sexual abuse informs the identity of adult women at the end of the therapeutic process. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 82(2), 177-184. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Polusny, M. A., & Follette, V. M. (1995). Long-term correlates of child sexual abuse: Theory and review of the empirical literature. *Applied & Preventive Psychology*, 4(3), 148-166. doi:10.1016/S0962-1849(05)80055-1
- Rahm, G. B., Renck, B., & Ringsberg, K. (2006). 'Disgust, disgust beyond description' – Shame cues to detect shame in disguise, in interviews with women who were sexually

- abused during childhood. *Journal of Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing*, 13(1), 100-109. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2850.2006.00927.x
- Scannapieco, M., & Connell-Carrick, K. (2005). Understanding child maltreatment: An ecological and developmental perspective. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Scheidlinger, S. (2004). Group psychotherapy and related helping groups today: An overview. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 58(3), 265-280. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Schulenberg, S. C., Hutzell, R. R., Nassif, C., & Rogina, J. M. (2008). Logotherapy for clinical practice. *Psychotherapy Theory, Research, Practice Training*, 45(4), 447-463. doi:10.1037/a0014331
- Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (2004). Posttraumatic growth: Conceptual foundations and empirical evidence. *Psychological Inquiry*, 15(1), 1-15. doi: 10.1207/s15327965pli1501\_01
- van Deurzen, E. (2002). *Existential counseling and psychotherapy in practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Vande Kamp, H. (2009). Overcoming contradiction in the four-dimensional dialectic of action. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 29(2), 85-90. doi:10.1037/a0016928
- Vontress, C. E. (1979). Cross-cultural counseling: An existential approach. *The Personnel & Guidance Journal*, 58(2), 117-122. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Walsh, K., Blaustein, M., Knight, W. G., Spinazzola, J., & Van der Kolk, B. A. (2007). Resiliency factors in the relation between childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual assault in college-age women. *Journal of Sexual Abuse*, 16(1), 1-17. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Whiffen, V., Judd, M. E., & Aube, J. A. (1999). Intimate relationships moderated the association between childhood sexual abuse and depression. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 14(9), 940-954. doi: 10.1177/088626099014009002
- Wilken, T. R. (2009). Adult survivors of child sexual abuse. Retrieved from Public Health Agency of Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence website: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/nfcv-cnivf/publications/nfntsxagrsexadult-eng.php>
- Wolfsdorf, B. A., & Zlotnick, C. (2001). Affect management in group therapy for women with posttraumatic stress disorder and histories of childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 57(2), 169-181. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Yalom, I. D. (1980). *Existential Psychotherapy*. United States: HarperCollins Publishers
- Yalom, I. D. (1989). *Love's Executioner*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.



# Increasing Counselor Self-Awareness: The Role of Cognitive Complexity and Metacognition in Counselor Training Programs

R. Tyle Wilkinson, Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, Counseling/School Psychology, Auburn University.

## Abstract

The counseling profession is quite unique. It is a profession that requires practitioners to employ interventions beyond learned knowledge or acquired skills. Counselors are also required to incorporate self into their counseling practice, a task not easily accomplished. Counselor educators have the difficult role of training individuals to become competent in the profession of counseling. In fact, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2009) states competent professionals are individuals who have mastered the knowledge and the skills to practice effectively *and* who have developed a professional identity. The purpose of this article is to review literature evaluating the development of cognitive complexity and metacognition as a way to increase self-awareness, and ultimately competency, with counselors in training.

## Increasing Counselor Self-Awareness: The Role of Cognitive Complexity and Metacognition in Counselor Training Programs

A developed professional identity implies that an individual is able to practice with integrity, within specified ethical guidelines, and with a comprehensive understanding of clients and presenting problems. These elements of professional competence require counselors to be self-aware. Put simply, a self-aware counselor is one who practices professionally and competently; this counselor “demonstrates the ability to recognize his or her own limitations and to seek supervision or refer clients when appropriate” (CACREP, 2009, p. 32). CACREP (2009) makes clear that competent, professional counselors are self-aware. Furthermore, many proposed models of counselor development hold that increasing self-awareness is a necessary task in becoming a master counselor (Hogan, 1964; Stoltenberg, 1981; Borders, 1990). As students are expected to monitor their own limitations and decide how to apply appropriate counseling interventions in specific situations, counselor educators are expected to identify and to help cultivate self-awareness in their students.

Hansen (2009) defined four conditions for establishing the construct of self-awareness. These are: (a) the self must exist, (b) the self must be available for introspection, (c) the self must have an enduring essence, and (d) the self must be able to be represented by language. These existential conditions presuppose that certain higher-order capacities exist within a person that allow an individual to self-monitor thoughts and actions. Two of these capacities will be discussed in this article: metacognition and cognitive complexity. An understanding of these processes will assist counselor educators in developing student self-awareness.

## Metacognition

Metacognition is the process by which a person thinks about thinking (Gredler, 2009). Research indicates that higher levels of metacognition lead to a greater ability to problem-solve (Gredler, 2009; Holder, Whetstone, & Sheinker, 2008; Swanson, 1990) and an increased capacity for developing goals (Gredler, 2009; Holder et al., 2008). Two components of metacognition are usually identified as important: a knowledge about and an awareness of one's thinking and knowledge of when and where to use metacognitive strategies (Gredler, 2009). It is important for counselors to be aware of their metacognitions and, perhaps more importantly, to know how to appropriately utilize that metacognitive information in the form of appropriate counseling interventions.

Prior knowledge of a circumstance or an experience assists with determining how to address novel situations (Gredler, 2009). Many counseling students state discomfort and anxiety regarding the actual practice of working with clients (Jordan & Kelly, 2004). However, "when faced with life situations that cannot be solved by prior knowledge or automatic responses, a thinking person activates metacognitive behavior" (Holder et al., 2008). Counseling situations can be complex, problematic, and puzzling (Schön, 1982). Counselors need to harness metacognitive processes to frame clients' idiosyncracies. Counseling students should recognize their metacognitions as valuable sources of information. For example, metacognitive strategies can be appropriately utilized in counseling sessions through here-and-now processing (Yalom, 1980; Schneider, 2008) and recognition of countertransference (McWilliams, 1994).

Holder et al. (2008) stated that teaching a person a set of skills is of little value unless that individual knows how to appropriately apply the skills. A person with well-developed metacognitive skills demonstrates the ability to self-monitor and to self-direct behavior (Holder et al., 2008). Furthermore, these authors found that metacognitive strategies increase the ability to generalize skills across situations and that metacognition can enhance goal setting. Goal setting behavior helps counselors direct their clients' attention, provide motivation, and encourage different ways of relating to the world (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). This is particularly relevant for the supervision process. If students have learned skills without metacognitive strategies, then those students will have difficulty conceptualizing various presenting client concerns. It is impossible to prepare future counselors regarding every possible problem with which clients may present (Schön, 1982). Therefore, it is imperative for counselor educators to help students refine metacognitive skills. Swanson (1990) found that students with stronger metacognitive skills performed better in exhibiting problem solving skills regardless of overall level of aptitude. In this study, even individuals with low overall aptitude/high metacognition outperformed individuals with higher levels of aptitude. It seems that an ability to self-monitor one's behavior can assist students in appropriately utilizing under-developed skills. Counseling students must develop the skills to apply appropriate, comprehensive, effective strategies with their clients (CACREP, 2009).

Holder et al. (2009) recommended students utilize self-directed strategies for increasing metacognition. Student-led strategies include self-questioning to promote metacognition. These authors recommend that students learn to direct, monitor, evaluate, and correct what they know about any given situation. In essence, metacognition allows counselors to reflect on counseling interventions while they are being implemented and to evaluate on the efficacy of the interventions after they were implemented (Schön, 1982). Counselors should be able to answer the question "Do I know how to fix the strategy if it is not working?"

Counselors need to understand that the counseling process requires patience and flexibility regarding the information that they are receiving, both verbally and nonverbally, from their client. Counselors should integrate any new information received with what they have already learned from their clients. Supervisors can assist in the development of the students' metacognitive skills by asking probing questions that enhance the students' self-evaluating. Additionally, supervisors should monitor the students' level of confidence with their metacognition. How well do the students trust what they are telling themselves?

### **Cognitive Complexity**

Closely related to metacognition is the concept of cognitive complexity. In the last twenty years, cognitive complexity has been identified as an important component of counselor training (Choate & Granello, 2006). Cognitive complexity is one's ability to assimilate, integrate, and use a variety of perspectives and a broad amount of information in developing understanding of a topic (Granello, 2010). Cognitively complex counselors utilize comprehensive client conceptualization (Borders, 1989), remain open-minded, are more flexible, practice empathetic communication, exhibit multicultural social desirability (Wendler & Nilsson, 2009), maintain a process-oriented approach regarding the counseling relationship, self-monitor, and are self-aware (Granello, 2010).

Cognitive complexity theories suggest that counselors utilize training and experiences to create conceptual templates to describe what they observe (Welfare & Borders, 2010). A cognitively complex counselor recognizes a variety of pertinent characteristics about the client. Clinical cases that are vague and contradictory can be understood and conceptualized by cognitively complex counselors (Granello, 2010; Welfare & Borders, 2010). Moreover, counselors with low levels of cognitive complexity view clients more superficially. While counselors with low levels of cognitive complexity tend to use more dichotomous, simplistic features when making impressions about the client, cognitively complex counselors work from a more comprehensive understanding of the client and are thus more effective in their clinical work (Welfare & Borders, 2010).

Granello (2001) encouraged educators to utilize Bloom's Taxonomy as an educational and assessment tool in determining an individual's level of cognitive complexity. Granello (2001) utilized Bloom's six stages—Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation—to develop graduate student writing abilities. Determining which stage a student falls within based upon the quality of an integrative literature review, Granello (2001) was able to make necessary educational interventions to assist the student toward a higher stage of cognitive processing. The same processes apply in a counseling session; the integration of language is no longer from words on paper but through interactions with a human being. The student's ability to operate at Bloom's higher levels of cognitive processes will lead to a more thorough understanding of the client and a comprehensive treatment approach.

Many students' levels of cognitive complexity will increase naturally after they have completed the internship sequence of their counseling training programs (Brendel, Kolbert, & Foster, 2002). Brendel et al. (2002) found that forming counseling skills and incorporating empathetic communication facilitates the development of cognitive complexity organically. Furthermore, other studies (Granello, 2010; Welfare & Borders, 2010) have shown that cognitive complexity continues to develop well after one's graduation. These studies indicate that, compared with other factors, counseling experience contains the most power in predicting an individual's level of cognitive complexity

(Granello, 2010; Welfare & Borders, 2010). It seems that deliberately assisting counseling students to develop these skills to increase self-awareness will inadvertently add years of “experience” to their counseling abilities.

Granello (2010) compared years of counseling experience with William Perry’s epistemological model (Perry, 1970). Perry’s (1970) model groups individuals’ perceptions about the world of knowledge into categories. These categories, used by Granello (2010) to measure counselors’ levels of cognitive complexity, include: (a) dualistic, (b) multiplistic, (c) relativistic, and (d) committed relativistic. The dualistic thinking category is related to low levels of cognitive complexity. This category is characterized by simplistic, dichotomous thinking structures (Granello, 2010). The multiplistic thinking category moves from an either-or structure of understanding towards attributes of uncertainty; whereas a counselor in the dualistic category holds to unquestioned, absolute truths (Perry, 1970), the multiplistic counselor becomes overwhelmed by data and abandons the search for right answers (Granello, 2010). The next category is relativistic thinking, which features contextual knowledge where decisions are made utilizing the best information. These counselors “have the ability to engage in metacognition, which allows them to have a critical inner voice to engage in reasoned self-reflection” (Granello, 2010, p. 93). This highlights the relationships between metacognition and cognitive complexity as potentially being two sides of the same coin. Granello (2010) discussed the last stage, committed relativistic thinking, as being merely theoretical in nature as very few individuals move past the relativistic stage. In Granello’s (2010) study counselors hit two critical developmental shifts regarding counselor complexity. The first occurs at approximately 5 to 10 years of experience. It should be noted that Granello (2010) started counting years of experience with the internship year; thus, the shift for some would occur shortly after obtaining full licensure. Additionally, Granello (2010) considered practicing in the profession in any capacity (practice, supervision, counselor educator, or administrator) as counseling experience. At 5 to 10 years of experience, counselors were more likely to be at an early multiplistic stage of development (Granello, 2010). The next shift occurred with 10 or more years of experience. At this point counselors were more likely to be at a late multiplistic stage or an early relativistic stage of development (Granello, 2010). The research indicates that the counseling profession is a lifelong journey that starts at the beginning of the counselor’s graduate training program and continues throughout his or her career (Brendel, Kolbert, & Foster, 2002; Granello, 2010).

Cognitive complexity will develop during and after graduate training (Fong, Borders, Ethington, & Pitts, 1997; Granello, 2002; Granello, 2010). However, if graduates of counseling programs are expected to holistically conceptualize (CACREP, 2009) and to understand multiple, complex, and even paradoxical aspects of the clients, then it is critical that counselor educators do not simply allow cognitive complexity to develop naturally over time. Counselor educators must intentionally be aware of these conceptualization skills. Additionally, the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2005) makes it clear that the “primary responsibility of counselors is to respect the dignity and to *promote the welfare of clients*” (p. A.1.a, emphasis added). Again, to fully promote an individual’s welfare counselors must be able to conceptualize that person’s idiosyncratic way of interacting in the world.

There is little research that discusses specific intervention techniques that will increase cognitive complexity. One of the only strategies that appear frequently in the literature is known as Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR; Kagan, 1976, 1980). IPR was developed by

Norman Kagan as an intervention to use during supervision (Cashwell, 1994). This process is designed to help supervisees' become more aware of the dynamics of the counselor/client relationship, move towards a greater understanding of the client, and develop an increased awareness of the supervisees' own limitations inhibiting greater understanding of the client (Borders & Brown, 2005; Cashwell, 1994). Through this process supervisors can help facilitate cognitive complexity development by utilizing out-loud thinking (Borders, 1989; Borders & Brown, 2005). This strategy requires supervisors to review the supervisees' counseling tapes prior to the session (Cashwell, 1994) or listen to the tapes during session (Borders, 1989). Supervisees are encouraged to utilize out-loud discussions regarding portions of the tape that are deemed important. The supervisees should speak about their thoughts and feelings that were occurring *during that time* of the counseling session (Cashwell, 1994). Supervisors help the supervisees focus on the relational dynamics allowing for the supervisees to reach their own resolution (Cashwell, 1994). This strategy will help the supervisees make explicit the implicit thus moving towards greater cognitive complexity.

Some authors have attempted to formulate specific training models to enhance the development of cognitive complexity within a graduate counseling program (Little, Packman, Smaby, & Maddux, 2005). The Skilled Counselor Training Model (SCTM; Smaby, Maddux, Torres-Rivera, & Zimmik, 1999) is a stage model that systematically teaches mastery of counseling skills while promoting accurate self-assessment of those skills (Little et al., 2005). This model seems to be progressive with each stage building upon the other. The first stage of SCTM (Smaby et al., 1999) is the exploring stage where the trainee works with simulated clients to learn, perform, and monitor skills. The counseling student then begins to conceptualize affective and behavioral blocks that inhibit problem solving in the understanding stage. It is also during this stage that the student is encouraged to understand the importance and the impact of the counseling relationship. During the acting stage, the trainee begins to place more of an emphasis on implementing plans of action based upon information gathered in earlier stages and based upon personal impressions of the student. Thus, it seems that students are encouraged to develop counseling skills alongside the development of metacognition, which leads to an increase in cognitive complexity. In fact, Little et al. (2005) compared two counseling theory courses in which one received SCTM training. The results of the study indicated that the SCTM students scored higher on the RCQ, a two-question measure of cognitive complexity. Though the authors noted the control group was one half the size of the experimental group and the RCQ is not very reliable to cognitive complexity changes over a brief time, it seems that a structured approach that places a focus on helping students become comfortable with metacognitive self-assessment can lead to higher levels of cognitive complexity.

Unfortunately, students are at various stages of their cognitive development, which can make the process of refining cognitive complexity difficult (Choate & Granello, 2006). Though creating a training model that is intended to work for all students seems like a good idea, in practice it can be very difficult, especially with the field of counseling. Choate & Granello (2006) identified the faculty adviser as having the potential to be a critical component of the student's development of cognitive complexity.

"The faculty adviser is the one consistent person during a student's enrollment who can monitor that student's development across the program; who can tailor advising methods to match the developmental needs of an advisee; and who can interact with

other program faculty...to ensure the optimal learning environment for that student" (Choate & Granello, 2006, p. 117).

Advisers who move away from prescriptive approaches and toward developmental approaches to supervision can encourage self-reflection and self-awareness in the student (Choate & Granello, 2006). Choate and Granello (2006) proposed a developmental model for advising across the counseling program that provides a framework for advisors to intervene beyond merely developing a plan of study to engaging with the student in a developmentally appropriate way that helps create confidence, cognitive development, and self-awareness. Thus, research indicates that institutions should be mindful of the need to develop counseling programs that promote and develop cognitive complexity on the broad level and on the individual level. Counselor educators need to be aware of importance of encouraging cognitive development during classes, advisory meetings, and supervision sessions.

Counselors with high levels of cognitive complexity and a greater tendency toward metacognitive skills are more likely to consider comprehensive conceptualizations of that client and intervene appropriately (Gredler, 2009; Holder et al., 2008). One strategy that supervisors and educators can continue to utilize that seems to integrate the use of metacognition and cognitive complexity is treatment planning. Implementing treatment plans is an integral part of the students' training and the clinical process (Mears, 2009). Understanding the cognitive processes that are occurring within the supervisee as it relates to treatment planning can lead to its utilization as a developmental tool for the supervisee.

Supervisees need to conceptualize clients in ways that are clear and succinct. Metacognition and cognitive complexity influence client conceptualization and goal direction. Well-developed treatment plans require counselors to utilize complex conceptualizations and to then be aware of the metacognitions that flow from those conceptualizations. It then seems that that practice of treatment planning leads to an increased ability to utilize metacognitive and cognitive complex processes. Further, treatment plans require counselors to develop the interventions that will act as means to the treatment goal. Supervisors can utilize some of the concepts of IPR to pull out the supervisees' cognitions. Students need to be able to understand how they are arriving at their plans for treatment (cognitive complexity) and then be able to evaluate these decisions (metacognition). This increase of self-awareness seemingly would create more confidence and a greater ability to self-evaluate.

### **Discussion**

CACREP (2009) expects counseling training programs to produce graduates who can exhibit a wide range of skills and have a broad base of knowledge. Counselors who meet the standards set forth by CACREP (2009) are required to consider a myriad of matters when working with clients, such as: (a) ethical and legal issues, (b) diagnostic impressions and criteria, (c) the client's ecology, (d) public mental health policy, (e) effective treatment approaches, (f) need for referral, (g) possible suicidality, (h) multicultural influences, (i) assessment skills, (j) interpersonal techniques, (k) record-keeping standards, (l) community resources, (m) awareness of own feelings, (n) biases and judgments, (o) self-care, and (p) the relationships between the counselor and the client. Counselors may be skilled in each of these areas; however, it is important for the counselors to be aware of their reasoning for choosing a particular intervention with any client (Holder, Whetstone, & Sheinker, 1998).

Counselor educators have an ethical and professional responsibility to encourage these skills in their students. More research is needed in this area to further define the constructs of metacognition and cognitive complexity. Much of the research on cognitive complexity and metacognition addressed from a developmental perspective; research is needed to elaborate on effective strategies that will harness the development of these skills during and after a counseling training program. Counselor educators and counseling training programs should be intentional in assessing and increasing cognitive development of students in their counseling training programs. This will lead to the development of counselors who are self-aware, self-monitoring, competent, comprehensive, and professional in their future practice.

### References

- American Counseling Association (2005). *ACA Code of Ethics*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Borders, L. D. (1989). Developmental cognitions of first practicum supervisees. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 36*, 163-169.
- Borders, L. D. (1990). Developmental changes during supervisees' first practicum. *The Clinical Supervisor, 8*(2), 157-167.
- Borders, L. D., & Brown, L. L. (2005). *The New Handbook on Counseling Supervision*. Lahaska Press: Mahwah, New Jersey.
- Brendel, J. M., Kolbert, J. B., & Foster, V. A. (2002). Promoting student cognitive development. *Journal of Adult Development, 9*(3), 217-227.
- Cashwell, C. S. (1994). Interpersonal Process Recall. *ERIC clearinghouse on counseling and student services*. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED372342.pdf>
- Chaote, L. H., & Granello, D. H. (2006). Promoting student cognitive development in counselor preparation: A proposed expanded role for faculty advisors. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 46*, 116-130.
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2009). *CACREP 2009 Standards*. Retrieved from [http://www.cacrep.org/doc/2009 standards with a cover.pdf](http://www.cacrep.org/doc/2009%20standards%20with%20a%20cover.pdf)
- Fong, M. L., Borders, L., Ethington, C. A., & Pitts, J. H. (1997). Becoming a counselor: A longitudinal study of student cognitive development. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 37*(2), 100-114.
- Granello, D. H. (2001). Promoting cognitive complexity in graduate writing: Using Bloom's Taxonomy as a pedagogical tool. *Journal of Counselor Education and Supervision, 40*, 292-307.
- Granello, D. H. (2002). Assessing the cognitive development of counseling students: Changes in epistemological assumptions. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 41*(4), 279-293.
- Granello, D. H. (2010). Cognitive complexity among practicing counselors: How thinking changes with experience. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 88*, 92-100.

- Gredler, M. E. (2009). Cognitive perspectives: II. Metacognition and problems solving. In *Learning and Instruction: Theory Into Practice (6<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. Merrill: Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Hansen, J. T. (2009). Self-awareness revisited: Reconsidering a core value of the counseling profession. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 87*, 186-193.
- Hogan, R. A. (1964). Issues and approaches in supervision. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice, 1(3)*, 139-141.
- Holder, C., Whetstone, P., & Sheinker, J. (2008). When research meets practice: Using metacognitive strategies to teach social skills. *The International Journal of Learning, 15(8)*, 205-212.
- Jordan, K., & Kelly, W. E. (2004). Beginning practicum students' worries: A qualitative investigation. *Counseling and Clinical Psychology Journal, 1(2)*, 100-105.
- Kagan, N. (1976). *Influencing human interaction*. Mason, MI: Mason Media.
- Kagan, N. (1980). Influencing human interaction—eighteen years with IPR. In A. K. Hess (Ed.), *Psychotherapy supervision: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 262-286). New York: Wiley.
- Little, C., Packmon, 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.
- Locke, E. A., Shaw, K. N., Saari, L. M., & Latham, G. P. (1981). Goal setting and task performance: 1969-1980. *Psychological Bulletin, 90*, 125-152.
- McWilliams, N. (1994). *Psychoanalytic diagnosis*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Mears, G. (2009). How to develop treatment plans. In I. Marini, & M. A. Stebnicki (Eds.), *The professional counselor's desk reference* (pp. 145-153). New York: Spring Publishing.
- Perry, W. G., Jr. (1970). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Schneider, K. J. (ED)(2008). *Existential-integrative psychotherapy*. New York: Routledge.
- Schön, D. A. (1982). *The reflective practitioner*. New York: Basic Books.
- Smaby, M. H., Maddux, C. D., Torres-Rivera, E., & Zimmick, R. (1999). A study of the effects of a skills-based versus a conventional groups counseling training program. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 24*, 152-163.
- Stoltenberg, C. (1981). Approaching supervision from a developmental perspective: The counselor complexity model. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 28*, 59-65.
- Swanson, H. L. (1990). Influence of metacognitive knowledge and aptitude on problem solving. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 82(2)*, 306-314.
- Welfare, L. E., & Borders, D. (2010). Counselor cognitions: General and domain-specific complexity. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 49*, 162-178.



Wendler, A. M., & Nilsson, J. E. (2009). Universal-diverse orientation, cognitive complexity, and sociopolitical advocacy in counselor trainees. *The Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 37*(1), 28-39.

Yalom, I. (1980). *Existential psychotherapy*. Basic Books.

## The Effects of Student Involvement on Graduate Student Satisfaction: A Pilot Study

Kelsey Farley, M.A.C. candidate of Rehabilitation Counseling, Counselor Education Program, University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Mallory McKee, M.A.C. candidate of Community/Agency Counseling, Counselor Education Program, University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Michael Brooks Ph.D., Counselor Education Program, University of Alabama at Birmingham.

### Abstract

The pilot study discussed in this article investigates the perception of counselor education students' level of involvement and their satisfaction regarding their graduate program experience. It is believed, more involved students are more satisfied. Because there is limited existing data, this study seeks to ignite the conversation and future inquiries surrounding counselor education student fulfillment and contribution.

### **The Effects of Student Involvement on Graduate Student Satisfaction: A Pilot Study**

As students near the end of a school year, there are a number of surveys they are encouraged to take, such as class and professor evaluations, which evaluate their satisfaction levels with their experience in school. This widespread practice shows universities care about student satisfaction, and in fact, many universities promote clubs and organizations as a means to enhance the college experience. Research suggests that studying habits and classroom encounters are bettered when students become involved in programs like on-campus committees, social clubs, and Greek life, just to name a few (Pennington, Zvonkovic, & Wilson, 1989). This study seeks to understand students' perceptions regarding the relationship between student satisfaction and student involvement .

Astin (1984) defined student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 300). Involvement may be solely scholastic, such as devoting considerable energy to studying, spending ample time on campus, or interacting frequently with faculty and other students. Involvement may also be extracurricular, such as actively participating in student organizations. Whatever the type of involvement, it can have a significant impact on the student's college experience.

Campus involvement is considered by many to be an important aspect of college life. On any given campus in the country, one can likely find some sort of involvement fair or student organization exposition as a regular part of yearly events. These events are held to encourage students to become involved in campus clubs, and they are usually run by the students themselves. It is believed these events continue to be important on college campuses because of the positive effects of involvement on student satisfaction (Astin, 1993). Student involvement fairs jumpstart student involvement and likely contributes to student-student interactions and a feeling of community, both of which are important themes when measuring student satisfaction levels.

Further research shows the strong connection between specific involvement activities and satisfaction. Involvement in collegiate athletics was found to have a positive impact on student satisfaction, in addition to increasing the likelihood that students would be more socially active in college (Pascarella & Smart, 1991). Another study on student involvement proved that being a member of a Greek organization significantly impacts student satisfaction in a positive manner (Pennington, Zvonkovic, & Wilson, 1989). One study utilized a senior exit survey to measure satisfaction and characteristics of students who were involved, and the results showed more involved students were more satisfied than less involved students (Matross, 2009). Findings from the study also showed these more involved students were more likely to recommend their respective university to other potential students. The results of all aforementioned studies show a clear connection between involvement and satisfaction at the undergraduate level, but still leave the question of whether graduate student involvement tends to provide the same levels of satisfaction. Could it be shown that counselor education graduate students who are involved in counseling-related extracurricular activities would also be more satisfied with their graduate school programs than non-involved counterparts?

Educators are aware of the importance of finding and defining indicators of graduate student satisfaction, however, the authors have found little research on graduate school involvement and satisfaction specifically. While there is abundant research on how to retain graduate students, little was found on using involvement opportunities as a method of doing so. The authors also found many studies regarding involvement at the undergraduate level, but found research lacking in the involvement for graduate students. Research in this area could help educators and students design and obtain a more fulfilling experience in the graduate school environment. Furthermore, education programs may be able to attract and retain more students. Learning the link between student involvement and graduate school satisfaction could be critical for future program vitality.

Research has shown student involvement is a major contributor to beneficial outcomes of the undergraduate college student experience (Foubert & Grainger, 2006). The purpose of our study was to determine if student involvement would have a positive effect on graduate school satisfaction, particularly in regards to counselor education programs. Recognizing that the current published research discusses undergraduate student involvement and satisfaction, the authors felt it would be best to first conduct a pilot study with the graduate population prior to extensive research. A pilot study would allow the development of an appropriate reliable and valid instrument to capture any relationships and associations between graduate student involvement and satisfaction. For the purpose of this study, active student involvement was defined as participating in 10 or more hours of graduate counseling-related extracurricular activities per semester. The 10 hour minimum was approximated based on the total number of possible extracurricular hours available per semester (20) divided by two. The 20 hours was determined based on the hours of volunteering required by most on campus student organizations. Clubs and organizations that have membership volunteer requirements averaged a 20 hour per semester standard. It was anticipated that the most involved students would also be the most satisfied.

## **Methods**

### *Participants and Sampling*

This pilot project is a descriptive research study using a survey method. The potential population included all of the Master's Counselor Education students in the State of

Alabama, who attended Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) institutions; this yielded approximately 50 eligible students. The researchers chose Alabama programs to participate in the pilot study because of convenience and proximity to their home institution. Of the approximately 50 students who were eligible to participate, fourteen (14) counselor education internship students took part in this study. Twelve counseling students were female and two were male. Internship students were specifically solicited because it was believed such a student would be able to give an accurate account regarding satisfaction throughout their program experience. Students who were not at the internship stage have not experienced the entire program and may be unable to offer a comprehensive opinion of the program.

The distribution of the research survey was handled by the internship coordinators at the various state institutions. As the investigators were not present when the data was collected, it is unknown why the researchers had only 14 responses to the pilot study, with an estimated 50 possible participants. We believe either a number of students chose not to participate, or the institutions themselves did not distribute the surveys. Demographic information on the 14 student participants is presented in Table 1.

### *Instrumentation*

The questionnaire was divided into two main sections. The first section consisted of 12 demographic questions. Participants were asked their age, gender, ethnicity, employment status and GPA. The second section used a 4-point Likert-type scale to ask participants to rate their overall satisfaction on 17 different items regarding involvement. Questions were asked based on the constructs provided in a survey constructed by Yin and Lei (2007). These constructs included: amount of extracurricular involvement in hours per semester, program required involvement, voluntary involvement, satisfaction rates, and attrition rates. Questions and statements were formulated based on these concepts. Students' satisfaction was rated by questioning whether they would recommend their institution to others, and asking students to agree or disagree with the statement "I am satisfied with my graduate school experience". In order to give an accurate picture of the participants' extra-curricular counseling related involvement, the researchers made modifications to a previously used survey instrument. These modifications were also able to provide an accurate picture of the participants' satisfaction level with their graduate school experience, by asking questions directly related to graduate school satisfaction through a forced-answer format. Appropriate permission was elicited and granted to use the instrument with these slight modifications. Each question was re-designed to measure one variable, either involvement or satisfaction. Also, the forced choice statements were in ordered from "Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree," reducing possible responses from 5 to 4. Neutral options were avoided in an effort to obtain the most accurate answer possible. The authors felt the forced choice answers would provide more accurate results as students may feel guilty by being honest. The researchers also did not want the students to assume a position of ambiguity; it is believed the neutral response can lead to this behavior.

To establish validity of the instrument, the authors conducted a review of literature and utilized a panel of experts (Counselor educators and research design experts) to generate items found in this instrument. Because this study is a pilot, it is hoped that the results will help us further refine the instrument for a larger future inquiry. The instrument was reviewed a second time by the panel before being distributed

### *Procedures*

Participants were intern-level Counselor Education graduate students attending CACREP accredited programs in the state of Alabama. The state has eight CACREP accredited programs, all of which were invited to participate in the pilot study. University internship coordinator instructors were mailed participation packets inclusive of an instructor's script, informed consent waivers for all potential students, and surveys. All participants were aware that their surveys were anonymous. All participants were asked to answer the survey with honest reflection of their graduate school satisfaction and extracurricular involvement. Each participating program was coded as belonging to a particular region, so they could be identified later in data comparison. Each school was given a 14-business day deadline to return completed packets in stamped envelopes provided in the participation packets. Professors received follow up e-mails one week prior to the deadline so they could encourage their students' participation. If requested, programs were allowed a deadline extension to ensure participation.

Of the fourteen (14) participants, 78.6% of our participants were female; the remaining 14.3% were male. The majority of the participants were between the ages of 25 and 35 (57.1%), followed by the age ranges 19-25 (28.6), and 50 and older (14.3%). In terms of ethnicity, the majority was Caucasian (92.9%) with a small percentage being African American (7.1%). A majority of the students were part-time (57.1%) compared to full-time (28.6%). Conversely, 42.9% of the participants worked full-time as opposed to 35.7% who were employed part-time; 21.4% were unemployed. Lastly, 80.6% of the participants were members of the counseling honor society, while 19.4% were not.

### Results

The authors hypothesized that the most involved students would also be the most satisfied with their graduate school experience. Specifically in regards to counselor education, it was believed if a student was involved in 10 or more hours of counseling-related extracurricular activities per semester, they would likely be satisfied with their graduate school experience. While the results did not show involved students were dissatisfied with their graduate school experience, the results also did not prove involvement had a positive effect on satisfaction. Due to the low number of participants, results were limited to frequency counts and percentages. The frequency responses were tabulated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 18.0. Descriptive statistics included measurements of means, and percentages were also documented.

In response to a statement about the importance of counseling-related extracurricular activities such as professional networking, 71.4% either agreed or strongly agreed professional networking was the most important benefit of counseling-related extracurricular activities. Close to 80% of participants reported disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that resume building was the most important benefit of counseling-related extracurricular activities. Although these results are not directly related to the hypothesis, they do provide possible insight as to motivation for students participating in the outside classroom activities.

When asked how many hours of extracurricular involvement students participated in each semester, 14.3% reported 0 hours of involvement and 42.9% reported 1 to 5 hours of involvement. The remaining 42.8% reported more than 5 hours of involvement. In terms of graduate school satisfaction, 92.9% stated they were "very satisfied" with their graduate counseling program. Comparing the frequency responses of these two questions show that

while over half of participants reported 5 hours or fewer of extracurricular involvement, over 90% reported being very satisfied.

Our results showed 57.2% of participants had 5 or fewer hours of extracurricular counseling involvement. The researchers believe in future studies, “extra-curricular counseling involvement” should be better explained and include examples such as volunteering at a local crisis center, being an active member of professional organizations, and networking at professional conferences. The explanation would give a clearer idea of what is being asked of the students. The researchers have a feeling a number of students are involved and may not be aware that their activities fit our operational definition.

### **Discussion**

The strongest trend from our results was the reported importance for social networking opportunities among Counselor Education students, with the majority of participants stating they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Many students reported extracurricular involvement was strongly linked to a desire to network socially with other students and professionals in the field. This link was identified as important to students looking for future professional opportunities as well as the need for social relationships among peers and professors; thus networking could elicit satisfaction. The strong interest in making contacts has led us to wonder if professional networking specifically leads to student satisfaction with their graduate school program rather than generic involvement.

The findings from this study bring new information to the literature regarding the perspectives of graduate counseling students on their overall graduate program experience. In terms of instrumentation, significant gains were documented, as there was previously no tool available for assessing programs in this regard. Because of the low number of responses, the research tool used in the study could not be validated.

On a more practical level, the results of this investigation do start a discussion on the factors contributing to student satisfaction and the sacrifices students are willing to make to complete graduate counseling programs. Counselor educators may not always be aware of student demographics such as proximity to campus, familial obligations, and overall happiness that contribute to their satisfaction in school. Counselors may also simply wish to know the various thresholds of happiness of graduate counseling students. It is apparent from this study, some students can be minimally involved, but still be very excited and satisfied with their graduate experience.

There were some limitations related to this study, most of which were inherent in an ex post facto study. A major limitation to this study was the overall statistical analysis and low participant turnout. We, the researchers, were hoping to show causation via strong correlations and factor analysis. However, we did not meet the requirements for conducting such statistics.

Because the study was a pilot study, one of the goals was to validate the instrument. However, there were not enough participants to complete the correlation statistical analysis. Moreover, in relation to the experimental design, such variables like marital status and proximity from the graduate campus were possibly perplexing to the study. Because of the confusion, it is not known if there were participants who had less time to be involved, but remain satisfied with their programs because they have no desire to be involved, or if participants were satisfied with their program, however, simply chose to be uninvolved.

Another limitation was the inability to control confounding variables. Variables such as marital status and proximity from the graduate campus were possible confounds in the study. Due to these variables, it is impossible to know the constraints on time each participant faced, which could keep them from extracurricular activities.

A follow up study is definitely necessary for a number of reasons. In terms of instrumentation, a stronger and larger sample will help in establishing validity and reliability. Also, the larger sample will allow stronger statistical analysis. A multiple regression would be ideal in determining the relationship between student involvement and graduate satisfaction. A factor analysis would be beneficial in determining the factor, which contributes to students being involved.

The follow up study may wish to consider the possible effects of counselor education programs requiring extra-curricular involvement. Forced participation could have the opposite effect on student satisfaction, yet many programs have mandated supplemental program activities. The strong interest in making contacts has lead us to wonder if professional networking specifically leads students being satisfied with their graduate school program rather than generic involvement.

### References

- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25, 297-308.
- Astin, A.W. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Foubert, J.D. & Grainger, L. (2006). Effects of membership in clubs and organizations on the psychosocial development of first-year and senior college students. *NASPA Journal*, 43, 166-182.
- Matross, R. (2009). Student involvement and satisfaction. *Occasional Papers on Undergraduate Education*, 1(1), 1-4.
- Pascarella, E. & Smart, J. (1991). Impact of intercollegiate athletic participation for African American and Caucasian men: Some further evidence. *Journal of College Student Development*, 32(3).
- Pennington, D., Zvonkovic, A., & Wilson, S. (1989). Changes in college satisfaction across an academic term. *Journal of College Student Development* 30(11).
- Yin, D., & Lei, S. A. (2007). Impacts of campus involvement on hospitality student achievement and satisfaction. *Education*, 128(2), 282-293.

# When Values and Ethics Conflict: The Counselor's Role and Responsibility

Glenda R. Elliott, Ph.D., Associate Professor Emerita, Counselor Education Program,  
University of Alabama at Birmingham

## Abstract

Based on the core conditions of client-centered counseling and supported by aspects of psychodynamic, cognitive developmental, and behavioral theories, a perspective is introduced that provides a resolution to the dilemma experienced by counselors and counseling students whose personal values and beliefs conflict with the ethical guidelines of the American Counseling Association.

## Introduction

Recent court cases have highlighted significant issues related to dilemmas faced by counseling students whose personal values are in conflict with ethical guidelines of the American Counseling Association (ACA). Most notable are the cases based on incidents at East Michigan University and Augusta State University where personal values and beliefs related to sexual orientation as held by counselor education students were found to be in conflict with the requirements of the *ACA Code of Ethics* (Shallcross, 2010). The outcome in both cases resulted in the dismissal of one student and the other student's decision to withdraw from the program because she chose not to follow the conditions stipulated by the faculty for remediation.

The issue raised in both cases was addressed in an *Alabama Counseling Association Journal* editorial outlining a specific and relevant list of ways potential conflicts between personal values and ethical requirements can be avoided or minimized in counselor education programs (Tyson, 2010). In response to the expressed hope that these ideas be discussed among counselor educators, this article is offered as a possible contribution to the discussion by means of a suggested perspective for the resolution of conflicts between personal values and ethical guidelines when these conflicts arise for practicing counselors and counselors-in-training.

## Possible Value Conflicts

As indicated in the introduction, the value conflicts highlighted in the Eastern Michigan University and Augusta State University cases involved the students' unwillingness to counsel gay clients because of their personal, religious values opposing homosexuality. While conflicts regarding sexual orientation and gender identity often receive attention, other value conflicts may emerge in the counseling process both for practicing counselors and counselors-in-training; e.g., counseling issues related to termination of pregnancies, euthanasia and the "right to die," sexual relations outside of marriage, counseling offenders, and counseling individuals from cultural and racial backgrounds different from that of the counselor (Consoli, Kim, & Meyer, 2008). In all these situations, counselors who have very strong beliefs and values regarding these issues may experience serious dissonance between their values and beliefs and the requirements of the *ACA Code of Ethics*.



### Relevant Ethical Guidelines: *ACA Code of Ethics*

While several sections of the *ACA Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2005) are relevant to the counselor's role and responsibility in resolving issues related to personal values, the following sections are particularly applicable. Section A.1.a. clearly states: "The primary responsibility of counselors is to respect the dignity and to promote the welfare of clients" (p.4). Regarding the imposition of personal values, Section A.4.b. states: "Counselors are aware of their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and avoid imposing values that are inconsistent with counseling goals. Counselors respect the diversity of clients, trainees, and research participants" (pp.4-5). Adherence to this ethical guideline provides an essential safeguard against the potential abuse of power inherent in the counseling relationship and is necessary if counselors are to be both ethical and therapeutic when engaged in the practice of counseling (Elliott, 2003). In reference to counselor competence, Section C.2.a. asserts: "Counselors practice only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, state and national professional credentials, and appropriate professional experience. Counselors gain knowledge, personal awareness, sensitivity, and skills pertinent to working with a diverse client population" (p.9). In a relevant article by Shallcross (2010) noted ethicist David Kaplan commented on the issue of appropriate referral when the question of referral relates to personal values: "...counselors refer on the basis of competency, not their own values." He further stated that "...meeting our clients' needs is more important than meeting our own needs" (p.34).

Particularly germane to the discussion of the role and responsibility of counselors is the statement on nondiscrimination in Section C.5.: "Counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination based on age, culture, disability, ethnicity, race religion/spirituality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status/partnership, language preference, socioeconomic status, or any basis proscribed by law. Counselors do not discriminate against clients, students, employees, supervisees, or research participants in a manner that has a negative impact on these persons" (p.10).

### Suggested Solutions to Value Conflicts

In response to the value conflicts experienced by counselors-in-training as well as practicing counselors, some ethicists in the field of counseling have suggested that counselors who are unwilling to follow the ethical guidelines should consider leaving the counseling profession or practice in a setting that does not require adherence to the ethical guidelines of licensure boards and professional counseling associations (Hermann & Herlihy, 2006; Remley & Herlihy, 2007). As a result of their research on homonegativity among members of the Alabama Counseling Association, Satcher and Leggett (2006) also concluded that counselors who have negative attitudes toward homosexuality should consider not engaging in the practice of counseling.

In states that require licensure only for counselors in private practice, an alternative solution exists to leaving the counseling profession as a means of resolving value conflicts. For example, in Alabama, counselors who work in nonprofit agencies and institutions are exempt from the licensure requirement (W. Cox, personal communication, September 20, 2011). While a nonprofit agency or institution may require licensure as a condition of employment, the state does not require licensure in these cases. Thus, in states similar to Alabama, counselors who are unwilling to follow the *ACA Code of Ethics* or the ethical codes of their respective licensure boards can forego licensure and membership in the respective

state branches of the ACA. These counselors can choose to practice in nonprofit agencies or institutions whose values are consistent with the values of the counselors.

It is reasonable to assume that while the foregoing resolutions to value conflicts are possible, for many counselors it is unlikely that either resolution is acceptable. There remain counselors-in-training and practicing counselors who have personal values and beliefs in conflict with the *ACA Code of Ethics* yet who choose to complete their degrees in counseling and seek to be licensed and to hold membership in the ACA. These counselors need a perspective for the resolution of the conflict between their personal values and beliefs and ethical requirements. The following perspective is suggested as a means of meeting this need.

### **Proposed Perspective**

All counselors and particularly those who experience a conflict between personal values and ethical guidelines are encouraged, and some would say required, to ground their practice of counseling on the core conditions of the therapeutic process identified with the client-centered approach to counseling (Raskin & Rogers, 2000; Rogers, 1957). It is the position of this author that these conditions – unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence – provide a perspective that holds the potential for the resolution of the conflict that occurs when personal values are at odds with relevant ethical guidelines. The importance and the efficacy of the client-centered approach continue to be emphasized in the field of counseling and are especially relevant when counselors face controversial issues in the practice of counseling (American Psychological Association, 2009; Clark, 2010; Elliott, 2003; Lemoire & Chen, 2005).

The proposed perspective does require counselors to embrace fully the role and responsibility of the professional counselor when engaged in the practice of counseling, accepting the responsibility to follow ethical guidelines as conscientiously as possible. Thus, counselors are committed to respecting all clients, promoting their welfare, and not imposing their personal values on clients (ACA, 2005). Nevertheless, counselors also have the right as citizens to believe whatever they choose to believe and to adhere to whatever values they as citizens have chosen.

In contrast to rights as a citizen, when a person is enacting the role of a counselor in the practice of counseling, the counselor is required to follow the ethical guidelines even if the guidelines conflict with personally held beliefs and values. Therefore, in respecting a client, the counselor strives to extend unconditional positive regard and acceptance of the client as a person deserving of respect while at the same time responding with empathy as the counselor attempts to understand what the client is experiencing from the client's frame of reference. For counselors whose personal beliefs and values may conflict with their role and function as a professional counselor, this perspective is offered, based on the core conditions of the client-centered approach to counseling and supported by aspects of psychodynamic, cognitive developmental, and behavioral psychology theories.

#### *Psychodynamic*

A component of the psychodynamic theory of Carl Jung (Wilmer, 1987) suggested a possible standpoint for those counselors who experience conflict between personally held values and the ethical guidelines. This standpoint requires an acceptance of the concept of "both/and" rather than "either/or" as a view of the reality of the counselor's conflict

between ethical guidelines and personal beliefs and values. That is, the counselor chooses not to surrender either reality but accepts the reality of both the counselor's personal values and beliefs as well as the counselor's obligation to follow the ethical guidelines.

By accepting both realities, the counselor is willing to experience the resulting tension between the "either/or" conflicting realities until a "both/and" standpoint and resolution can be achieved which transcends the opposing realities without denying either one of them (Wilmer, 1987). This approach requires not only a willingness to endure the tension between the opposing realities but it also requires moral courage in honestly facing the conflict (Kidder, 2006) as well as a willingness subsequently to seek a resolution. The possibility of achieving this standpoint is supported by the following aspect of cognitive developmental theory.

#### *Cognitive Developmental*

In striving to achieve the standpoint of "both/and" the role of a supervisor or consultant is very helpful if not essential. The kind of supervision or consultation that can lead to a resolution of the conflict requires a supervisor or consultant who understands the dynamics of the conflict, follows an accepted, ethical decision-making process, and, very importantly provides the core conditions of the client-centered approach in the supervision or consultation process. Such supervision or consultation provides the needed opportunity for self-exploration and increased self-awareness of the impact of counselor's own beliefs on the counseling process (Balkin, Schlosser, & Levitt, 2009). In a sense, the supervisor or consultant serves as a mentor fostering the professional development of the counselor-in-training or practicing counselor.

What is possible in a supervision or consultation process grounded in the core conditions is that eventually the counselor is able to move to a level of moral reasoning that provides a resolution to the dissonance experienced in the conflict (Elliott, 1986; Hoffman, 2000; Kohlberg, 1975). The counselor develops what Hoffman describes as an "empathic morality" which incorporates the moral principles of justice and care, values inherent in the ethical guidelines. The counselor's personal beliefs and values may or may not be modified in this process, but what is gained is a clarification of the role and responsibility of the counselor. This important clarification results in a "both/and" standpoint from which the counselor can engage ethically in the practice of counseling with congruence and comfort. From the "both/and" standpoint or perspective the counselor can still retain both personal beliefs and values while not imposing those beliefs and values on clients. Thus, the counselor is able to follow the ethical guidelines when enacting the role of the counselor in the practice of counseling.

An example of a supervision process that resulted in the resolution of an "either/or" conflict and led to a "both/and" solution is found in the case of a school counseling supervisee who found herself working with a lesbian student during internship (Elliott, 2005). The student's presenting problem was her anxiety about her "coming out" process and her pain over the taunting episodes she had experienced at school. The supervisee described herself as conservative in her religious beliefs about homosexuality. However, during supervision, the supervisor encouraged her to explore her ethical responsibility not to discriminate and not to impose her own personal value system on the student. Subsequently, she was able to keep a boundary between her professional obligations and her personal belief system by focusing on and being empathic with the student's pain and struggle. By maintaining an affective focus and responding to the emotional content of the student's issues and

concerns, the supervisee was able to address the student's needs successfully (C. Daughhetee, personal communication, April 12, 2005). What is significant in this kind of supervision process is the willingness of the counselor to accept the supervisor's encouragement to focus on being empathic. Subsequently, the counselor discovers in the process of being empathic he or she is not being judgmental or attempting to impose his or her personal values and beliefs.

### *Behavioral Psychology*

Support for the incompatibility of imposing one's personal values and simultaneously being empathic is suggested by the technique of systematic desensitization found in behavioral psychology. This technique is based on the incompatibility of muscle relaxation with the response of anxiety (VanderBos, 2007). With this technique, a client or patient learns to relax when faced with an object, event, or situation that previously elicited fear and anxiety. Just as one cannot be relaxed and anxious at the same time, this author suggests as a corollary it is cognitively impossible for a counselor to be judgmental and empathic at the same time. In genuinely seeking to be empathic, the counselor will not attempt to impose his or her personal values on the client and thus will be more likely to follow ethical guidelines.

### **The Resolution of the Conflict**

As the counselor attains an emerging perspective grounded in the core conditions of the client-centered approach, the counselor comes to trust his or her commitment to the validity, usefulness, and interdependence of unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence. Regarding the interdependence of the core conditions, the counselor discovers that unconditional positive regard and empathy are inseparable. Furthermore, the counselor recognizes the third core condition, congruence or genuineness, is also inseparable from the other two conditions and is essential to the capacity to extend unconditional positive regard and empathy. That is, if the counselor is not genuine in the desire to be accepting of and empathic toward the client, the counselor's lack of authenticity will be apparent and will prevent the counselor from communicating the conditions of unconditional positive regard and empathy and thus will inhibit the counselor's ability to be therapeutic as well as ethical (Elliott, 2003).

### **Conclusion**

When counselors and counselors-in-training experience conflict between their personal values and beliefs and the requirements of ethical guidelines, they are faced with three ethically sound choices. They can choose not to engage in the practice of counseling; they can practice in a setting that does not require licensure and adherence to a code of ethics for licensed professional counselors; or, by following the proposed "both/and" perspective, they can find an acceptable way to resolve the conflict. From this third perspective, counselors are able to retain their personal values, follow the ethical guidelines, and fulfill the role and function of a professional counselor when engaged in the practice of counseling. Significant to the third choice is the role of a supervisor or consultant, serving also in the role of mentor, who is able to facilitate the process of achieving a positive and acceptable resolution between a professional counselor's conflicting personal values and ethical responsibilities.

## References

- American Counseling Association (2005). *ACA code of ethics*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- American Psychological Association (2009). *Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation*. Available at [www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf](http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf)
- Balkin, R. S., Schlosser, L. Z., & Levitt, D. H. (2009). Religious identity and cultural diversity: Exploring the relationships between religious identity, sexism, homophobia, and multicultural competence. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 87* (4), 420-427.
- Clark, A. J. (2010). Empathy: An integral model in the counseling process. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 88* (3), 348-356.
- Consoli, A. J., Kim, B. S. K., & Meyer, D. M. (2008). Counselors' values profile: Implications for counseling ethnic minority clients. *Counseling and Values, 52*, 181-197.
- Elliott, G. (2003). Between hope and despair: One counselor's journey. *Alabama Counseling Association Journal, 29* (2), 24-34.
- Elliott, G. (1986). Facilitating the moral reasoning process: A curriculum for the helping professions. In G. L. Sapp (Ed.), *Handbook of moral development* (pp. 200-211). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.
- Elliott, G. (2005). Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues in counselor education and supervision: A call to advocacy. *Alabama Counseling Association Journal, 31* (2), 36-43.
- Hermann, M. A., & Herlihy, B. R. (2006). Legal and ethical implications of refusing to counsel homosexual clients. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 84* (4), 414-418.
- Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Kidder, R. M. (2006). *Moral courage*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Kohlberg, L. (1975, June). The cognitive-developmental approach to moral education. *Phi Delta Kappan, 670-677*.
- Lemoire, S. J. & Chen, C. P. (2005). Applying person-centered counseling to sexual minority adolescents. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 83* (2), 146-154.
- Raskin, N. J. & Rogers, C. R. (2000). Person-centered therapy. In R. J. Corsini & D. Wedding (Eds.), *Current psychotherapies* (6<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 133-167). Itasca, IL: Peacock.
- Remley, T. P., Jr. & Herlihy, B. (2007). *Ethical, legal, and professional issues in counseling*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 21*, 95-103.

- Satcher, J. & Leggett, M. (2006). Homonegativity among Alabama counselors. *Alabama Counseling Association Journal*, 32 (2), 1-11.
- Shallcross, L. (2010, November). Putting clients ahead of personal values. *Counseling Today*, 32-34.
- Tyson, L. E. (2011). Letter from the editor: What have we learned from Augusta State University? *Alabama Counseling Association Journal*, 36 (1), 2-3.
- VanderBos, G. R. (Ed.). (2007). *APA dictionary of psychology*. Washington, D. C.: American Psychological Association.
- Wilmer, H. A. (1987). *Practical Jung: Nuts and bolts of Jungian psychotherapy*. Wilmette, IL: Chiron Publications.

### ***The Alabama Counseling Association Journal***

An official publication of the Alabama Counseling Association, *The Alabama Counseling Association Journal* is an electronic journal published twice a year. A primary purpose is to communicate ideas and information which can help counselors in a variety of work settings implement their roles and develop the profession of counseling. *The Journal* may include thought-provoking articles, theoretical summaries, reports of research, and discussions of professional issues, summaries of presentations, reader reactions, and reviews of books or media. The ALCA Journal is located on the ALCA website ([www.alabamacounseling.org](http://www.alabamacounseling.org)).

Inquiries about *The Journal* should be directed to:

Dr. Ervin L. Wood  
ALCA Executive Director  
217 Daryle Street  
Livingston, Alabama 35470  
Telephone: (205) 652-1712 [chip@alabamacounseling.org](mailto:chip@alabamacounseling.org)

**MANUSCRIPTS:** Practitioners, educators, and researchers in the fields of guidance, counseling, and development are encouraged to submit manuscripts. While priority will be given to ALCA members, counselors from other states and countries are valued contributors. Manuscripts, which conform to the Guidelines for Authors, must be submitted to the Editor:

Dr. Lawrence E. Tyson  
The University of Alabama at Birmingham  
(205) 975-2491 [ltyson@uab.edu](mailto:ltyson@uab.edu)

**EDITORIAL BOARD:** *The ALCA Journal* Editorial Board consists of one representative from each division of The Alabama Counseling Association. Members serve three-year terms for which a rotation schedule has been established. The primary function of the Editorial Board is to assist in determining the content of publications. At least two members of the Editorial Board read each manuscript submitted to the publication through a blind review system. No honoraria or travel funds are provided for Editorial Board members. Editorial Board members and their respective divisions and terms are:

M. Carolyn Thomas	ALCDA	2007-2009
Virginia Martin	ALASGW	2007-2009
Karena T. Valkyrie	ALAMFC	2007-2009
Joy Burnham	ALACES	2007-2009
Glenda Reynolds	ALAADA	2009-2011
James L. Jackson	ALMHCA	2009-2011
Karla Carmichael	ALASCA	2007-2009
Necoal Driver	ALAMCD	2007-2009
<b>Vacant</b>	<b>ALASERVIC</b>	
Jamie Satcher	ADADARCA	2007-2009
Paul Hard	AGLBICAL	2007-2009
Yulanda Tyre	ALCCA	2009-2011
Don Phillips	ALAAOC	2009-2011

*The ALCA Journal* is provided under the direction of the Alabama Counseling Association Executive Council. The officers are:

President . . . . . Melanie J. Drake Wallace

President-elect . . . . .Necoal Driver

Past-president . . . . . Nancy Fox

Treasurer . . . . . Margaret McFadzean Fox

Historian . . . . .Nancy Wolfe

Parliamentarian . . . . .Joanne Schrantz

**ISSN: 1546-2781**

**Guidelines for Authors**

The purpose of *The Alabama Counseling Association Journal* is to communicate ideas and information that can help counselors in a variety of work settings implement their counseling roles and develop the profession of counseling. A function of *The Journal* is to strengthen the common bond among counselors and to help maintain a mutual awareness of the roles, the problems, and the progress of the profession at its various levels. In this context, thought provoking articles, theoretical summaries, reports of research, descriptive techniques, summaries of presentations, discussions of professional issues, reader

reactions, and reviews of books and media are highly recommended. Manuscripts that are theoretical, philosophical, or researched-oriented should contain discussion of the implications and /or practical applications. All manuscripts that contain data derived from human subjects and are submitted by individuals associated with a university or college, are required to obtain Institutional Review Board approval from their respective institution. Description of such approval will be stated in the Methodology section of the manuscript. Authors should ground their work with an appropriate review of the literature.

### **Review Process**

Authors are asked to submit an electronic original copy in Microsoft Word. All manuscripts should be prepared according to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th Edition) Manuscripts that are not written in compliance with publication guidelines will be returned to the author with a general explanation of the deficiencies. Manuscripts that meet The ALCA Journal publication guidelines will be distributed to a minimum of two (2) members of the Editorial Board. The Editor will synthesize the reviewers' comments and inform the authors of both publication decisions and recommendations. Anonymity of authors and reviewers will be protected.

#### **PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED BY AUTHORS:**

1. Manuscripts must be word processed on eight-and-one-half by eleven inch white paper with double spacing and one-inch margins
2. Authors should make every effort to submit a manuscript that contains no clues to the author's identity. Citations that may reveal the author's identity should be masked within the text and reference listing.
3. Author notes including current position, work address, telephone number, and email address should be included on a separate page. Other pages should exclude such affiliations.
4. Camera-ready tables or figures should be prepared and submitted on separate pages.
5. Recommended length of manuscripts is between 13 and 20 pages.
6. Authors should submit only original work that has not been published elsewhere and is not under review by another journal. Lengthy quotations (300-500 words) require written permission from the copyright holder for reproduction. Adaptation of figures and tables also requires reproduction approval. It is the author's responsibility to secure such permission and provide documentation to the ALCA Journal Editor upon acceptance for publication.
7. Protection of client and subject anonymity is the responsibility of authors. Identifying information should be avoided in description and discussion.



8. Authors should consult the APA Publications Manual (6th edition) for guidelines related to discriminatory language in regard to gender, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic identity, disability, and age.
9. Authors should consult the APA Publications Manual (6th edition) for guidelines regarding the format of the manuscript and matters of editorial style.
10. The terms counselor, counseling, and client are preferred, rather than their many synonyms.
11. Authors bear full responsibility for the accuracy of references, quotations, tables, figures, and other matters of editorial style.
12. The ALCA Journal expects authors to follow the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the American Counseling Association (also adopted by the Alabama Counseling Association) related to publication including authorship, concurrent submissions, and Institutional Review Board approval for studies involving human subjects.

**PUBLICATION PROCEDURES:**

Authors of accepted manuscripts will be asked to submit a final, electronic manuscript in Word format. All manuscripts accepted for publication will be edited and altered for clarity. No alterations that change the integrity of the article will be made without the primary author's permission. Authors whose manuscripts are accepted may be asked to review manuscripts subsequent to the publication of the article in The ALCA Journal.