PREDICTING BEGINNING MASTER’S LEVEL COUNSELOR EFFECTIVENESS
FROM PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND ADMISSIONS DATA:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
August 2009

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Halinski, Katherine Hupfeld. *Predicting beginning master’s level counselor effectiveness from personal characteristics and admissions data: An exploratory study.*

Doctor of Philosophy (Counseling), August 2009, 123 pp., 6 tables, references, 127 titles.

In this exploratory study of 95 counseling program master’s students at a large southwestern public university, students’ scores on an admissions Group Interview Sociometric Rating did not correlate with their GRE Analytic Writing (GRE-AW) scores nor their basic skills course instructors’ end-of-course assessment of students’ counseling-related personality traits (Personality) or mastery of basic counseling skills (Mastery). However, Mastery was predicted by both Personality, with a large effect size, and GRE-AW, with a medium effect size. This study provides promising preliminary evidence that counselor educators may use Counselor Personality Assessment Ratings and GRE-AW scores to screen master’s applicants by predicting students’ abilities to master basic counseling skills early in their counselor preparation. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are discussed.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is my pleasure to thank those who made this dissertation possible. First, I would like to express my greatest respect to my committee chair, Jan Holden, whose scholarship inspired me to do my best. Thank you for your tireless efforts in guiding me through this process. Next, I would like to thank my encouraging and supportive committee members, Casey Barrio Minton and Sue Bratton. Thank you for your wisdom and guidance. It has been an honor to work with such dedicated counselor educators. I would also like to thank Su-Chuan He whose patience and expertise aided in my increased confidence in statistical analysis. Janet Rogers also deserves my thanks for her time and energy she devoted to countless hours of data entry. I would like to thank Dee Ray for her support throughout my doctoral work. I have benefitted from her guidance as she has greatly contributed to the counselor I am today. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) Research Grant Award Committee who awarded me with a 2009 ACES Research Grant Award to assist in the funding of this research.

I am very grateful for my family and friends who have encouraged me throughout this process. I would like to specifically acknowledge my parents and my husband. First, I owe an endless amount of thanks to my loving parents, Stanley and Suzie Hupfeld. Their support has fueled me throughout my life and of all of my accomplishments I am most proud of being their daughter. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my husband, Patrick Halinski. I am eternally grateful for his unconditional love and unwavering belief in me. Patrick, thank you for your patience and grace throughout my graduate studies.
This journey would have been very lonely without you and I appreciate you being with me every step of the way. I love you.
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Prediction of students’ future effectiveness as counselors can be an ambiguous and challenging task for counselor educators. Counselor education program faculties devote a great deal of effort and attention to the training of competent counselors. It is vital that counselor educators discriminate between those students who are likely to achieve the benchmarks at the conclusion of training and those who will not (Wheeler, 2002).

It is the responsibility of counselor educators to screen applicants based on several criteria including scholastic aptitude, ability to foster culturally relevant therapeutic relationships, and possession of relevant career goals (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2009). However, a review of pertinent literature indicates that academic achievement continues to be the primary criterion in the admissions decisions of most counseling programs (Markert & Monke, 1990; Schweiger, Henderson, & Clawson, 2008; Smith, 2004).

Admitting students who are not appropriate to be counselors has tremendous cost repercussions, including the students’ emotional, temporal, and financial investments; the endangered welfare of their clients; and their faculty’s time and stress, including ethical responsibilities and fears of legal repercussions (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Li, 2000; McAdams, Foster, & Thomas, 2007; Smith, 2004). Nevertheless, researchers have shown that counselor educators have not yet identified an adequate means of predicting which applicants will or will not be effective in counseling programs or as counselors in the field (Markert & Monke, 1990; Smaby, Maddux, Richmond,
Counselor educators seem to realize the importance of assessing for that certain “something” that plays a role in applicants’ counseling potential. As a result, many counseling program faculties have adopted procedures such as personal interviews in an attempt to enhance their admissions criteria (Holden, Roberts, & Brookshire, 1999; Leverett-Main, 2004; Nagpal & Ritchie, 2002; Schweiger et al., 2008; Smith, 2004).

In contrast to professions like law and business, the profession of counseling is often emotional in nature and can lack clear indicators of success and failure (Dlugos & Friedlander, 2001). For this reason, it can be difficult to identify which counselors will be successful. In an effort to combat this ambiguity, many researchers and clinicians have outlined the key components they believe to be necessary in a therapeutic personality. For instance, Frank and Frank (1991) proposed that confidence is vital to a counselor’s effectiveness. Rogers (1957, 1961, 1980) focused on a counselor’s ability to communicate empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard. Carkuff and Berenson (1977) specified empathic understanding and the ability to respond in a therapeutic manner as two key components of counselor effectiveness. Kottler (2003; Kottler & Hazler, 2001) asserted that the ideal counselor is patient, warm, flexible, open-minded, self-assured, genuine, peaceful, and balanced by a passionate and enthusiastic spirit. In addition to the attributes cited above, Miars and Halverson (1997) included self-awareness, centeredness and being focused, and humor as necessary characteristics of an effective counselor. Other leading counselor educators (Cavanagh & Levitov, 2002; Corey & Corey, 2003; Gladding, 2007) have echoed these points.

As cited above, counselor educators and counseling theorists have produced an
abundance of literature pertaining to personality characteristics that contribute in part to counselor effectiveness. It is noteworthy that counseling skill-based training that enhances personal characteristics during counseling training is also heavily endorsed in the literature (Crews et al., 2005; Smaby, Maddux, Packman et al., 2005; Urbani, 2002). It is important to better understand what qualities, attitudes, beliefs, and abilities counselor trainees can develop through their training. Therapy is about change, and as a parallel to this commonly held belief, counselor educators expect their trainees to change and grow in therapeutic effectiveness through their counselor preparation experience. However, Wheeler (2000; 2002) asserted that when evaluating applicants during admissions, counselor educators must judge how much change is realistic to expect in particular applicants during the training time available.

Statement of the Problem

Counselor educators have long been concerned with identifying personal qualities that contribute to counselor effectiveness as well as identifying a means of assessing for those qualities during the admissions process. Despite the importance of these two interrelated issues, researchers have failed to identify reliable and valid assessment tools for counselor admission screening (Holden et al., 1999; Markert & Monke, 1990; Leverett-Main, 2004; Smith, 2004). In particular, researchers have found consistently that factors such as undergraduate grade point average (GPA) and Graduate Record Exam (GRE) verbal (GRE-V) and quantitative (GRE-Q) scores are not highly predictive of personal development (Hosford, Johnson, & Atkinson, 1984; Smaby,
Maddux, Richmond et al., 2005) or overall success in counseling master’s programs (Markert & Monke, 1990).

Only one unpublished study suggested predictive value of the GRE Analytical Reasoning (GRE-A) score (Morrow, 1993), but the Educational Testing Service (ETS) discontinued the use of this exam in 2002, and no researcher as yet has studied the value in this regard of the GRE Analytical Writing Assessment (GRE-AW) score that ETS implemented in lieu of the GRE-A. Holden et al. (1999) concluded, “In response to both ethical imperatives and legal realities, counselor educators are under greater pressure than ever to identify effective strategies for screening program applicants and to substantiate the validity of those strategies through quality research” (p. 10).

Since 1993, as a way of assessing counseling program applicants’ personal characteristics during the admissions process, the faculty at a large southwestern university CACREP accredited counseling program, with three accredited master’s level tracks in elementary and secondary school counseling, clinical mental health counseling, and college and university counseling, has used a group interview format with semi-structured activities and a sociometric rating system. They have used sociometric group ratings to generate information regarding applicants’ interpersonal skills. Although this procedure has yielded anecdotal evidence to support its effectiveness as an additional screening tool, no one as yet has validated it through systematic research.

Review of Related Literature

The following section is a review of the professional counseling literature relevant
to counselor effectiveness and the counseling admissions process. In the absence of pertinent resources specifically related to the field of counseling, I refer to related applicable literature from the fields of psychology, social work, education, and medicine. Specifically, I explore gatekeeping responsibilities of counselor educators, personality traits that counseling scholars have most often cited as being related to counselor effectiveness, and current counseling admissions procedures.

Gatekeeping Responsibilities of Counselor Educators

Counselor educators are charged with populating the mental health field with competent counselors. In addition to academic performance, counseling students are expected to possess personal characteristics and demonstrate adequate preparation conducive to therapeutic practice. Monitoring for such competencies as a means of gatekeeping is the responsibility of counselor education faculties (Kerl, Garcia, McCullough, & Maxwell, 2002; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Nagpal & Ritchie, 2002; Wheeler, 2002). In this section, I examine counselor educators’ gatekeeping responsibilities including professional, ethical, and legal implications.

Counselor educators and supervisors have the responsibility of gatekeeping in an effort to protect the rights of the public, including potential clients, by ensuring that only qualified students are permitted to progress toward graduation and licensure (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). The American Counseling Association’s (ACA) Code of Ethics (2005) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) Ethical Guidelines for Counseling Supervisors (1993) contain similar mandates that emphasize ongoing assessment and evaluation of supervisees to
ensure awareness of limitations of particular supervisees that might impede clinical performance. Furthermore, the ACES Guidelines states that “supervisors have the responsibility of recommending remedial assistance to the supervisee and of screening from the training program … supervisees who are unable to provide competent professional services” (Section 2.12).

Serving as gatekeepers, counselor educators face a difficult dilemma. They are ethically mandated to dismiss students whom they judge incompetent or irremediable. However, this responsibility to protect the public can leave them litigiously vulnerable. In describing their experiences of being sued by a dismissed student, counselor educators McAdams et al. (2007) referred to a “no-win” dilemma. The court found in favor of the defendants; however, for several reasons, McAdams et al. reported feeling little sense of vindication. First, resources of time and energy that could otherwise have been given to the community, the program, or other students were exhausted on the case. Next, “the loss of an admitted student might be seen as a failure by a counselor preparation program committed to the careful selection of applicants who can and will matriculate, graduate, and ultimately provide productive community service” (McAdams et al., p. 220). McAdams et al. attributed the favorable legal ruling to their routine practice of careful documentation of student competency concerns. In an age of bureaucratic accountability, counseling program faculties must establish detailed criteria for the selection and evaluation of students in order to insure transparency and concreteness (Wheeler, 2002).

To learn more about the evaluation and dismissal of students in master’s level clinical programs, Oklin and Gaughen (1991) surveyed 100 programs in mental health
including clinical and counseling psychology programs, counselor education programs, and marriage and family counseling programs. They received usable responses from the faculty representatives of 54 programs. As part of the survey, the researchers listed seven possible reasons for remediation and dismissal of students and asked respondents to identify and rank their programs’ top four. The most frequent problems the faculty representatives identified were academic deficits (88%), clinical skills (77%), pervasive interpersonal problems (70%), and resistance to supervision (58%). Oklin and Gaughen concluded that counseling students need to possess the scholastic competence to cope with the academic rigor of a graduate program as well as be clinically proficient and appropriate. Therefore, counselor educators’ gatekeeping responsibilities include the assessment of both academic and interpersonal competence.

Wheeler (2002) contended that the gate should exist throughout counselor training including at the beginning and at the end of the training process. Therefore, gatekeeping responsibilities include predicting at admissions which counseling program applicants are likely to be successful. Wheeler assumed that the more carefully applicants are chosen, the more likely those applicants will develop into competent counselors, thus decreasing the frequency of remediation and dismissal of students. It is noteworthy, however, that no researcher as yet has tested Wheeler’s hypothesis.

Several scholars have concluded that applicants who desire to be trained as counselors may be motivated but not suited for a career in counseling (Gladding, 2007; Guy, 1987). In addition to the sheer motivation to become counselors, Gladding contended that counselors’ personalities play a crucial role in their clinical success.
Students who are not suitable for clinical practice may lack the characteristics inherently needed to be helpful, may lack the proper training, or may be motivated by dysfunctional needs (Guy). Furthermore, when comparing mental health professionals to the general public, White and Franzoni (1990) found that mental health professionals have higher rates of depression, elevated anxiety, and more relationship problems. This assertion further endorses the importance of gatekeeping as a means of only producing competent counselors who are mentally healthy and high functioning. Finally, Gladding believed counselor educators should not allow into the field of counseling those applicants who possess personality characteristics incongruent to the demands of the field.

In summary, the professional counseling literature supports counselor educators’ professional, ethical, and legal obligation to assess counselor trainees’ potential and actual counseling effectiveness at all stages of the training process. The next question to address is how best to carry out that obligation.

A Counselor’s Personality

As gatekeepers, counselor educators have considered personal characteristics to be related to counselor effectiveness. In addition to counselor training and theoretical orientation, Herman (1993) encouraged counselor educators to redefine the definition of counselor competence to encompass non-specific factors such as personality. In this section, I explore specific characteristics that scholars in the field of counseling and psychology have identified as important personal characteristics related to counselor effectiveness.
Through an extensive review of pertinent literature, I found general consensus regarding the belief that counselors’ personality is an important factor in interpersonal counseling effectiveness. However, researchers have had little success validating these assertions (Beutler et al., 2004). Beutler et al. contended that recent research concerning the effect of counselor personality is “notably sparse, or even absent” (p. 290). Several scholars have hypothesized that this lack of research may be due to the ambiguous nature of the subject of personality as the emphasis of the mental health field has shifted to validated, objective, and time efficient outcome studies in response to the demands of managed care (Beutler et al.; Smith, 2004; Weaver, 1999).

Nevertheless, in the following section I highlight counseling scholars, theorists, and researchers who have supported the assertion that counselors’ personality characteristics are related to their clinical effectiveness. Due to the somewhat limited current systematic research on this topic, the literature I reviewed for this section includes systematic research and scholars’ opinions.

Kerl et al. (2002) believed that effective counselors are those who demonstrate competence above and beyond factual or theoretical content. As a result, these scholars developed the Counseling Performance Evaluation Form (CPEF) to assess for personal characteristics in addition to clinical skills and professional standards. Although the CPEF is not exclusively devoted to personality characteristics related to counselor effectiveness, Kerl et al. emphasized personality characteristics as necessary dimensions of the overall evaluation and assessment of counselors-in-training. It is noteworthy that no researcher as yet has published outcome research that included the use of the CPEF.
A commonly held belief among researchers and clinicians is that characteristics of therapists are related to or predictive of therapeutic outcome (Asay & Lambert, 1999; Beutler et al., 2004; Miller, 1993). Luborsky, McLellan, Diguer, Woody, and Seligman (1997) compared the outcomes of 22 therapists’ caseloads with 7 patient samples and concluded that differences in client’s demographics, background, or symptom severity did not predict their treatment outcomes. However, Luborsky et al. identified some differences in treatment outcome that reflected the efficacy of the counselor. Counselors’ personality traits, coping patterns, emotional well-being, and values-were among the traits that Beutler et al. labeled inferred. Beutler et al. classified inferred traits as being subjective cross-situational – traits that are enduring and not subject to frequent change. Conversely, subjective therapy-specific traits are traits that counselors develop systematically through training. Beutler, Machado, and Neufeldt (1994) asserted that “traits endure, [whereas] states many change” (p. 231).

Many scholars also believe that effective counselors are those who possess the interpersonal skills necessary to foster a therapeutic environment (Kottler, 2003; Rogers, 1980). According to Brammer and MacDonald (2003), effective counselors do not possess a fixed cluster of traits, but, rather, effective counselors work to create desirable therapeutic conditions that foster client change. Bachelor and Horvath (1999) examined the therapeutic alliance from a theoretical, empirical, and clinical viewpoint and concluded that preexisting dispositional characteristics of counselors influence the therapeutic relationship. From Bachelor and Horvath’s review of literature at the time, they concluded that counselors forge the therapeutic relationship through the establishment of a safe environment. Counselors communicate this safety, in part, by
listening attentively, communicating understanding, and exhibiting respect for the client. Emphasizing the essential nature of the therapeutic environment for client change, Ronnestad and Orlinsky (2005) recommended that candidates selected for psychotherapy education, “should have, and experience themselves as having, already well-developed basic interpersonal skills and a warm manner in close personal relationships” (p. 182).

Similarly, Rogers (1980) contended that counselors’ manifested attitudes and ways of being with clients has a far greater impact on the therapeutic relationship than counselors’ theoretical orientation and techniques. Kottler (2003) claimed that who one is as a counselor is who one is as a person. Wosket (1999) noted that counselors in service to clients employ the therapeutic use of self. Consequently, counselors’ main therapeutic tool is their personality, awareness, and presence (McLeod, 1992). In essence, the counselor’s spirit as a human being most radically fuels change (Bachelor & Horvath, 1999). Corey, Corey, and Callanan (2002) maintained that counselors’ professional functioning is greatly influenced by personal beliefs, life experiences, and ways of living. Clinical helpfulness results from the utilization of counselors’ personalities, which include willingness to be with clients in caring and respectful ways (Kottler, 2003).

Strong’s (1968) model is often referenced in more current literature pertaining to characteristics of counselor effectiveness. The essence of Strong’s model is that clients’ perceptions of counselors’ level of expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness affect the therapeutic relationship. Strong and Dixon (1971) referred to the social influence and persuasive power that counselors can establish early in the client-counselor
relationship, when clients perceive the aforementioned qualities. Paulson, Truscott, and Stuart (1999) studied clients’ perceptions of helpful experiences in counseling and concluded that counselors’ interpersonal style can be a key ingredient in clients’ perceived successful counseling outcomes.

Several researchers have conducted intensive literature reviews and systematic investigation in search of specific characteristics linked to counselor effectiveness. One such researcher, Smith (2004), reviewed pertinent literature that included 56 sources spanning 68 years, including relevant research studies and experts’ opinions. She divided cited characteristics into the two categories of cognitive-behavioral and personal-emotional. She found that authors most often cited characteristics in her cognitive-behavioral category of independent/self-managing (17), developed coping mechanisms (17), good problem-solving skills (14), knowledgeable (i.e., skills, theories, and techniques) (13), understanding (i.e., comprehension and intelligence) (11), self-motivated (i.e., urge to action and mental ability) (11), internal locus of control (i.e., cognitive intrinsic regulation of self) (9), developed communication skills (9), life experience (8), high cognitive intelligence (8), and rational (8). She found that authors most often cited characteristics in her personal-emotional category of developed personal skills (38), warm (34), respectful (33), accepting (30), strong self-esteem/ self-confidence (29), developed intrapersonal skills (26), genuine (24), trusting (23), independent/ self-managing (i.e., free from emotional influence or control of others) (22), positive regard (22), internal locus of control (i.e. emotional intrinsic regulation of self) (22), emotionally well-adjusted (22), self motivating (i.e., emotional/spiritual energy used to incite or urge to action) (20), empathic/ compassionate (20), personally mature
(18), understanding (15), openness/open-minded (13), optimistic (11), positive (11), and flexible (9). Smith concluded that the above listed “abilities and qualities often cannot be developed within the brief time limit programs have to educate students, if at all” (p. 96).

Weaver (1999), another researcher interested in personality traits of counselors, studied counselors-in-training to understanding the relationship between personality characteristics, academic readiness, and counselor effectiveness. Her participants were enrolled in practicum or internship, courses the students completed toward the conclusion of their master’s training, from eight Midwestern CACREP accredited counselor education programs. Participants completed the California Psychological Inventory (CPI), a reliable assessment commonly used in personality research. Likewise, participants’ respective supervisors completed the Counselor Evaluation Rating Scale (CERS), developed by Myrick and Kelly (1971), as a measure of counselor effectiveness. Weaver isolated and studied the scales of Empathy, Sense of Well-being, Tolerance, and Psychological Mindedness of the CPI. She also conducted a post hoc analysis of the participants’ undergraduate GPA and GRE scores. Weaver concluded that the inclusion of personality variables along with current academic criteria of GPA and GRE could improve the predictability of counselor effectiveness. She found that the personality variables of Empathy and Sense of Well-being had a significant impact on CERS scores of counselor effectiveness. When evaluating this study for the purpose of the prediction of counselor effectiveness at the time of admissions, I concluded that one limitation would be that Weaver did not account for counseling skills, self-awareness, or theoretical knowledge that participants could have acquired during counselor training.

Next, Smith (2002) classified cognitive complexity, spirituality, and self-
actualization as essential personality traits of counselors and examined the relationship between those personality traits and trainee effectiveness. His 33 participants were counselors-in-training who had completed at least 30 semester hours of course work at a CACREP accredited counseling program. They completed three instruments: the Personal Need for Structure (PNS) designed to measure cognitive flexibility, the Spirituality Assessment Scale (SAS) designed to measure spirituality, and the Short Index (SI) designed to measure self-actualization. Qualified independent raters used the Counselor Rating Form Short Version (CRF-S) and a modified version of the Counselor Skill and Personal Development Rating Form (CSPD-RF) to evaluate participants’ counseling effectiveness in their performance in counseling sessions with community clients. Through multiple regression analysis, Smith provided empirical support for the importance of self-actualization in predicting counselor effectiveness. Smith’s results also indicated no statistically significant relationship between cognitive flexibility or spirituality and counselor effectiveness.

In an attempt to bring coherence to the common factors of the therapeutic process, Grencavage and Norcross (1990) reviewed 50 articles and identified the most often cited therapeutic common factors. They identified the qualities of warmth and positive regard, empathic understanding, cultivates hope, and acceptance as the most commonly cited factors of an effective therapist.

Pope and Kline (1999) also studied stable personality characteristics of effective counselors. First, through an extensive literature review, Pope and Kline identified 22 personality characteristics that authors cited in the literature as being related to counselor effectiveness. Next, 10 scholars in the field of counseling, each with at least
five years of teaching and supervisory experience, ranked the 22 identified characteristics in order of importance to counselor trainee effectiveness as well as to responsiveness to training – how easily trainees could develop the characteristic through the process of training. The researchers combined the rankings of importance and responsiveness to training to form a total ranking for each characteristic. Pope and Kline considered the characteristics with the highest ordinal rankings to be the most crucial personality characteristics to the development of effective counselors. They found the top 10 characteristics most important to counselor effectiveness and least responsive to training were acceptance, emotional stability, open-mindedness, empathy, genuineness, flexibility, interest in people, confidence, sensitivity, and fairness. They concluded that these personality characteristics should serve as the foundation and focus of the counseling admissions process.

Another researcher, Wheeler (2000), interested in the distinguishable criteria of “good” and “bad” supervisees, discovered that the characteristics counselor educators and supervisors selected most often were personal variables. Wheeler had 27 counselor educators and supervisors complete a triangulated repertory grid on which they identified five students whom they considered potentially “good”, as well as five students whom they considered relatively “bad” supervisees. In addition, she asked the participants to elicit constructs with their identified students in mind and then rate each identified student on each construct, on a scale from 1 to 5. Independent raters classified the resulting constructs and identified 22 conflated constructs. Of the 22 constructs, Wheeler found that some constructs were more related to personality and some were more related to teachable counseling skills. Of the constructs Wheeler
identified as related to personality, counselor educators and supervisors most frequently
cited personable-allof, open-closed, secure-insecure, and self aware-unaware. It is
noteworthy that the list of constructs Wheeler found included all 10 personality traits
Pope and Kline (1999) found counselor educators and supervisors considered unlikely
to change as a result of counselor training.

Unlike researchers whose studies I have cited so far in this section, Woodyard
(1997) focused not on the indicators of counselor effectiveness but rather on counselor
impairment. She studied a panel of counseling experts in an attempt to reach a
consensus regarding specific indicators of impairment in incoming master’s-level
counseling students. Using the Delphi technique to gain consensus, she asked a panel
of experts to identify 5 categories of indicators of impairment for incoming students,
which included problems with self expression, problems with receiving from others,
problems with self-awareness, overlapping of relationship skills, and moral and/or
ethical problems. The first category, problems with self-expression, included behavior
such as attempting to fake feelings and displaying anger toward a specific characteristic
such as gender, race, or sexual orientation. Other indicators in this category included
inappropriate disclosure, inactivity during interviews, and poor performance in group
interaction. The second category, problems with receiving from others, included the
inability to listen, inability to integrate the viewpoints of others, and intolerable of
diversity. The next category, problems of self-awareness, included the inability to learn
from experiences, lacking self-awareness, and externalizing blame. The category of
overlapping relationship skills included the behaviors that Woodyard judged as
overlapping with the previous three categories, including inability to empathize, lacking
personal boundaries, acting judgmental, and interrupting people. The final category, moral or ethical problems, included behaviors of lying, misrepresenting credentials, and not accepting-diversity. Woodyard concluded that further research is needed to validate the assumption that when the above behaviors are present counselor effectiveness is negatively affected and vice versa.

*Developmental Potential of a Counselor’s Personality*

As I highlighted above, general consensus exists among counseling scholars and researchers regarding the importance of counselors’ personality. However, some disagreement seems to exist among scholars and researchers in regards to the developmental potential of such characteristics. In the remainder of this section, I explore this ongoing debate.

Like many scholar and researchers, Wheeler (2002) posed the interesting question, “Are therapists born or trained?” (p. 427). Can counselors learn or develop the personality characteristics necessary for clinical effectiveness through training? Wheeler drew the conclusion that counselors are trained by their life experiences and by their counselor preparation. She highlighted the fact that counselor training occurs, at the earliest, after the age of 21 when patterns of interpersonal behavior have been established as a result of socialization experiences. Counselor education program faculties can provide the appropriate environment to stimulate personal growth, but students’ emotional capacity to manage those experiences should be in place before training begins (Strupp & Hadley, 1979; Wheeler, 2002). Gladding (2007) believed that one’s basic personality cannot be changed through education. Wheeler called for the
admissions process to differentiate between individuals who possess insight and understanding of their emotional difficulties, including the motivation to deal with those difficulties, and individuals who do not possess such insight and motivation. Similar to Gladding, Corey et al. (2002) asserted that counselors can be well trained in counseling and conceptualization skills and well-versed in counseling theory and still be ineffective helpers.

Next, Cavanagh and Levitov (2002) maintained that a helpful personality in possession of the qualities conducive to counselor effectiveness does not compensate for inadequate preparation in counseling theory and skills, whereas even excellent counselor education curriculum cannot compensate for counselors lacking the personal qualities related to counselor effectiveness. In addition to academic preparation of theoretical understanding and clinical experience, appropriate counselor development includes attending to counselors’ personal qualities (Cavanagh & Levitov; Lauver & Harvey, 1997). Counseling students have to be open to the experience of learning, which can be stressful and can challenge personal beliefs and attitudes. Stated simply, learning involves a process of change, which can be stressful. Additionally, Lauver and Harvey believed that effective counselors are those who can cope with the stressors of performance evaluation.

Hatcher et al. (1994) found that high school and college students could learn empathy skills through a Rogerian teaching approach. The researchers noted a relationship between the success of empathy training and the development of abstract thought and moral development, which is more likely to occur during one’s college years. It is noteworthy, however, that these researchers identified differing levels of
empathy of the students before the training began. Higher levels or mature forms of empathy the students displayed included perspective-taking and the display of empathic concern. These high levels of empathy require counselors’ objectivity, which includes counselors’ ability to perceive and understand clients’ worldview (Martz, 2001). In review of Hatcher et al.’s results, Pope (1996) concluded that counselor educators should identify those individuals who display empathic tendencies at admissions, due to their advanced developmental level.

In conclusion, the general agreement in the literature among counseling scholars and researchers is that at best some of the characteristics that contribute to counselor effectiveness, like empathy, can be developed; however, the characteristics do need to exist to some degree when one enters counseling training. Therefore, counselor characteristics that attribute to counselor effectiveness can be enhanced and developed but not created through counselor education.

**Personality Traits Related Most to Counselor Effectiveness**

As highlighted above, a general consensus exists in the literature among counseling theorists and researchers regarding the link between personality characteristics and counselor effectiveness. However, less agreement exists regarding which personality characteristics are most essential (Pope & Kline, 1999).

In an attempt to identify the most often cited personality traits or constructs that contribute to counselor effectiveness, I conducted an exhaustive review of literature. I collected as many texts, theoretical articles, and research studies as I could find, which numbered 47. I accessed PsycInfo and PsycArticles via Ebscohost to search for peer
reviewed articles and dissertations. I also used the University of North Texas Library System and Interlibrary Loan to access dissertations and textbooks pertaining to counselor training, counselor theory, and counselor effectiveness. It is important to note that I also examined the references cited in the articles, dissertations, and texts I reviewed, in pursuit of other sources that pertained to my search. A matrix of the cited characteristics that I found from those 47 sources appears in Appendix A. As the matrix revealed, I found the top five cited counselor personality traits or constructs to be warm and accepting (27), empathic (26), flexible (23), self-aware (24), and genuine (23). Other less frequently cited constructs included confident (11), humorous (9), psychologically healthy (8), altruistic (7), vulnerable and open (6), and intuitive (6).

As a result of my literature review, I found many references to synonymous constructs. In an effort to classify the most often cited constructs referenced as contributing to counselor effectiveness, I chose to combine traits that I judged as synonymous. However, if an author or group of authors of a single source referenced synonymous terms, I chose to count that occurrence as one reference in the matrix. The following is a description of the top five cited constructs in greater detail.

**Warm and accepting.** The construct of warm and accepting includes the synonyms of positive regard, open-mindedness, and respect for the inherent worth in others. In the following section I provide a description of the importance of the construct of warm and accepting to counselor effectiveness as conceptualized by counseling scholars, theorists, and researchers.

Warmth includes the ability to be compassionate, nonthreatening, and kind (Cavanagh & Levitov, 2002). Rogers (1957) referred to warm and accepting counselors...
as those who communicate unconditional positive regard for every aspect of clients’ experiences. Rogers (1957, 1961) included counselors’ success in communicating unconditional positive regard as a therapeutic quality necessary for client change to occur. Unconditional positive regard “means a caring for a client as a separate person, with permission to have his [sic] own feelings, his [sic] own experiences” (Rogers, 1957, p. 98). Unconditional positive regard also includes respecting the individuality and worth of the client (Brammer & MacDonald, 2003). Welfel and Patterson (2005) wrote, “Positive regard is expressed by the enthusiasm one person shows for being in the presence of another and by the amount of time and energy one is willing to devote to another’s well being” (p. 57).

Rogers’s (1961) description of the journey toward self-actualization included the traits of acceptance of self and others. Smith (2002) conceptualized self-actualization as an essential personality trait that contributes to counselor effectiveness. As cited previously, Smith provided empirical support through systematic research for the importance of self-actualization in predicting counselor effectiveness.

In a description of necessary interpersonal skills that counselors need to possess, Ronnestad and Orlinsky (2005) referred to the construct of counselors’ ability to be affirming. According to Ronnestad and Orlinsky, to be an affirming presence means to be friendly, warm, accepting, and tolerant. The researchers analyzed the personal lives of therapists and found a moderate positive correlation ($r = .57$) between feeling affirming towards clients and the extent to which counselors experience warmth, acceptance, and tolerance within intimate relationships. As a result, the researchers
suggested that a predictor of applicants’ affirming potential in clinical practice could be gauged by how applicants experience their role in close intimate relationships.

In Pope and Kline’s (1999) study, as cited previously, acceptance was ranked first in the overall ranking as the most important personal characteristic and least responsive to training. Warmth was ranked third in terms of importance; however, warmth was ranked 11th overall, which Pope and Kline concluded was due to the experts’ opinions that warmth is more responsive to training.

Empathic. The construct of empathic includes the synonym of understanding. In the following section I provide a description of the importance of the construct of empathic as conceptualized by counseling scholars, theorists, and researchers.

Ronnestad and Orlinsky (2005) recommended that the selection of applicants for clinical training must be based in part on their interpersonal skills, which includes the ability to empathize with a broad range of human experiences. Empathy involves counselors’ ability to immerse oneself into the world of their clients, coupled with the ability to separate from their clients’ feelings when appropriate (Foster 1996; Spurling & Dryden, 1989). In addition to unconditional positive regard, Rogers believed that empathy is a necessary condition for change (1957, 1961). According to Rogers (1957), to be empathic is to sense and understand the client’s world accurately. When describing empathy, Rogers wrote, “To sense the client’s private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the ‘as if’ quality — this is empathy, and this seems essential to therapy” (1957, p. 243).

Rogers (1980) drew upon the affective and cognitive aspects of the process of empathy, which he referred to as empathic understanding. Moustakas (1995) described
the sensation of empathic understanding as a threefold process, he termed, being-in, being for, being-with. According to Moustakas, in order to fulfill this process, counselors must possess the capacity to tolerate therapeutic emotional intimacy in order to be fully present and emotionally available for clients. Reflecting on the multidimensional construct of empathy, Bohart and Greenberg (1997) concluded that all definitions of empathy they studied involved some degree of sensing, perceiving, sharing, or understanding another’s experience of the world.

Lafferty, Beutler, and Cargo (1989) studied the differences between more and less effective psychotherapists. Therapist effectiveness was measured by comparing levels of clients’ reported symptomatic distress before and after therapy. Lafferty et al. found that less effective therapists had lower levels of empathic understanding.

Despite much agreement in the literature concerning the importance of empathy, differing opinions among scholars, theorists, and researchers exist concerning whether or not empathy can be a learned skill (Bohart & Greenberg, 1997; Hatcher et al., 1994; Pope, 1996). Gilbert, Hughes, and Dryden (1989) believed that the teaching of empathic responding is possible if the learner already possesses empathy. In Pope and Kline’s (1999) study, as cited previously, empathy ranked as the most important quality of counselor effectiveness. In terms of responsiveness to training, empathy ranked 9th in training ability, meaning that the experts who participated believed that counselors can be somewhat responsive to empathy training.

Egan (2002) argued that empathy is both a way of being, as described above, and a communication skill that can be fine-tuned. Similarly, Brammer and MacDonald (2003) described empathy as a process, consisting of two stages. The first stage
involves counselors’ experience of their clients’ feelings. The second stage involves a
cognitive awareness in which counselors manifest empathy through the ability to
perceive clients’ feelings as well as communicate this perception in a clear and
appropriate manner.

Although scholars and researchers debate as to whether or not empathic
communication can be taught, a general consensus exists concerning the importance of
empathic understanding as a way of being and as a trait that needs to be present in
order to fine tune empathic communication (Egan, 2002; Welfel & Patterson, 2005). For
this reason, I will focus on the extent to which a person conveys empathy that could be
identified prior to counselors’ training.

**Flexible.** The construct of flexible includes the synonyms of tolerant of ambiguity
and patient. In the following section I provide a description of the importance of the
construct of flexible as conceptualized by counseling scholars, theorists, and
researchers.

Flexible counselors are able and willing to “shift gears” cognitively and
emotionally in a session (Smith, 2002). Hyman and Woog (1989) described the
characteristic of flexibility as the ability to tolerate ambiguity and the ability to be freeing
rather than controlling. Counselors with appropriate clinical flexibility possess the ability
to adapt and customize therapy to accommodate the needs of a diverse clientele
(Kottler, 2003). Because much of counseling is subjective and intuitive in nature,
counselors must be comfortable with existential questions, unclear answers, and
unresolved issues (Guy, 1987). Rogers’s (1961) description of self-actualization
included the trait of being open to experiences. According to Kottler (1991), counselors’
flexibility allows for an egalitarian approach to therapy. The construct of flexibility also includes remaining open and nonjudgmental toward clients (Kottler, 1991, 2003). Furthermore, clinical flexibility allows counselors to change and adapt as clients change, in an effort to meet clients’ therapeutic needs.

In Dlugos and Friedlander’s (2001) qualitative study in which they examined passionately committed psychotherapists, flexibility and openness to new experiences were two similar qualities the researchers identified as a common thread amongst the counselors studied. Conversely, Mearns (1997) highlighted several personality traits that could hinder the training of counselors. In particular, he cited the trait of rigidity and the need to “get things right” (p. 114). Therefore, trainees lacking flexibility and the willingness to “deviate from one’s self-concept” can impede the training process (Smith, 2002, p. 8).

In addition to tolerating ambiguity, flexible counselors also possess patience and trust in the natural progression of therapy (Cavanagh & Levitov, 2002; Kottler, 2003). Counselors trusting in the process of therapy includes allowing situations to develop naturally without rushing clients. Patient counselors communicate that they are more interested and concerned with clients’ personhood instead of therapeutic results (Cavanagh & Levitov). Therefore, the antithesis of patience and flexibility are counselors’ needs to be successful and to produce measurable symptom change. The process of counseling is often painstaking slow, which requires counselors to be comfortable with limited markers of success (Guy, 1987). Patient counselors are those who are self-disciplined and communicate a sense of stability and grounding for clients (Kottler, 2003). Furthermore, flexible counselors move at clients’ paces, tolerate silence, and
allow clients to take responsibility for therapeutic progress and movement (Kottler, 1991).

**Self-aware.** The construct of self-aware includes the synonyms of self-knowledge and introspection. In the following section I provide a description of the importance of the construct of self-aware as conceptualized by counseling scholars, theorists, and researchers.

Ronnestad and Orlinsky (2005) viewed self-awareness as a prerequisite for therapists preparation, as well as a condition that should continually be nurtured throughout therapists’ development. Cavanagh and Levitov (2002) asserted that counselors possessing adequate levels of self-knowledge are aware of their feelings and motivations and understand how those feelings and motivations affect the counseling relationship. Possessing an accurate and realistic view of self allows counselors to better connect with clients, communicate genuine compassion, and recognize personal strengths and weaknesses (Cavanagh & Levitov, Miars & Halverson, 1997).

According to Foster (1996), effective counselors are those who are willing to self-reflect and examine personal issues. Similarly, Brammer and MacDonald (2003) cited self-awareness as a critical determinant to the nature of the therapeutic relationship. Furthermore, self-awareness provides protection against the tendency of counselors to project values onto clients. Self-aware counselors have the capacity to identify personal attitudes and feelings as well as monitor personal biases (Gladding, 2007; Menne, 1975). Furthermore, the ACA Code of Ethics (2005) stated, “Counselors are aware of
their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and avoid imposing values that are inconsistent with counseling goals" (A.4.b).

Lee and Sirch (1994) stated that effective counselors are those who are open to personal growth and enlightenment, which assists them in helping their clients to do so, on both a personal and a global level. Moustakas (1995) asserted that self-awareness, including awareness of personal reactions, is part and parcel to being fully present with clients.

**Genuine.** The construct of genuine includes the synonyms of congruent, authentic, and honest. In the following section I provide a description of the importance of the construct of genuine as conceptualized by counseling scholars, theorists, and researchers.

Carkuff and Berenson (1977) contended that the establishment of a genuine relationship is the foundation of an effective therapeutic process. Genuineness was also a quality Pope and Kline (1999) identified in their study as being important to counselor effectiveness and less responsive to training. Rogers (1957, 1961) included genuineness as one of the conditions he believed necessary for therapeutic change to occur in the counseling relationship. Furthermore, Rogers’s (1961) description of self-actualization included the trait of moving away from phony, manufactured relationships. To be genuine is, among other things, to be congruent, honest, and authentic (Korb, Gorrell, & Van De Riet, 1989; Welfel & Patterson, 2005). Foster (1996) believed that genuineness also encompasses the qualities of sincerity, thoughtfulness, and openness. Perez (1979) observed that the when counselors are in tune and accepting of their feelings, the greater capacity for the tolerance of clients’ strong emotional
responses exists as well as the higher level of counselor congruence. According to Frank and Frank (1991) counselors’ success is somewhat dependent on their genuine concern for their clients’ well being.

Cavanagh and Levitov (2002) conceptualized genuineness and authenticity to include an element of honesty. Honest counselors appropriately communicate positive and negative reactions to clients and in doing so foster an open working relationship (Cavanagh & Levitov).

Current Counseling Admissions Procedures

In this section, I focus on admissions procedures as conducted within counselor education programs. First, I highlight pertinent CACREP admission standards. Next, I explore current counseling admissions criteria and highlight the utilization and efficacy of the GRE and undergraduate GPA as admissions criteria. Finally, I review the relevance and effectiveness of the admissions interview.

CACREP admission standards. Counseling experts emphasize the importance of admitting students based on aptitude as well as personal and professional development. The CACREP 2009 Standards stated that program admissions criteria should include consideration of the following:

1. Each applicant’s potential success in forming effective and culturally relevant interpersonal relationships in individual and small-group contexts
2. Each applicant’s aptitude for graduate-level study
3. Each applicant’s career goals and their relevance to the program (p. 3)

Although CACREP program admissions standards provide the admissions criteria
underpinnings, accredited programs are left to decide how best to meet the CACREP standards (Smith, 2004). Furthermore, Smith found that CACREP program admissions standards and the characteristics of effective counselors as specified in the literature were only loosely related.

**Counseling admissions criteria.** In addition to personal characteristics related to counselor effectiveness, counselor educators have also considered academic achievement as being related to counselor effectiveness. Most counselor educators indicate that they rely heavily on GRE-V and GRE-Q sections of the GRE and undergraduate GPA during the master’s admissions process (Pope & Kline, 1999). However, these measures are not highly predictive of personal development (Hosford, Johnson, & Atkinson, 1984; Smaby, Maddux, Richmond et al., 2005) or overall success in counseling master’s programs (Markert & Monke, 1990).

Interested in the predictive ability of the GRE, Morrison and Morrison (1995) conducted a meta-analysis of systematic research to examine the relationship between performance on the GRE-V and GRE-Q and graduate level achievement as measured by graduate GPA. Morrison and Morrison examined 22 relevant studies published between 1955 and 1992 in psychological and educational literature. Studies included student samples from education, psychology, humanities, fine arts, math and science, library science, and counseling. Results of their meta-analysis suggested that the GRE-V and GRE-Q are minimal predictors of graduate GPA, with GRE-V and GRE-Q performance accounting for an average of 6.3% of the variance in graduate GPA. The researchers concluded that the GRE-V and GRE-Q are “virtually useless from a prediction standpoint” (p. 314).
In an effort to review, revise, and validate one counseling program’s admissions criteria, Morrow (1993) studied the admissions procedures and applicable historical data at Western Carolina University (WCU). In a three-phase study, Morrow found that the GRE-A was the best predictor of graduate GPA. It is important to note that Morrow’s 1993 study preceded the 2002 introduction of the GRE-AW and subsequent discontinuation of the GRE-A assessment. Morrow found no significant correlation between the GRE-V and GRE-Q scores and the faculty’s rating of overall counseling performance. However, the GRE-A score was positively correlated ($r = .79, p < .01$) with the faculty rating. Previous admissions standards in the WCU counselor education program included a minimum undergraduate GPA requirement of 2.5, the GRE-V and GRE-Q minimum of 800, and the GRE-A score was not included in the criteria. As a result of their research, they changed their admissions criteria to include a minimum undergraduate GPA requirement of 3.0 and a combined GRE-V or –Q with –A minimum of 900. It is noteworthy that after the WCU counselor education program faculty revised the admissions standards to include the new criteria, several faculty members and clinical supervisors anecdotally reported their perceptions of improvements in the academic and clinical performance of the program’s students.

As cited previously, the GRE-AW replaced the GRE-A assessment in 2002. According to Rosenfeld, Courtney, and Fowles (2004), the GRE-AW increases the predictability of graduate GPA as compared to the GRE-A. The GRE-AW is a performance-based assessment of critical reasoning and analytical writing. The GRE-AW “assesses a test taker’s ability to articulate and support complex ideas, analyze an argument, and sustain a focused and coherent discussion” (Rosenfeld et al., p. 1). The
GRE-AW consists of two timed analytical writing tasks: Present Your Perspective on an Issue and Analyze an Argument (Rosenfeld et al.). Through my review of literature, I was unable to identify any research pertaining to the efficacy of the GRE-AW as a counseling admissions tool.

Several researchers have studied the current trends of the admissions criteria and practices of counseling program faculties in an effort to determine the trends and efficacy of such practices. Below, I outline four such studies. First, in an effort to simply analyze current admissions practices, Schweiger et al. (2008) surveyed counselor education program faculties in the United States of America, both CACREP accredited and non-accredited. The researchers determined that 61% of the 511 programs surveyed offer a community counseling or school counseling master's graduate degree program. Of the 269 program faculties that responded to the admissions portion of the survey, approximately 60% required the GRE, 7% required the Miller Analogies Test (MAT), and 33% required either the GRE or the MAT. Among responding program faculties, the average undergraduate GPA of students admitted was 2.87; however, the researchers did not report on the minimum GPA criteria for admittance. The researchers also surveyed program faculties to determine additional admission criteria they used. Results included criteria such as relevant work experience, letters of recommendation, and interviews. Of the 468 program faculties that responded to this portion of the survey, 92% required letters of recommendation, 62% conducted screening interviews, and 14% required relevant work experience.

Smaby, Maddux, Richmond et al. (2005) examined academic admissions criteria as predictors of counselor effectiveness. Participants in the study consisted of 80
students who received a master’s degree in counseling from a CACREP accredited
counseling program between 1997 and 2003. The researchers compared the
participants’ GRE-V and GRE-Q scores and undergraduate GPA’s to counseling
knowledge, personal development, and counseling skill. The instruments the
researchers used included the Skilled Counselor Scale (SCS) designed to measure
observable counseling skills (Urbani et al., 2002), the Counselor Preparation
Comprehensive Examination (CPCE) designed to measure knowledge of the eight
CACREP domains, and the Counselor Skills and Personal Development Rating Form
(CSPD-RF) designed to measure emotional sensitivity, listening skills, multicultural
skills, influencing skills, and counseling skills (Wilber, 1991, as cited in Smaby, Maddux,
Richmond et al.). An in-depth examination of these instruments is beyond the scope of
this literature review; the interested reader can refer to Smaby, Maddux, Richmond et
al. for a comprehensive explanation.

From their systematic research, Smaby, Maddux, Richmond et al. (2005) first
concluded that academic requirements including the GRE-V and GRE-Q were
predictive of knowledge acquisition, as measured by the CPCE. Next, the researchers
concluded that undergraduate GPA could be emphasized by counselor education
faculties during admissions due to the motivation required for strong academic
performance, which could translate into the effort needed to acquire and fine-tune
counseling skills. Finally, academic tests and grade performance were not highly
predictive of personal development, as measured by the CSPD-RF. As a result of these
findings, the researchers called for other means of assessing personal development at
admissions.
Schmidt, Homeyer, and Walker (2009) also examined the use of the abovementioned CPCE, an outcome measure of students’ mastery of professional counseling academic content. The researchers studied the relationship between counseling students’ performance on the CPCE at the conclusion of their graduate preparation and admissions requirements, including undergraduate last-60-hours GPA, GRE-V scores, and GRE-Q scores. Through multiple regression analysis, the researchers determined that the GRE-Q and GRE-V were valid predictors of success on the first administration of the CPCE. The GRE-V was the most statistically significant predictor regarding the CPCE overall as well as all eight subtests. Schmidt et al. acknowledged that although the GRE-V and GRE-Q may be useful measures to predict students’ potential for mastery of counseling content prior to granting admittance, they do not account for counseling skills and professional development needed to become an effective and competent counselor. It is important to note that the researchers did not evaluate GRE-A or GRE-AW scores in their study.

Smith (2004) surveyed 18 CACREP accredited counseling program faculties concerning their admissions procedures, and 15 of the 18 program faculties surveyed expressed the belief that most counseling program faculties do not adequately screen for personal or emotional characteristics related to counselor effectiveness. As a result, an increased burden exists for counselor educators to attend to gatekeeping responsibilities once students are admitted. The researcher divided the responding program faculties into the two categories, Academically Focused Admissions Requirements (AFAR) and Personally Focused Admissions Requirements (PFAR), based on the focus of their admissions criteria. The nine program faculties that the
researcher classified as having AFAR all cited empathic understanding, interpersonal
skills, insightful, good problem solving skills, and trusting as the most important
characteristics of an effective counselor. However, only six of the nine AFAR program
faculties reported screening for empathic understanding, five reported screening for
interpersonal skills, three reported screening for insightful, three reported screening for
good problem solving skills, and three reported screening for trusting. The other nine
program faculties the authors classified as having PFAR cited trusting, independent,
intuitive, and persistent as the most important characteristics of an effective counselor.
However, only four of the nine PFAR program faculties reported screening for trusting,
three reported screening for independent, two reported screening for intuitive, and two
reported screening for persistent. Smith pointed out a discrepancy between what the
program faculties professed to value in candidates and what they reportedly assessed
at the time of admissions.

Admissions interview. Many counselor educators have endorsed the individual
and group interview as a preferred selection procedure to assess for applicants'
interpersonal skills (Bradey & Post, 1991; Leverett-Main, 2004; Nagpal & Ritchie, 2002).
In this section, I highlight the opinions of scholars and researchers regarding the
utilization and efficacy of the admissions interview.

Leverett-Main (2004) surveyed program directors of CACREP accredited
counselor education programs to ascertain the perceived effectiveness of applicant
screening measures. Of the 91 respondents, representing all regions of the United
States, 62% ranked the personal interview as the most important screening measure. It
is noteworthy that respondents ranked the GRE and letters of recommendation as the
least effective measures.

Counselor educators informally and subjectively screen and evaluate applicants based upon personality characteristics (Pope & Kline, 1999). Some counseling scholars and researchers have expressed concern regarding the efficacy of this subjective screening, as it can be uncontrolled. Pope and Kline called for a screening device that formalizes the assessment of personality characteristics and reliably predicts counselor effectiveness. Leverett-Main (2004) evaluated the effectiveness of the structured interview versus the unstructured interview format and concluded:

The creation of a structured interview format for counselor education screening committees, including defined questions and rating scales that are consistently administered to all applicants, may improve the screening process and assist screening committees to select graduate students who will succeed both in the classroom and as future counselors (p. 218).

Wheeler (2002) encouraged counseling program faculties to use admissions interviews to explore applicants’ inner world in order to determine applicants’ potential to establish collaborative therapeutic relationships with clients. “The interviewer’s countertranference provides valuable insight into the candidate’s interpersonal functioning and his/her ability to tolerate intimacy and feedback from others” (Wheeler, p. 437). Similarly, Nagpal and Ritchie (2002) asserted that the personal interview is the best assessment of personal characteristics and interpersonal skills that are related to counselor effectiveness as compared to other methods used in applicant selection. However, results of Markert and Monke’s (1990) evaluation of studies indicated that selection interviews lack validity in predicting therapeutic effectiveness.

In Markert and Monke’s (1990) frequently cited survey of counseling program admissions procedures, no program faculties surveyed at the time were utilizing
sociometric ratings as admissions criteria. However, Holden et al. (1999) cited R. Nejedlo as confirming that the Northern Illinois University counselor education program faculty had used sociometric evaluations in their admissions process for over 30 years. In 1993, the University of North Texas (UNT) counseling program followed suit and instituted a similar admissions procedure. In it, a faculty member and doctoral student co-led a semi-structured small group interview designed to maximize participants’ self-disclosure, and then the co-leaders independently completed sociometrical ratings of each applicant. Holden et al. asserted that sociometric ratings can potentially identify a variety of interpersonal factors that may be predictive of counseling program applicants’ success.

Next, Holden et al. (1999) studied the relationship between counseling students’ GRE-A, group interview sociometric ratings, and ratings of effectiveness by counseling theory and counseling skills instructors at the end of the first semester to the instructors’ ratings of students’ practicum performance. Below, I highlight Holden et al.’s study, including the format of the group interview upon which co-leaders based their sociometric ratings.

In Holden et al.’s (1999) study, during the third class meeting of the semester, the researchers randomly divided provisionally admitted students into small groups of 5 to 8 members. Faculty member and doctoral student co-leaders of each group conducted a 2.5 hour semi-structured group with exercises designed to maximize group participants’ self-disclosure. The group activities consisted of personal introductions, a value clarification/group consensus activity, brainstorming positive and negative traits of counselors, and strength bombardment. At the conclusion of the group, participants and
co-leaders completed a form both rating and ranking each member’s potential as a counselor. At the conclusion of the same semester, the instructors of the courses rated and ranked all participants in terms of their perceived potential as counselors. The researchers completed data collection when the participants completed practicum. At the conclusion of practicum, the practicum instructor rated each participant’s performance as a counselor.

Holden et al. (1999) conducted a regression analysis that failed to yield significant correlations, which is in contrast to anecdotal evidence they presented. The authors reported that faculty members at three different universities that had implemented the semi-structured group interview with sociometric ratings reported a decrease in the number of problem students admitted. As a result, the researchers called for further research to determine what exactly the group interview sociometric ratings detect that appear to screen out applicants with low potential as future counselors. J. Holden (personal communication, October 9, 2008) reported two major weaknesses of the study. The first limitation was the use of a single assessment item, “potential effectiveness as a counselor.” The second limitation of the study was that one of the group leaders reportedly dominated the group interview sessions he/she led, so the resulting applicant ratings probably lacked validity.

Nagpal and Ritchie (2002) hypothesized that researchers have not found selection interviews to be a valid measure of counselor effectiveness for three reasons. First, counselor educators lack consensus about which applicant characteristics are most desirable and should, therefore, be assessed during admissions. Second, the characteristics applicants should possess are not well defined. However, research from
the field of psychology and medicine indicate that structuring the interview based on the identification of key dimensions pertinent to task tends to improve interview validity and reliability (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997; Conway, Jako, & Goodman, 1995; Nagpal & Ritchie). Therefore, Nagpal and Ritchie suggested that if counselor educators could identify specific criteria for evaluation, then the interviews could provide a more valid measure of counselor effectiveness. Finally, the interview decision-making process can affect validity of selection due to extraneous factors including “the type of attributions made by applicants, the interviewers’ moods, personal liking and the ‘similar-to-me’ effect, racial composition of the interview panel, and the similarity between the interviewers’ and the interviewee’s race” (p. 209).

In a qualitative study, Nagpal and Ritchie (2002) examined counselor educators’ decision-making processes during selection interviews. They interviewed nine counselor educators from four counselor education programs in the state of Ohio; however, the authors did not specify whether the counselor education programs were CACREP accredited. The participants consistently reported subjective screening for applicants’ professional attributes, personal attributes, and interpersonal skills. Professional attributes included goal and motivational appropriateness and professional and academic preparedness. Personal attributes included personal maturity, flexibility, and emotional stability. Interpersonal skills included social appropriateness, presence, and verbal skills. A general consensus existed among participants in regards to the information gathering process including their subjective impressions, which refers to “intuitive and subjective responses to an applicant’s behavior” (p. 214). Although a high degree of agreement existed among the participants concerning the evaluation criteria,
less agreement existed concerning the final decision-making process; some participants cited the processes of individual analysis and other participants cited group influence.

Nagpal and Ritchie (2002) also observed that counselor educators seemed to be using interviews as a screening tool instead of a selection tool: utilizing interviews to make certain that no applicants were admitted who were undoubtedly inappropriate. For example, participants of the study reported that interviewees were admitted “as long as they did not display any extremely undesirable characteristic” (p. 216). As a result of these findings, the researchers suggested that counselor educators might be reluctant to use interviews to select the best candidates rather than screen for the worst candidates due to the lack of specific criteria to support their selection. The researchers called for more research to correlate existing measures of counselor effectiveness with the criteria used in the interview selection process. It is noteworthy that generalizability of this study may be limited due to the small sample size. After my review of the literature regarding the admissions interview process, it seems clear that a need exists for counselor educators to establish the intentionality and functionality of the process.

Purpose of the Study

In the field of counseling, experts have recognized that personal attributes and personality characteristics are important factors for counselor education faculties to consider when applicants are evaluated for admissions (Leverett-Main, 2004; Pope & Kline, 1999; Wheeler, 2002). However, less evidence of agreement exists in the literature as to which traits should be used to assess such counseling potential. Counseling scholars and researchers have largely focused on counselor impairment,
including the identification of deficiencies as well as remediation and dismissal procedures (Gaubatz & Vera, 2006; Hensley, Smith, & Thompson, 2003; McAdams et al., 2007; Oklin & Gaughen, 1991; Woodyard, 1997). I propose that more careful screening procedures could reduce the amount of unfit students admitted. It seems pertinent and appropriate to continue research in the area of counselor screening, in an effort to prevent inept students from being admitted into counseling programs from the beginning.

Due to the fact that counselor educators have ready access to academic assessments and are often required to utilize such assessments by their respective university, they predominantly have used and continue to use those measures in admissions decisions. Counselor educators are still using these measures as admissions criteria even though research has shown that these measures alone do not predict counseling effectiveness. Therefore, counselor educators need to find a way to assess for personal characteristics in conjunction with or instead of academic assessments in an effort to better predict counseling effectiveness.

The purpose of this study is to provide greater clarity to current admissions procedures in one CACREP accredited counselor education program. The results of this study may provide crucial information related to the efficacy of current admissions procedures. The results may encourage other counselor education program faculties to evaluate and perhaps reassess their current practices.
CHAPTER 2
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The focus of this chapter is on the specific methods and procedures that I used to investigate the relationship between two admissions screening instruments and the personality traits related to counselor effectiveness. I present the research questions and assumptions as well as the quantitative correlation research design, which includes operational definitions, instrumentation, and identification of my population. I also review specific procedures I used to obtain and statistically analyze pertinent data.

Research Questions and Assumptions

The research questions that I sought to answer are:

1. What relationships exist between four variables: master’s counseling program admitted students’ admissions group interview co-leaders’ sociometric ratings averages, GRE Analytical Writing Assessment (GRE-AW) scores, instructors’ ratings of counselor personality characteristics, and instructors’ ratings of students’ mastery of basic clinical skills at the conclusion of the first clinical course of the counselor preparation program?

2. Which variable or combination of variables, including the admissions group interview co-leaders’ sociometric rating average, GRE-AW score, and a rating of counselor personality characteristics, is/are the best predictor of instructors’ ratings of students’ mastery of basic clinical skills in the first clinical course of counselor preparation?

My primary assumptions concerning the research were:
1. The admissions group interview sociometric ratings will correlate positively with both personality trait ratings and basic clinical skills ratings at the conclusion of students’ first clinical course.

2. The group interview sociometric ratings will be the best predictor of basic clinical skills ratings at the conclusion of the first clinical course.

Definition of Terms

To define personality for the purpose of this study, I adopted Maddi’s (1996) definition: “Personality is a stable set of tendencies and characteristics that determine those commonalities and differences in people’s psychological behavior (thoughts, feelings, and actions)” (p. 8). Although each person is unique, the characteristics that make up one’s personality are recognizable, observable, and predictable (Maddi).

I defined a large southwestern university accredited counseling program as a CACREP accredited counselor education program located in the southwestern U.S. and offering master’s degrees in elementary and secondary school counseling, community counseling, and college and university counseling, as well as a doctoral degree in counselor education. Such a program admits approximately 150 master’s candidates annually, with an annual graduation rate of approximately 85% (Schweiger et al., 2008).

I defined counseling program admissions group interview procedure as the procedure used at the large southwestern university accredited counseling program, which I define as follows. Applicants are randomly divided into groups of 7-10 applicants. Each group is co-led by a faculty member and doctoral student. The co-leaders conduct a 2.0- to 2.5-hour group process consisting of semi-structured
exercises designed to maximize participant self-disclosure. These exercises include personal introductions, a values clarification/group consensus task, brainstorming and discussion of positive and negative traits of counselors, and strength bombardment. See Appendix B for a detailed description of the group interview activities. The group concludes with participants and group leaders completing a group interview rating of each participant’s perceived potential as a counselor. Below is a portion of the instructions co-leaders follow concerning the admissions group interview procedures.

The activities are designed to encourage active participation that reveals applicants' interpersonal skills and some intrapsychic material without getting into "deep" psychological material. Do what you can to make the group a safe place for people to express themselves. The more they participate, the more data you have to make your decisions about how promising each applicant looks as a potential counselor (University of North Texas Counseling Program, 2008a).

Co-leaders are instructed to complete the rankings of all participants individually and are also instructed to refrain from discussing impressions of particular applicants until both co-leaders have submitted their ratings. I describe the group interview rating in further detail in the instrumentation section of this chapter.

**Counselor Effectiveness**

The remaining definitions include the identified personality constructs that I found to be most often cited in the literature as being related to counselor effectiveness. For the purpose of this study, counselor effectiveness was limited to the personality qualities of empathic, genuine, self-aware, warm and accepting, and flexible as defined below. As a result of my literature review, I found many apparently synonymous references to the same constructs. In an effort to classify the most often cited constructs referenced
as contributing to counselor effectiveness, I chose to combine traits that I judged as synonymous.

For the purpose of this study the construct of warm and accepting is defined as someone who is kind, nonthreatening, compassionate, open-minded, and possesses positive regard for others. For the purposes of this study, I conceptualized the construct of warm and accepting to include the synonymous constructs of positive regard, open-mindedness, and respect for the inherent worth in others.

Someone who possesses empathy, or is empathic, has the ability to sense, perceive, understand, and reflect another’s experience of the world. For the purposes of this study, I conceptualized the construct of empathic to include the synonymous construct of understanding.

Flexible is defined as someone having the ability to tolerate ambiguity, adapt easily to changes, approach situations with an egalitarian attitude, and be patient. For the purposes of this study I conceptualized the construct of flexible to include the synonymous constructs of tolerance of ambiguity and patience.

Self-aware is defined as someone who comprehends one’s own feelings and motivations and possesses an understanding of how those feelings and motivations affect the counseling relationship. For the purposes of this study I conceptualized the construct of self-aware to include the synonymous constructs of introspection and self-knowledge.

To be genuine is to be congruent, thoughtful, sincere, honest, and authentic. For the purposes of this study I conceptualized the construct of genuine to include the synonymous constructs of congruence, authenticity, and honesty.
Instrumentation

For the instrumentation of this study, I used the Group Interview Sociometric Ratings (Appendix C), the GRE-AW, the Skills Assessment (Appendix D), and the Counselor Personality Assessment (Appendix E). In this section I describe the aforementioned instruments, including the rationale and systematic development of the Counselor Personality Assessment.

Group Interview Sociometric Rating

As I outlined above, the co-leaders of the master’s admissions interview groups were a counseling program faculty member and doctoral student. At the conclusion of the group interview process, co-leaders completed the Group Interview Co-Leaders Rating Sheet (Appendix C), which instructed each co-leader to individually rate each applicant on five items.

1. She/He expressed herself/himself well.
2. She/He seemed understanding of others in the group.
3. She/He seemed genuine.
4. She/He seemed to value and care about others.
5. I could imagine her/him becoming an effective counselor.

Response options for each item are:

1 = extremely poor   2 = poor   3 = fair   4 = good   5 = extremely good

Co-leaders sometimes responded with decimals rather than integers, for example, 4.5 instead of 4 or 5. Averaging of all responses yielded an overall rating that ranged from 1 to 5 expressed in hundredths, for example, 4.25.
The validity for the Group Interview Sociometric Rating was established through the large southwestern university accredited counseling program faculty members’ expert review of items and collective agreement that an effective counselor is characterized by the behaviors described in the first four items. Item 1, she/he expressed herself/himself well, assesses how well an applicant expresses oneself. Items 2 through 4 assess how others perceive the applicant’s communication of the core conditions (Rogers, 1957), acknowledged by most theorists to be necessary but not necessarily sufficient for a positive therapeutic outcome. For example, Item 2, she/he seemed understanding of others in the group, assesses an applicant’s communication of empathy. Item 3, she/he seemed genuine, assesses an applicant’s level of genuineness. Item 4, she/he seemed to value and care about others, assesses an applicant’s communication of positive regard. Finally, Item 5, I could imagine her/him becoming an effective counselor, assesses how the applicant is perceived holistically as a potentially effective counselor (J. Holden, personal communication, April 20, 2009).

Regarding reliability, I used Cronbach’s alpha to determine the reliability of the sociometric rating to achieve Nunnally and Bernstein’s (1994) adequacy coefficient criterion of .7 or higher. The Group Interview Sociometric Rating yielded a total Cronbach’s alpha reliability score of .843. A paired t-test yielded no statistical significant difference between the way in which the co-leaders, consisting of faculty members and doctoral students, rated the interviewees, $t(94) = .730, p = .467$. As a result, I elected to use an average score of the co-leaders ratings as a variable in my study.
**GRE Analytical Writing Assessment**

The GRE-AW is a performance-based assessment of critical reasoning and analytical writing. As cited in chapter one, the GRE-AW consists of two timed analytical writing tasks: Present Your Perspective on an Issue and Analyze an Argument (Rosenfeld et al., 2004). The GRE-AW yields a single combined score from the two writing tasks, ranging from 0 to 6, in half-point increments.

**Skills Assessment**

As a means of measuring one possible refection of counselor effectiveness, I asked instructors of the first clinical course in the counseling program, termed respondents, to assess their students’ mastery of basic clinical skills. In an effort to encourage the respondents to think discriminately about each of their students, I asked them first to rank the students in their class from most (1) to least (the number equaling the total number of students in their class, such as 17) effective in students’ mastery of basic clinical skills. After completing the ranking, respondents then rated each student’s mastery of basic clinical skills using a five point Likert scale from far above average to far below average (Appendix D).

**Counselor Personality Assessment**

In lieu of creating the proposed Counselor Personality Assessment, I had hoped to identify an existing validated instrument to assess a counselor’s personality. However, through a thorough review of literature, I was unable to identify such an instrument due to both theoretical and practical reasons as I describe below. From a
theoretical perspective, I was unable to identify a valid and reliable preexisting instrument that addressed counselor personality characteristics exclusively. Many authors have attempted to create or use existing instruments to assess counselor effectiveness (Basile, 1993; Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2003; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Kerl et al., 2002; Leigh et al. 2007; Myrick & Kelly, 1971; Ponterotto & Furlong, 1985; Weaver, 1999). Despite the emphasis on counselors’ personality traits in the literature, instruments I reviewed focused on measureable behavior such as skills rather than personality traits. There did not appear to be an instrument with established validity, reliability, and effectiveness for assessing, at the time of admissions, counselor trainees’ personality traits that seem to be related to their potential to become effective counselors. It is noteworthy that I explored other assessments not specifically related to counseling or psychology, including the Emotional Judgment Inventory (Bedwell, 2003; Martin, Easton, Wilson, Takemoto, & Sulivan, 2004) and the California Psychological Inventory (Weaver, 1999). Both instruments seemed promising from a theoretical perspective; however, both instruments were not a practical choice due to the high cost of administration and scoring. In order to be a practical choice, any instrument I used in this study needed to be one that counseling program faculties could realistically afford to use routinely during admissions and/or during counselor preparation.

Due to a lack of available and applicable assessments for the purpose I intended, I consulted with my committee and a statistician regarding the development, scoring, and interpretation of the assessment. I designed the Counselor Personality Assessment for supervisors and instructors to complete with regard to counselors-in-training. I used Crocker and Algina’s (1986) suggested steps for systematic instrument development,
which included: (1) identifying purposes of test score use, (2) identifying behaviors to represent the construct, (3) preparing a set of test specifications, (4) constructing initial item pool, (5) reviewing items (6) holding preliminary item tryouts, (7) field-testing of item on representative sample, (8) determining statistical properties of item scores (9) conducting reliability and validity studies, and (10) developing guidelines for administration, scoring, and interpretation of test scores. Following is a description of the respective steps of instrument design as it pertains to the Counselor Personality Assessment.

**Step 1: Identifying purposes of test score use.** The purpose of the Counselor Personality Assessment was to assess counselor personality characteristics exclusively. I developed this instrument for the purpose of this research and used it to assess how instructors perceived the personality characteristics of their students at the end of a basic counseling skills course.

**Step 2: Identifying behaviors to represent the construct.** In an effort to identify the most often cited personality traits or constructs that contribute to counselor effectiveness, I collected as many texts, theoretical articles, and research studies as I could find, which numbered 47. Specifically, I used PsycInfo and PsycArticles via Ebscohost to search for peer reviewed articles and dissertations. I also used the University of North Texas Library System and Interlibrary Loan to access dissertations and textbooks pertaining to counselor training, counselor theory, and counselor effectiveness. A matrix of the cited characteristics that I found from those 47 sources appears in Appendix A. As discussed previously, I found many synonymous references to seemingly identical constructs. In an effort to classify the most often cited constructs
referenced as contributing to counselor effectiveness, I combined traits that I judged to be synonymous. However, if an author or group of authors of a single source referenced synonymous terms, I counted that occurrence as one reference in the matrix.

As the matrix reveals, the top five cited counselor personality traits or constructs I found were warm and accepting (27), empathic (26), flexible (23), self-aware (24), and genuine (23). In the Counselor Personality Assessment, I dedicated one subscale to each construct.

**Step 3: Preparing a set of test specifications.** According Crocker and Algina (1986), preparing test specifications includes determining the relative emphasis of each component on the test. I decided to weight all five subscales equally. I designed the Counselor Personality Assessment on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (**strongly disagree**) to 5 (**strongly agree**). I selected a Likert-scale to obtain the respondents' degree of agreement or disagreement with each item. According to Alreck and Settle (2004), one major advantage to using a Likert-scale is the ability to obtain a summated value. Besides obtaining the results of each item, I obtained a total score for each of the five constructs.

**Step 4: Constructing initial item pool.** I developed six items for each of the five subscales, totaling 30 items. I worded all items in statement form. For each subscale, I worded three items positively and three negatively (Alreck & Settle, 2004).

**Step 5: Reviewing items.** Next, Crocker and Algina (1986) advised consulting with a qualified associate to review the items for accuracy, ambiguity, grammar, appropriateness, offensive bias, readability, and technical flaws. The three members of
my doctoral committee, who qualify as experts by virtue of their combined 38 years of experience as counselor educators, served as my consultants for item review.

Upon analyzing expert reviewers’ responses, I made several changes to the Counselor Personality Assessment. First, I reworded several items so that all items were worded in present tense. Next, I reconstructed several items within constructs to ensure that the negative and positive statements were indeed opposite statements. Finally, I reformatted the layout of the assessment for ease of completion. When I finished making the abovementioned changes, I used a random numbers table to randomly assign the items in the Counselor Personality Assessment (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

Pilot Study

To assess the clarity of the instrument and to fulfill Steps 6 through 9 of Crocker and Algina’s (1986) instrumentation development guidelines, I conducted a small field test of the Counselor Personality Assessment.

Step 6: Holding preliminary item tryouts. Conducting a preliminary item tryout on a small sample is important to further explore the appropriateness of questions, including the difficulty level of items. To address this step, I conducted an informal field test and solicited verbal and written feedback concerning the items from 11 doctoral students in a large southwestern university accredited counseling program who had served in a supervisory role and who were not candidates to serve as respondents in the final study. See Appendix F for the pilot study informed consent and Appendix G for the pilot study version of the Counselor Personality Assessment. I asked the doctoral
students to complete a Counselor Personality Assessment on two of their current masters’ supervisees whom they considered to have different levels of counseling ability. I also asked the doctoral students to provide any written feedback about the Counselor Personality Assessment including item wording and assessment layout. I then made revisions based on the feedback I received from this preliminary item tryout concerning the Counselor Personality Assessment layout. I did not receive any feedback that led me to change any item.

**Steps 7, 8, and 9: Additional steps.** Crocker and Algina’s (1986) Steps 7, 8, and 9, respectively, were field-testing of items on a representative sample, determining statistical properties of item scores, and conducting reliability and validity studies. Crocker and Algina (1986) suggested conducting a large pilot study that would enable the researcher to conduct item analysis, as well as reliability and validity testing. A large pilot study was not feasible due to my limited access to the intended population. However, I established validity through triangulation and assessed for internal reliability by utilizing the data from the preliminary item tryout, as described in Step 6.

Validity pertains to accurately assessing the construct that the inventory claims to measure (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008). First, I achieved construct validity through a comprehensive literature review, as I’ve previously described in Step 2. Second, in Step 5 I achieved face validity by asking three faculty members on my committee, all considered experts in the field of counseling, to review the instrument and provide feedback about the extent to which the items individually and as a whole assess the five personality characteristic variables (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Finally, I
established criterion validity by piloting the instrument with 11 doctoral students, as described above in Step 6.

The 30 item pilot Counselor Personality Assessment (see Appendix G) had 15 positive statements and 15 negative statements. The 15 negative items (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 29, 30) were reverse-coded prior to data analysis. Regarding reliability, I used Cronbach’s alpha to determine the reliability of each subscale and the entire scale to achieve Nunnally and Bernstein’s (1994) adequacy coefficient criterion of .7 or higher. As can be viewed in Table 1, the Counselor Personality Assessment pilot study yielded a total Cronbach’s alpha reliability score of .968. In addition, all constructs yielded Cronbach’s alpha reliability scores that exceeded Nunnally and Bernstein’s adequacy coefficient criterion of .7. However, when I examined how each item within the respective constructs correlated with each other, I noticed that one item in the Empathic construct (Item 20, Seems insensitive to others’ feelings) and one item in the Self-aware construct (Item 2, Is out of touch with his or her own thoughts, emotions, and intentions) scored lower. Furthermore, of all 30 items tested, if I removed those two items from the Counselor Personality Assessment, then the respective constructs’ Cronbach’s alpha reliability scores would increase. As a result, I decided to eliminate Item 2 and Item 20 from the initial Counselor Personality Assessment. The final Counselor Personality Assessment used in this research had 28 items (Appendix E). I referenced a random number table to randomly reorder the items on the final Counselor Personality Assessment (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).
Table 1

*Counselor Personality Assessment Pilot Test Internal Reliability (N = 22)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Category</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>$\alpha$</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>$\alpha$ with Item Deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>.968</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm and accepting</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.922</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.852</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.851</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-aware</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.856</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genuine</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.949</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 10: Developing guidelines for administration, scoring, and interpretation of test scores. Through the data resulting from the aforementioned steps, I gained clarity in regards to specifics of administering and scoring.

Participants

The population for this study was men and women who had been conditionally admitted into the master’s program of a large southwestern university accredited counseling program and who had completed one of the first two required courses, a basic counseling skills course, during the Fall 2008 and Spring 2009 semesters. By nature of the program’s admissions criteria, each individual had completed an undergraduate degree; stated the intention to earn a master’s degree, or to complete deficiency work to achieve the equivalent of a master’s degree, in counseling; and
competed successfully with other applicants through a holistic admissions process that included review of student GPA, GRE scores, one-page essay, three letters of recommendation, and group interview co-leaders’ and peers’ ratings or Master’s Admissions Committee video rating of the student’s potential as a counselor. Because interview ratings were among the data I analyzed for this study, and because certain applicants such as international students and those living more than 50 miles from campus had, by admissions policy, submitted a self-statement video in lieu of interview participation, no group interview ratings data were available for these students, so I excluded them from the study (n=11).

Participants (N = 95) came from seven sections of the basic counseling skills course. Females comprised a much larger proportion of the sample (86%, n = 82) than males (13.7%, n = 13). Participants’ mean age was 27 (SD = 8.26). The sample included students specializing in community agency counseling (64.2%), elementary and secondary school counseling (31.6%), college and university counseling (3.2%), and degree deficiency (1%). It is important to note that I was unable to obtain information regarding the ethnicity of the sample, as that information is available only through the university graduate school and not through the counseling program.

Respondents were the five instructors, each of whom taught one or more of the seven sections of the basic counseling skills course offered during the two semesters of the study. Originally, I had planned on using ratings data from both the instructor and TAs for my study. However, during the first semester of data collection, one TA reported that he did not have enough information on each student to complete the Counselor Personality Assessments and Skills Assessments. Through further investigation, I
learned of the discrepancy between how each of the instructors used their TAs, with some TAs rarely spending time observing the students practicing basic counseling skills. As a result, I chose to omit the TA data from data analyses. Therefore, the respondent who completed the Counselor Personality Assessment and Skill Assessment on each student participant was the student’s instructor.

Data Collection Procedures

To review, the data I collected included (1) the average of the faculty leader and doctoral co-leader ratings of each participant on the Group Interview Co-Leaders Rating, (2) each participant’s GRE-AW score, (3) the respondent’s rating of each participant on the Counselor Personality Assessment, and (4) the respondent’s ranking and rating of each participants on the Skills Assessment.

Informed Consent

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the large southwestern university accredited counseling program, where I conducted my research, reviewed the necessary informed consent procedures pertaining to this study. The IRB determined that obtaining specific informed consent from each student would not be necessary due to the general consent each student gives when signing the UNT Counseling Program Understanding and Acknowledgement agreement, reproduced in Appendix H. The agreement reads:

I understand and acknowledge that my educational performance ratings may be included in research for the purpose of evaluation of the Counseling Program of the University of North Texas. I understand that my individual identity will not be
revealed to the public as part of this research (University of North Texas Counseling Program, 2008b).

To stay within the parameters of the above cited general consent, I hired a non-student staff person at an hourly rate to collect and de-identify all data so that I, as a fellow student, did not see students’ names attached to their performance data. Following is a detailed explanation of the steps that the staff member and I took to collect and de-identify the data.

First, I informed all respondents about my study no later than one month prior to the conclusion of the semester. I educated and prepared the respondents regarding the details of the data that I intended to collect. At the end of the second-to-last week of the semester, I provided the respondents with all necessary documents and instructions to complete the Counselor Personality Assessment and Skills Assessment. The instructions, which appear in Appendix I, included explicit directives regarding the order of form completion: Counselor Personality Assessment then Skills Assessment. The order of completion was deliberate in an attempt to increase respondents’ discriminate thinking about each student that they were rating. Regarding the Skills Assessment, my intention in requiring respondents to rank participants was exclusively to encourage discriminate thinking. For data analysis, I used only the ratings respondents provide. The instructions also explicitly stated and emphasized that respondents should return their completed forms in the enclosed envelope to the staff person.

In an effort to increase the thoughtfulness, motivation, and timeliness of the respondents, I implemented the following steps. As mentioned above, I first met with all respondents on an individual basis to familiarize them with the study and the specific instruments they would be completing and to communicate the importance of their
thoughtful and meticulous ratings of each participant. In this process, I showed them the instruments and how they were to complete them, but I did not leave copies of the instruments with them. Next, I provided an incentive to increase motivation and timeliness of respondents’ completion of all forms by offering respondent a $30 Visa gift card if all assessments were submitted by the deadline. At the time of this meeting, I determined respondents’ preferred mode of delivery of the gift card, such as placed by a staff member on their desk in their locked office or mailed to a preferred address.

When the staff member received data from the respondents, she then entered the collected data into an Excel spreadsheet that displayed the participants’ names in a column and the data organized in rows. Next, the staff member obtained and entered from existing department files each student’s admissions data, including faculty leader and doctoral co-leader ratings of each student on the Group Interview Co-Leaders Rating Sheet, participants’ GRE-AW scores, and participants’ demographic information. Finally, once she entered all necessary data, she de-identified the participants by creating a master list of participants’ names and assigning each one a unique and random numeric code, then replaced participants’ names on the spreadsheet with the codes. When she had completed the de-identification process, she sent the spreadsheet to me for data analysis. The staff member and I repeated all outlined data collection steps in both Fall 2008 and Spring 2009 semesters. The staff member retained all identifiable data in a locked filing cabinet in the counseling program office, including the master list that she retained if questions arose during the course of the study. I instructed her to destroy the master list after I had successfully defended my dissertation.
Data Analysis

My first research question was correlative in nature. Although findings of correlation research do not imply causality between variables, calculating a correlation coefficient can provide information concerning the extent to which two variables are related (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008). I selected the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) because it is the correlation coefficient most often used in behavioral science research (Hinkle, Wiersama, & Jurs, 2003). The four variables that I analyzed were group interview co-leaders’ sociometric rating average, GRE-AW score, counselor personality assessment rating, and skills assessment rating.

To analyze my second research question, I selected multiple regression, which is a method that examines the separate and collective contributions of one or more predictor variables to a dependent variable. I entered the multiple regression data using a simultaneous method. In a simultaneous regression, all of the independent variables, or predictor variables, are entered concurrently into the regression equation to determine the amount of variance each predictor variable uniquely contributes to the prediction of the dependent variable, or criterion variable (Heppner et al., 2008). In the multiple regression analysis, the criterion variable was the skills assessment rating and the three predictor variables included the admissions group interview co-leaders’ sociometric rating average, GRE-AW score, and counselor personality assessment rating.
CHAPTER 3
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the first section of this chapter, I review the results of my statistical analyses. Specifically, I review data screening steps and discuss the internal reliability and confirmatory factor analysis of the Counselor Personality Assessment. I examine the descriptive statistics of all assessments and provide a discussion of the correlation and multiple regression analyses of the data. In the discussion section of this chapter, I present a summary of my research, identify limitations of the research, and provide recommendations for future research endeavors.

Counselor Personality Assessment

The 28 item final Counselor Personality Assessment had 15 positive statements and 13 negative statements. For data entry, the 13 negative items (Items 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 27) were reverse-coded.

Internal Reliability

On the Counselor Personality Assessment, I calculated Cronbach’s alpha to determine the reliability of each subscale and the entire scale to achieve Nunnally and Bernstein’s (1994) adequacy coefficient criterion of .7 or higher. According to Rubin (2008), excellent internal consistency reliability is indicated by a Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of .9 or higher, and good internal consistency reliability is indicated by a Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of .8 to .89. Table 2 shows that the Counselor Personality Assessment yielded a total Cronbach’s alpha reliability score of
.968, the same result as in the pilot study. In addition, all constructs yielded Cronbach’s alpha reliability scores that exceeded Nunnally and Bernstein’s adequacy coefficient criterion of .7. The constructs Warm and Accepting (α = .935), Self-aware (α = .908), and Genuine (α = .932) all yielded excellent Cronbach’s alpha reliability scores that exceeded .9. The constructs of Empathic (α = .881) and Flexible (α = .820) yielded good Cronbach’s alpha reliability scores that exceeded .8.

Table 2

*Counselor Personality Assessment Mean, Standard Deviation, and Cronbach’s Alpha Estimates (N = 106)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>M*</th>
<th>SD*</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total – 28 items</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>.606</td>
<td>.968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm and accepting – 6 items</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>.720</td>
<td>.935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathic – 5 items</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.553</td>
<td>.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible – 6 items</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>.633</td>
<td>.820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-aware – 5 items</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>.745</td>
<td>.908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genuine – 6 items</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>.733</td>
<td>.932</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. * M and SD are averaged by the item numbers in each construct. M= Mean of all respondent responses, according to Likert scale, to all items in each construct.

*Factor Analysis*

Confirmatory factor analysis is a special type of factor analysis used in research to examine how well the hypothesized variables reflect a theoretical construct, thus testing for construct validity (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). One component of construct validity is convergent validity, meaning that the items within a
theoretical construct should share a high proportion of variance in common. Researchers can assess convergent validity through the examination of factor loading. According to Hair et al., all factor loading should be .5 or higher, and ideally .7 or higher.

The communality value represents the total amount of variance an item shares with all other items in the proposed construct. Low communality values less than .3 could indicate that the item does not fit well with the other items in the construct (Pallant, 2007).

The following is a discussion of confirmatory factor analysis for the five constructs of the Counselor Personality Assessment. First, the Warm and Accepting construct yielded high results with 76.44% of total variance explained; all factor loading values were greater than the ideal .7 level, and all communality values were greater than .3. Next, the Empathic construct yielded high results with 69.75% of total variance explained, all factor loading values were greater than the ideal .7 level, and all communality values were greater than .3. The Flexible construct yielded acceptable results with 53.14% of total variance explained; all factor loading values were greater than the acceptable .5 level, and all communality values were greater than .3. The Self-aware construct yielded high results with 73.43% of total variance explained; all factor loading values were greater than the ideal .7 level, and all communality values were greater than .3. Finally, the Genuine construct yielded high results with 76.22% of total variance explained; all factor loading values were greater than the ideal .7 level, and all communality values were greater than .3. See Table 3 for confirmatory factor analysis results presented by construct.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>% of Variance Explained</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>Communality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warm and accepting</td>
<td>76.44</td>
<td>.866</td>
<td>.749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2: Comes across as distant</td>
<td></td>
<td>.833</td>
<td>.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 7: Displays an open and caring attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td>.920</td>
<td>.847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 12: Seems “closed off”</td>
<td></td>
<td>.869</td>
<td>.755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 16: Seems approachable</td>
<td></td>
<td>.888</td>
<td>.789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 19: Seems cold and uninviting</td>
<td></td>
<td>.868</td>
<td>.753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 23: Is warm and accepting of others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathic</td>
<td>69.75</td>
<td>.836</td>
<td>.699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5: Is unable to accurately perceive another's experience of the world</td>
<td></td>
<td>.804</td>
<td>.647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 6: Sensitive to feelings and views of others</td>
<td></td>
<td>.822</td>
<td>.675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 11: Can take others’ perspectives</td>
<td></td>
<td>.833</td>
<td>.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 14: Struggles to take the perspective of others</td>
<td></td>
<td>.879</td>
<td>.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 18: Understands others’ feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>53.14</td>
<td>.748</td>
<td>.560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 13: Able to tolerate ambiguity</td>
<td></td>
<td>.694</td>
<td>.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 15: Has a need to control the situation</td>
<td></td>
<td>.683</td>
<td>.467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 17: Adapts easily to changing situations</td>
<td></td>
<td>.841</td>
<td>.707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 21: Seems uncomfortable with uncertainty</td>
<td></td>
<td>.741</td>
<td>.549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 25: Is patient</td>
<td></td>
<td>.651</td>
<td>.424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 27: Appears rigid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-aware</td>
<td>73.43</td>
<td>.900</td>
<td>.810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3: Seems perceptive of own inner thoughts, emotions, and intentions</td>
<td></td>
<td>.808</td>
<td>.653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 8: Can be introspective</td>
<td></td>
<td>.897</td>
<td>.805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9: Seems to struggle with self-reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td>.808</td>
<td>.654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 20: Seems unaware of how he or she impacts a situation</td>
<td></td>
<td>.867</td>
<td>.751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 26: Is in tune with his or her emotional reactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genuine</td>
<td>76.22</td>
<td>.848</td>
<td>.720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 1: Seems genuine</td>
<td></td>
<td>.845</td>
<td>.715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 10: Appears to be “playing a role”</td>
<td></td>
<td>.836</td>
<td>.700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 22: Seems not to be completely “real” with others</td>
<td></td>
<td>.925</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 24: Presents self in a sincere manner</td>
<td></td>
<td>.899</td>
<td>.807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 28: Appears authentic</td>
<td></td>
<td>.881</td>
<td>.776</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Descriptive Statistics

The following is a discussion of the descriptive statistics of all variables. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the GRE-AW yields a single combined score, ranging from 0 to 6, in half-point increments. The participants' mean score on the GRE-AW was 4.08 (SD = .726) with scores ranging from 3.0 to 5.0. The Group Interview Sociometric Rating yields a single averaged score, ranging from 1 to 5, expressed in hundredths. The mean coleaders’ average score on the Group Interview Sociometric Rating was 4.61 (SD = .364) with scores ranging from 3.0 to 5.0. See Table 4 for descriptive statistics on the Group Interview Sociometric Rating.

Table 4

*Group Interview Sociometric Rating Item Descriptive Statistics (N=95)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Interview Sociometric Rating</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th></th>
<th>Doctoral Student</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She/He expressed herself/himself well</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>.614</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>.669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She/He seemed understanding of others in the group</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>.563</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>.541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She/He seemed genuine</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>.558</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She/He seemed to value and care about others</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>.540</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>.584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could imagine her/him becoming an effective counselor</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>.580</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Average Score</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>.449</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>.448</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Counselor Personality Assessment yields an average total score ranging from 1 to 5, expressed in hundredths. As cited above, the mean total score of the Counselor Personality Assessment was 4.15 (SD = .606) with scores ranging from 2.39 to 4.86. The Skills Assessment Rating is based on a 5-point Likert scale; it yields a mean score expressed in hundredths. The mean score on the Skills Assessment was 3.36 (SD = .922) with scores ranging from 1 to 5.

Correlation Analysis

I conducted a correlation analysis among the four variables using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r). I set the level of statistical significance at an alpha level of .05 (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003) and preformed preliminary analyses to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality and linearity. Table 5 displays the bivariate Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) of the four variables. According to Cohen (1988), the strength of a correlation can be defined as small (.00-.30), medium (.30-.50), and large (.50-1.00).

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between skills assessment rating and GRE-AW (r (90) = .314, p < .01) with a medium strength correlation. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between skills assessment rating and counselor personality assessment (r (93) = .613, p < .01) with a large strength correlation. Group interview rating did not correlate significantly with any other factor.
Table 5

Correlations among Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group Interview</th>
<th>GRE-AW</th>
<th>Counselor Personality Assessment</th>
<th>Skills Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2 tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-AW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.051</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2 tailed)</td>
<td>.632</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor Personality Assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2 tailed)</td>
<td>.661</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills Assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.314**</td>
<td>.613**</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2 tailed)</td>
<td>.680</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Multiple Regression Analysis

In the multiple regression analysis, the three potential predictors included the group interview co-leaders’ sociometric rating average, GRE-AW score, and counselor personality assessment rating. The criterion variable was the skills assessment rating. As statistical significance testing for the estimated coefficients in a multiple regression analysis is necessary, I set the level of statistical significance at an alpha level of .05 (Hair et al., 2006).

I conducted preliminary analyses to ensure no violation of the assumptions of
normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity (Pallant, 2007). First, the assumption of multivariate normality is the assumption that variables are normally distributed. To check the assumption of normality, I analyzed the data distribution for skewness and kurtosis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Results showed the skewness and kurtosis of all variables were all in the acceptable range and, therefore, all met the assumption of multivariate normality. Next, linearity is the assumption that there is a linear relationship between variables. Homoscedasticity is the assumption that variability of scores for one continuous variable is similar to all values of another continuous variable. I assessed the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity through the examination of SPSS output scatter plots, and both assumptions were met. Finally, multicollinearity is a problem when variables are too highly correlated \( r > .90 \) (Tabachnick & Fidell). Analyzing highly correlated variables is redundant and weakens the analysis. All variables in the multiple regression analysis scored less than .90 and, therefore, did not meet the criteria of multicollinearity.

As shown in Table 6, regression analysis results revealed that the predictor variables significantly predicted the criterion variable, skills assessment rating, \( F(3, 89) = 18.295, p < .001 \). How well the predictor variables correlate with the criterion variable is expressed as the multiple correlation coefficient \( R \) (Heppner et al., 2008). Adjusted \( R^2 \) is the measure of effect size in multiple regression analyses. According to Cohen (1988), an adjusted \( R^2 > .35 \) is considered a large effect size. For this analysis, the adjusted \( R^2 \) was .368, signifying a large effect size, meaning that 36.8% of the variance in the criterion variable, skills assessment rating, was accounted for by the predictor variables group interview co-leaders’ sociometric rating average, GRE-AW score, and
counselor personality assessment rating.

Table 6

*Predictor Variables’ Coefficients (N = 90)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Beta (β)</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig (p)</th>
<th>rs</th>
<th>rs²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Interview</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.429</td>
<td>.699</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE-AW</td>
<td>.267</td>
<td>.218</td>
<td>2.534*</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.510</td>
<td>.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor Personality Assessment</td>
<td>.820</td>
<td>.544</td>
<td>6.337**</td>
<td>&gt;.001</td>
<td>.939</td>
<td>.882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.509</td>
<td>-1.337</td>
<td>.185</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01
rs = structural coefficient; rs² = squared structure coefficient

In terms of individual relationships between the predictor variables and the criterion variable, GRE-AW score (t = 2.534, p = .013) and counselor personality assessment rating (t = 6.337, p < .001) each significantly predicted the skills assessment rating. Counselor personality assessment recorded the highest beta value (β = .544, rs = .939), which indicates that it was the best predictor of skills assessment rating. Of the 36.8% variance in the skills assessment rating, the counselor personality assessment rating accounted for 88.2% (rs² = .882) and the GRE-AW accounted for 26.0% (rs² = .260).

Discussion

In the field of counseling, experts have recognized that personality characteristics
are important factors for counselor education faculties to consider when applicants are evaluated for admissions (Leverett-Main, 2004; Pope & Kline, 1999; Wheeler, 2002). However, counselor educators have used and are continuing to use academic assessments as admissions criteria even though research has shown that these measures alone do not predict counseling effectiveness. I believe that counselor educators need to find a way to assess for personal characteristics in conjunction with or instead of academic assessments in an effort to better predict counseling effectiveness.

This study was conducted to provide greater understanding of the value of various factors in the admissions process of one CACREP-accredited counselor education program in predicting applicants’ clinical potential. It seemed pertinent to continue research concerning counselor screening, in an effort to admit only those applicants with the potential to be successful, especially with regard to clinical ability. The two admissions criteria that I chose to study were the GRE-AW and the Group Interview Sociometric Rating. I selected the GRE-AW because Morrow (1993), a counselor educator, presented unpublished research findings at a professional conference, that the GRE Analytical score had correlated positively with his faculty members’ assessments of the overall strength – both academic and clinical – of advanced master’s counseling program students. Furthermore, as the GRE had relatively recently changed from the analytical to the analytical writing format, I was unable to identify any research pertaining to the efficacy of the GRE-AW as a counseling admissions tool. I chose to exclude the GRE-V and GRE-Q because researchers have found consistently that the GRE-V and GRE-Q scores are not highly
predictive of personal development (Smaby, Maddux, Richmond et al., 2005) or overall success in counseling master’s programs (Markert & Monke, 1990). I selected the Group Interview Sociometric Rating because, despite anecdotal evidence, this rating criterion had not been statistically validated as an effective admissions tool (Holden et al., 1999).

This study was conducted over two semesters, Fall 2008 and Spring 2009. The final sample of participants included 95 students enrolled in an introductory basic skills course at a large southwestern university accredited counseling program. I hired a non-student staff member to gather historical data on the participants’ admissions scores including their GRE-AW scores and their Co-leaders’ Group Interview Sociometric Ratings. At the conclusion of the respective semesters, each participant’s instructor completed a Counselor Personality Assessment rating and Skills Assessment Rating on the participant.

Results of Data Analyses

Results from the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis revealed several statistically significant relationships between variables. The following is a review of my research questions as well as a discussion of implications of the results of the data analyses.

My first research question was correlative in nature and involved exploring the existence of possible relationships between four variables: participants’ group interview co-leaders’ sociometric ratings averages and GRE-AW scores at the time of application to the counseling program, and participants’ instructors’ counselor personality
assessment ratings and skills assessment ratings of participants at the conclusion of their first clinical course of the counselor preparation program.

My data analyses revealed a medium statistically significant positive correlation between skills assessment ratings and GRE-AW scores. Results also revealed a large statistically significant positive correlation between skills assessment ratings and counselor personality assessment ratings. The group interview sociometric rating did not correlate with any other factor.

My second research question was concerning which variable or combination of variables, including the admissions group interview co-leaders’ sociometric rating averages, GRE-AW scores, and counselor personality assessment ratings, would be the best predictor of the skills assessment ratings in the first clinical course of training. Multiple regression analysis revealed that the criterion variable skills assessment ratings could be predicted by the combination of the predictor variables: counselor personality assessment ratings, GRE-AW scores, and group interview sociometric ratings. In terms of individual relationships between the predictor variables and the criterion variable, the counselor personality assessment rating was the best predictor of the skills assessment rating, with GRE-AW score also showing predictive value.

In this research, the counselor personality assessment and the skills assessment rating were positively correlated ($p < .01$). Furthermore, in the multiple regression analysis, the counselor personality assessment recorded the highest beta value ($\beta = .544$), which indicates that it was the best predictor of skills assessment rating, accounting for 88% of the predicted variance. These results indicate a relationship between instructors’ end-of-basic-counseling-skills-course assessments of participants’
personality characteristics and their assessment of participants’ degree of mastery of basic counseling skills. However, it is important to consider the possible impact of a halo effect when interpreting these results. A rater bias due to the halo effect exists when a rater’s overall impression of the individual being observed influences ratings on all of that individual’s behaviors (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). In other words, rather than discriminating among various behaviors, the rater may apply one’s overall view or feelings toward the subject to all of the subject’s behaviors. So, for example, although a subject might vary with regard to specific behaviors, a rater with an overall positive view or feeling for the subject would rate all behaviors positively, or vice versa.

This strong relationship between the variables of the counselor personality assessment scores and skills assessment ratings could be attributed to the halo effect because the same respondent completed both assessments in close temporal proximity. For example, if an instructor had come to favor a student – for reasons either related or unrelated to the personality characteristics or skills under examination – the instructor might render inflated and generalized ratings of the student on all personality characteristics and on mastery of basic counseling skills, when those student qualities actually varied considerably. Conversely, if an instructor had come to dislike a student – for reasons either related or unrelated to the personality characteristics or skills under examination – the instructor might deflate and generalize ratings of qualities that actually varied considerably. If these examples were true, the correlation between the counselor personality assessment scores and the skills assessment rating would be due to the halo effect rather than an actual correspondence between the two variables.

Data analyses also revealed that participants’ GRE-AW scores were positively
correlated with how their instructors rated their end-of-course mastery of basic counseling skills. To review, the GRE-AW consists of two analytical writing tasks: Present Your Perspective on an Issue and Analyze an Argument. The GRE-AW is intended to measure a test taker's ability to articulate complex ideas clearly and effectively, examine claims and accompanying evidence, support ideas with relevant reasons and examples, and sustain a well-focused, coherent discussion (Rosenfeld et al., 2004). Perhaps participants' ability to take on and analyze a perspective on an issue and clearly articulate their point is related to participants' ability to accurately reflect their clients' experience. The skills needed to analyze and communicate in the GRE-AW may be related to the skills needed to provide a sensitive awareness of a client's experience as well as the communication skills to reflect that understanding back to the client.

Researchers have found consistently that the GRE-V and GRE-Q scores are not highly predictive of overall success in counseling master's programs (Markert & Monke, 1990). In two more recent studies (Schmidt et al., 2009; Smaby, Maddux, Richmond et al., 2005), however, researchers have found that the GRE-V and GRE-Q are statistically significantly correlated to success of academic content mastery of counseling information as measured by a comprehensive counseling exam at the end of master's counseling training. Although these findings are promising in validating that an existing admission tool is predictive of counselor's content mastery, the GRE-V and GRE-Q do not account for the personal development or skills needed to be clinically effective as a counselor (Smaby, Maddux, Richmond et al.). The current study provides promising evidence that the GRE-AW may add an additional layer of criteria counselor educators can use, as it is predictive of students' abilities to master basic counseling skills early in
their counselor preparation.

In this study, the group interview sociometric rating did not correlate with any other variable nor did it predict the skills assessment rating. Thus, these results failed to provide support for the hypothesis that faculty member and doctoral student group interview sociometric ratings during a master's student’s application process would relate to or predict end-of-basic-counseling-skills-course instructor rating of personality characteristics or mastery of basic skills. However, this finding also should be considered cautiously. For this study, I was able to study only those students who had been granted admission into the counseling program. According to the chair of the Master’s Admissions Committee, applicants with lower ratings tended not to be admitted (J. Holden, personal communication, June 15, 2009). Thus, my study participants tended to represent the more highly rated applicants. Indeed, overall, their interview ratings ranged from 3 to 5, with a mean of 4.63. Correlation may have been more difficult to achieve with a variable involving such a narrow range. Thus, the true efficacy of the group interview sociometric ratings as an admissions screening tool remains unclear.

The faculty at the large southwestern university accredited counseling program, where I conducted my research, reject applicants with low Group Interview Sociometric Ratings because they believe that those applicants lack clinical potential. In order to test the Group Interview Sociometric Ratings as a viable admissions screening tool, researchers would need the willingness of program faculty to admit all applicants during the research period and determine whether those applicants who scored lower on Group Interview Sociometric Rating also do poorly in an introductory counseling skills
course. The experience of the faculty at the counseling program where I conducted my research was that previous to using the sociometric rating as a screening tool, when all applicants were provisionally admitted with the intention of instructors screening students for final admission to proceed in the program, instructors of the introductory counseling skills course, being counselors who believe in the developmental potential of others, would “wave through” students about whom they had actually had doubts regarding their clinical potential. Subsequently, those “waved through” students would struggle in an advanced counseling skills course, but by then it was much more difficult for the faculty to dismiss them from the counseling program (J. Holden, personal communication, June 15, 2009). Therefore, regarding future research on the predictive potential of the sociometric rating in which all applicants would be provisionally admitted to complete the basic counseling skills course, the counseling program faculty would probably be wise to agree explicitly that they would not grant full admission to any students who showed low potential by the end of the course. Perhaps the faculty could even set a quota of how many provisionally admitted students they would accept for full admission, basing the quota on the number of students to whom they believe they could provide quality service. Although the abovementioned steps would be necessary to fully assess the predictive potential of the Group Interview Sociometric Rating, researcher would be wise to conduct a cost benefit analysis to weigh the practical costs of such research, including faculty members’ time and students’ emotional well-being.

Limitations of the Study

In the following section, I discuss limitations of the study. First, this study was
conducted at only one university and, therefore, has low external validity; that is, one cannot, with confidence, generalize the study’s findings to other universities. Next, the reported demographics of the participants reflected a lack of diversity in the sample. Females comprised 86% of the sample participants. Although this gender proportion is reflective of current trends in counselor education, it nonetheless limits the generalizability of male graduate counseling students. Another limitation regarding the sample demographics is the lack of data regarding ethnicity of the sample due to the fact that such information was available only through the university graduate school and not through the counseling program.

There are several limitations of this study that pose threats to internal validity. The following is a discussion of such threats to internal validity. First, this study was a descriptive field study. As a result, the study had low internal validity because the variables I studied were naturally occurring rather than manipulated (Heppner et al., 2008).

Another limitation and threat to internal validity could be possible skewed results from the interaction of halo effects due to the fact that the Skills Assessment Rating and the Counselor Personality Assessment rating were both completed by the same respondent, likely within a short time of each other. In anticipation of this potential limitation, I prepared the respondents with clear and detailed instructions as to the intent of the study and the importance of their meticulous rating of each participant. Even with this precautionary measure, however, I could not guarantee complete alleviation of this concern.

Finally, the counseling program where I conducted my research had group
interview admissions procedures that involved conducting several group interviews simultaneously, therefore involving approximately 10 sociometric raters. That group of approximately 10 raters consisted of faculty members and doctoral students. As a result of this format, the issue of inter-rater reliability on the admissions group interview rating was a limitation to the study. Because my sample size enabled me to use only three predictors in the multiple regression, and because the current counseling program faculty uses a combined faculty member and doctoral student co-leader average in their admissions decision-making, I used that average in this study. It is important to note that within my sample, a paired t-test yielded no statistical significant difference between the way in which the co-leaders, consisting of faculty members and doctoral students, rated the interviewees, \( t(94) = .730, p = .467 \). However, the possibility that one pair of co-leaders might predict applicants' future clinical skills better than another pair is a valid question but was not part of this specific study and remains a limitation of it.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

As discussed above, the halo effect could have contributed to the highly correlated variables of the Counselor Personality Assessment rating and the Skills Assessment Rating. Researchers should consider designing a study to control for such a halo effect by implementing an independent rating system to rate the mastery of basic skills. Perhaps independent raters could watch a taped session of each student’s counseling to rate their mastery of basic skills. The course instructor and perhaps classmates could rate each student on the counselor personality assessment, thus potentially reducing the halo effect.
Further research is needed to validate the Counselor Personality Assessment. An instrument is reliable if responses are consistent. In terms of reliability, I established internal consistency reliability through obtaining high Cronbach’s alpha reliability scores on the total assessment and all subsequent constructs during the pilot study and final sample. To establish stability of the assessment, future researchers need to run additional studies to establish inter-rater reliability and test-retest reliability.

Validity pertains to accurately assessing the construct that the instrument claims to measure (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008). First, I achieved construct validity through a comprehensive literature review, described in chapter two. Second, I achieved face validity by asking three experts in the field of counseling to review the instrument and provide feedback about the extent to which the items individually and as a whole assess the five personality characteristic variables (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Finally, I established criterion validity by piloting the instrument and by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis of the final sample. Future research is needed to establish criterion validity by comparing this instrument to some external and independent indicator of the same concept that the instrument is intending to measure.

In this study, at the end of a master’s level basic counseling skills course, instructors’ Counselor Personality Assessment ratings of students did correlate positively with and predict Skills Assessment Ratings. With acknowledgment of the limitations of this study, the results did provide initial support for the potential of counselor educators to use the Counselor Personality Assessment in the application process as a screening device to predict applicants’ clinical potential. This practice would provide a solution to a problem that has continued to plague counselor educators.
since the inception of counselor preparation programs: how to predict not just academic but also clinical potential (Smaby, Maddux, Richmond et al., 2005). To reach that goal, researchers would need to conduct studies that overcome the limitations of this study.

One such study researchers could conduct to examine the efficacy of the Counselor Personality Assessment as a screening device would involve instructing applicants’ referees to complete the Counselor Personality Assessment confidentially on applicants to determine if those scores predict which students will do better in an introductory basic counseling skills course. Researchers could also study the usefulness of the Counselor Personality Assessment in counselor preparation and supervision. As mentioned previously, researchers could investigate the relationship between how students are rated on the Counselor Personality Assessment and how students are rated on their basic counseling skills by independent raters. Finally, researchers could compare students’ Counselor Personality Assessment scores at the end of their first clinical counseling course to students’ scores on a final counseling skills assessment at the end of their master’s preparation program.

This study demonstrated the GRE-AW’s promise as a predictor of mastery of basic skills. Further research analyzing the GRE-AW should be conducted to validate the usefulness of this test as an admissions criteria tool. One such study could include analyzing the relationship between GRE-AW scores, cumulative graduate GPA, and a rating of counselor effectiveness like the Counseling Performance Evaluation Form (Kerl et al., 2002) at the conclusion of counseling students’ practicum semester.
Conclusion

My goal in this research was to examine the efficacy of GRE-AW scores and Group Interview Sociometric Ratings to predict clinical effectiveness in the first clinical course of a counseling master’s degree program. In this study, I identified the key personality traits related to counselor effectiveness that were highlighted most often in the counseling literature and developed an instrument that supervisors can use to assess these traits in students at the end of the first clinical course. For the purpose of this study, I focused on enduring traits of counselors that are present and could be identified at the time of admissions and that may be related to success as a counseling practitioner. I examined how students’ scores on the two admissions assessments – Group Interview Sociometric Ratings and GRE-AW – and on the instructors’ assessment of students’ identified personality traits at the end of the counseling program’s first clinical course are related to each other and to instructors’ overall assessments of students’ basic counseling skills at the end of that course.

Frank and Frank (1991) asserted that “no amount of training can make a tone-deaf person into a musician” (pg. 167). The same may be true for counseling potential. It may very well be that counselor characteristics that contribute to counselor effectiveness can be enhanced and developed but not created through counselor preparation. Prediction of students’ future effectiveness as counselors can be a challenging task for counselor educators. Some counseling students may need little preparation and guidance to master basic counseling skills, some students can develop into competent counselors through much study and supervision, and other applicants are inappropriate to even begin such a course of study because no amount of counselor
preparation will result in success in mastering clinical skills. It is important that counselor educators discriminate between those students who are and those who are not likely to develop into competent counselors by the conclusion of training (Wheeler, 2002). The admissions process is the first point in which counselor educators judge applicants’ potential to develop into competent counselors. Research in this area should continue in an effort to fine-tune such an ambiguous process involving subjective judgments, ethical responsibilities, accountability pressures, and professional and university standards.
APPENDIX A

MATRIX OF COUNSELOR PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Warm &amp; Accepting</th>
<th>Empathic</th>
<th>Self-aware</th>
<th>Flexible</th>
<th>Genuine</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Humorous</th>
<th>Psychologically Healthy</th>
<th>Altruistic</th>
<th>Vulnerable &amp; Open</th>
<th>Intuitive</th>
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Note. Type: Research Study (R); Theoretical Text (T); Unpublished Dissertation (D).

APPENDIX B

GROUP INTERVIEW INSTRUCTIONS
Master’s Admissions Interviews

Instructions for Small Group Co-Leaders

1. Please familiarize yourself with the accompanying materials for use on interview day.

2. Orientation includes showing our orientation video, answering questions, and giving the applicants a bathroom break so they are ready to begin the group interviews by 9:45 a.m. There’s plenty of room at the orientation, so feel free to sit in, if you like.

3. All the materials you’ll need will be ready for you in your interview room when you arrive. Expect 8-9 applicants in your group. Here are the specifics.

4. Here is a suggested “flexible schedule” for the interviews

- 10:00: Structured Group Interview (see attached)
- 10:30: Values/Consensus Task (see attached)
- 11:15: Positive/Negative Traits of Counselors (see attached)
- 11:45: Strength Bombardment (see attached)
- 12:15: Assessment (see attached)

Applicants may leave after they turn in their assessments to you. Please turn in all assessments to Jan not later that the end of Monday.

5. Suggested time allotments are exactly that: suggested. Use your own judgment about the group’s readiness to move on. At the same time, please by mindful of the need both to use the full 2.5 hours to get the most valid “snapshot” of each applicant as well as to be finished with activities by 12:30

6. Enjoy! This job doesn’t carry the responsibility of group therapy. The activities are designed to encourage active participation that reveals applicant interpersonal skill and some intrapsychic material without getting into “deep” psychological material. Do what you can to make the group a safe place for people to express themselves. The more they participate, the more data you have to make your decisions about how promising each applicant looks as potential counselor.

7. Please don’t discuss your impressions of students with your co-leader until both of you have submitted your ratings. If, after the group has dispersed, you want to compare your impressions, that’s fine. And, once again, thanks!
Structured Group Interview  
(Leader A)

Introduction:

Briefly introduce self and how you can to be leading this group. As Leader B to do the same.

Explain that the group interview will take the form of a series of somewhat structured activities designed to make it easy for participants to express themselves and show who they are as people. Also, explain that, at the end of the interview, you’ll be asking each of them to confidentially share their impressions of themselves and each of the other applicants in the group regarding each person’s apparent potential as a counselor.

Inform the group that the purpose of the first exercise is to introduce oneself to the group by exploring one’s reasons for doing master’s work in counseling and one’s aspiration related to the field of counseling.

Directions:

Tell applicants, “After saying your name, talk about the following (these are topics you were asked to write about on your one-page essay):

--- your career aspirations in the field of counseling,
--- any meaningful life experiences that contributed to developing these aspirations.

Who is “willing to being?”

Time allotment: 30 minutes
Values/Consensus Task  
(Leader B)

Introduction:

Tell applicants that the purpose of this exercise is to identify personal value priorities and increase awareness about how values act as motivators.

Procedure:

Distribute a copy of the symbol sheet (enclosed) to each person in the group. No mention should be made of the meaning of the symbols. Ask each applicant to decide the meaning of each symbol and then rank order each of the symbols in relation to their own personal values from 1 (high) to 9. (allow 5 minutes)

When this is accomplished, the group is first to try to reach a group consensus as to the meaning of the symbols. (allow 10-16 minutes)

Next, they must try to reach a consensus as to the ranking of the symbols. (allow 10-15 minutes).

At the end of time (whether or not group has reached consensus), process the exercise through the following questions (allow 20-25 minutes):

- How did your rankings solidify, change, or remain unaffected as a result of group discussion?
- What factors create difficulty in coming to a group consensus
- How might values be involved in counseling

Time allotment: 45 minutes total

*For information on the symbols sheet please contact Jan Holden at the University of North Texas Counseling Program. Phone: 940.565.2910
Positive/Negative Traits of Counselors  
(Leader A & B)

Introduction:

Tell applicants that the purpose of this exercise is to stimulate awareness of the qualities associated with being a relatively more or less effective counselor.

Procedure:

Tell applicants that their first task as a group is to generate a list of negative qualities or undesirable traits in a counselor. Leader B lists on a pad each trait mentioned and keeps the list visible for the group to refer to. Group members and leaders both are free to comment on traits mentioned. (allow 7 or 8 minutes)

Tell applicants that their second task as a group is to generate a list of positive qualities or desirable traits in a counselor. Again, list on a pad each trait mentioned and keep the list visible for the group to refer to. Group members and leaders both are free to comment on traits mentioned. (allow 7 or 8 minutes)

For the third part of the activity, let the group know that a group of applicants in another Counselor Ed program did this same activity. The traits that they identified are listed on the accompanying sheet. Ask the group to compare their lists with the lists generated by the other group. (allow 7 or 8 minutes)

For the last part of the activity, ask each applicant to identify briefly the one positive trait (s)he feels strongest in and the one (s)he believes (s)he needs most to develop in the process of becoming an effective counselor. (allow 7 or 8 minutes)

Time allotment: 30 minute total
Negative Traits

impulsive
compulsive
passive
negative attitude
extreme attitudes
inflexible
strongly self-centered
high need to control others

Positive Traits

calm
competent
responsible
empathic
caring
warm
accepting of others
faith in others
appropriately confident
appropriately self –assured
appropriately assertive
Strength Bombardment
(Leader B)

**Introduction:**

Tell students that the purpose of this exercise is to share one positive perception of each group member with him/her.

**Procedure:**

Tell students that each person in turn will be the focus of the group. “For example, if I am the focus, (person’s name to my left) would begin by telling me one quality he likes, admires, values, appreciates, or some other positive reaction. Then (person to his/her left) would tell me one, and so on around the group. If, when you turn comes you want more time to think what you want to say, pass, and we will come back to you at the end. Limit your comment to one concise expression, such as, ‘I admire your commitment to working on this degree in light of your responsibilities in life right now’; this will insure that we have enough time to get to everyone. Who would be willing to receive positive feedback first?” After someone volunteers, tell everyone to take a moment to identify what they want to say, and invite the person to the volunteer’s left to being whenever (s)he is ready. After that person has received feedback from everyone (including leaders), ask for another volunteer. Continue until everyone has received positive feedback. If time allows, leaders may volunteer to receive feedback, too.

**Time allotment:** 30 minutes
Assessment

(Leader A)

Distribute a “Self and Peer Form” to each applicant and a “Leader Form” to each leader; make sure everyone has a writing implement. Beginning with first student to left of leaders, ask each student to say their name so everyone can list these on their form. Then ask everyone to complete the form as per instructions, making sure everyone understands instructions. When finished, each applicant should fold the form in half (to protect confidentiality of responses) and give it to one of the leaders. As soon as a student has turned in a completed form, (s)he may leave.

Note: During assessment, students may express that ‘this is really hard” and “I don’t know how to decide this.” Just reflect their feelings and remind them to make their best assessment as they see it.
Co-Leader Rating Sheet

1. In the spaces below, list the names of the applicants in your group in alphabetical order by last name.

2. Rate each applicant on each of the five items, using this scale:
   1 = extremely poor  2 = poor  3 = fair  4 = good  5 = extremely good

3. Compare answers with your co-leader ONLY after you have completed your own ratings. Thank you!

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<tr>
<th>Leave blank</th>
<th>Applicants’ Names (alphabetical by last name)</th>
<th>Rating Items</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1. She/He expressed herself/himself well</td>
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<td>3. She/He seemed genuine</td>
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<td>5. I could imagine her/him becoming an effective counselor</td>
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Comments: Please describe any specific concerns you have about any applicants.
APPENDIX D

SKILLS ASSESSMENT
Skills Assessment: Ranking and Rating of Mastery of Basic Clinical Skills

Respondent's Name:

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<th>Student's Name:</th>
<th>STEP 2: RANKING</th>
<th>STEP 3: RATING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please estimate the number of hours you spent observing each student practicing basic counseling skills in your COUN 5680 course.</td>
<td>Rank the following students from most effective (1) to least effective (16) in the mastery of basic clinical skills.</td>
<td>Rate each student’s mastery of basic clinical skills by placing an X in the column that best represents the student’s mastery of basic clinical skills.</td>
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APPENDIX E

COUNSELOR PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT FINAL VERSION
### Step 1: Counselor Personality Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s Name:</th>
<th>Respondent’s Name:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Circle the number in the column that best describes your level of agreement for each item pertaining to the student listed above</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strongly Disagree</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Seems genuine</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Comes across as distant</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Seems perceptive of own inner thoughts, emotions, and intentions</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Seems phony</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Is unable to accurately perceive another’s experience of the world</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Sensitive to feelings and views of others</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Displays an open and caring attitude</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Can be introspective</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Seems to struggle with self-reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Appears to be “playing a role”</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Can take others’ perspectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Seems “closed off”</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Able to tolerate ambiguity</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Struggles to take the perspective of others</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Has a need to control the situation</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Seems approachable</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Adapts easily to changing situations</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Understands others’ feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Seems cold and uninviting</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Seems unaware of how he or she impacts a situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Seems uncomfortable with uncertainty</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Seems not to be completely “real” with others</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Is warm and accepting of others</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Presents self in a sincere manner</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Is patient</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Is in tune with his or her emotional reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Appears rigid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Appears authentic</td>
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APPENDIX F

PILOT STUDY INFORMED CONSENT
Before agreeing to participate in this pilot research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose and benefits of the study and how it will be conducted.

**Title of Study:** Predicting Beginning Master’s Level Counselor Effectiveness from Personal Characteristics and Admissions Data

**Principal Investigator:** Kate Halinski, a graduate student in the University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Counseling and Higher Education.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of current admissions procedures in the UNT counseling program. The results of this study may provide crucial information related to the efficacy of current admissions procedures. Specifically, the goal in this research is to examine the efficacy of master’s students’ GRE Analytical Writing Assessment (GRE-AW), group interview sociometric ratings, and personal characteristics to predict counselor effectiveness in the first clinical course of a counseling master’s degree program.

In this study, the principal investigator identified the key personality traits related to counselor effectiveness that are highlighted most often in the counseling literature and developed an instrument that supervisors can use to assess these traits in students at the end of the first clinical course.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** You have received two identical Counselor Personality Assessments. Think of two of your current supervisees whom you consider to have different levels of counseling ability at this point. Please complete one of the enclosed instruments with one of those supervisees in mind, then the other instrument with the other supervisee in mind. Please write only the supervisee’s last name initial on the assessment. Do not write the supervisee’s name on the assessment.

Please write any feedback you have concerning the assessment, including item wording and assessment layout, on the provided Feedback Form.

Please return the signed Informed Consent Form, two Counselor Personality Assessments, and Feedback Form to Kate Halinski, in the Child and Family Resource Clinic, or Janet Rogers in the Counseling Program office, Stovall Hall, Room 155 (fax: 940.565.2905) by **Wednesday, December 10, 2008.**

**Foreseeable Risks:** No foreseeable risks are involved in this study.

**Benefits to the Subjects or Others:** This study is not expected to be of any immediate benefit to you. However, future students and counselor educators could potentially benefit from this research if it yields results that enable them to predict which students are most likely to succeed in a counseling program before students make the investment of time and money in pursuing the
Compensation for Participants: You will receive a Starbucks $5 gift card as compensation for your participation.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Kate Halinski at telephone number (xxx) xxx-xxxx or the faculty advisor, Dr. Jan Holden, UNT Department of Counseling and Higher Education, at telephone number (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants’ Rights: Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- Kate Halinski has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

________________________________                                ____________
Signature of Participant                                        Date

For the Principal Investigator: I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the participant signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

________________________________________               ___________
Signature of Principal Investigator         Date
APPENDIX G

COUNSELOR PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT PILOT STUDY VERSION
## Counselor Personality Assessment

**Supervisee’s Initials:**  
**Respondent’s Name:**

Circle the number in the column that best describes your level of agreement for each item pertaining to the supervisee listed above

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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APPENDIX H

COUNSELING PROGRAM UNDERSTANDING AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AGREEMENT
UNT Counseling Program

Understanding and Acknowledgment

(This form must be signed for placement in each counseling program student’s file.)

I, ________________________________, have received and read the Master’s Student Handbook from the University of North Texas Counseling Program.

I understand the policies and procedures as stated in the Handbook. I agree to fulfill the requirements as stated and to abide by the policies set forth herein.

I understand that it is solely my responsibility to meet the requirements of the Graduate School and the College of Education as outlined in the UNT Graduate Catalog.

I further understand that the faculty of the University of North Texas Counseling Program has the right and responsibility to monitor my academic progress, my professional ethical behavior, and my personal characteristics and, based on that monitoring, to make decisions about my standing in the counseling program—whether I will continue without restriction, will continue with restriction and/or remediation, or will withdraw from the program. I understand that remediation can include the requirement of personal counseling that I undertake at my own expense.

I understand that success in the sequence of clinical courses, including but not limited to COUN 5680, 5660, 5690, 5720, and 5721, requires some skills different from those required for success in didactic courses; thus, success in didactic courses does not guarantee success in clinical courses. I also understand that the sequence of clinical courses involves the demonstration of increasingly complex counseling competencies and, consequently, that success in earlier course(s) in the sequence does not necessarily indicate success in later course(s) in the sequence.

I understand and acknowledge that neither the University of North Texas nor the Counseling Program will provide or pay for my legal counsel in the event I am sued for malpractice while doing my counseling practicum internship, guidance practicum, or other related laboratory experiences, nor will the University pay damages or other costs incurred by me in the event I am found liable. I hereby agree to provide proof of malpractice insurance and notification of any changes in my insurance coverage as specified on the “Statement of Liability Awareness” form. I will hold the University of North Texas harmless in the event I am sued and found liable.

I understand and acknowledge that my educational performance ratings may be included in research for the purpose of evaluation of the Counseling Program of the University of North Texas. I understand that my individual identity will not be revealed to the public as part of this research.

Signature ____________________________________________ Date ______________________

Print name ____________________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX I

INFORMED CONSENT
Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose and benefits of the study and how it will be conducted.

**Title of Study:** Predicting Beginning Master’s Level Counselor Effectiveness from Personal Characteristics and Admissions Data

**Principal Investigator:** Kate Halinski, a graduate student in the University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Counseling and Higher Education.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of current admissions procedures in the UNT counseling program. The results of this study may provide crucial information related to the efficacy of current admissions procedures. Specifically, the goal in this research is to examine the efficacy of master’s students’ GRE Analytical Writing Assessment (GRE-AW), group interview sociometric ratings, and personal characteristics to predict counselor effectiveness in the first clinical course of a counseling master’s degree program.

In this study, I identified the key personality traits related to counselor effectiveness that are highlighted most often in the counseling literature and developed an instrument that supervisors can use to assess these traits in students at the end of the first clinical course. I want to examine how students’ scores on the two admissions assessments – sociometric group interview ratings and GRE-AW – and on the instructors’ and doctoral TA’s assessment of students’ identified personality traits at the end of the counseling program’s first clinical course are related to each other and to instructors’ and doctoral TA’s’ overall assessments of students’ mastery of basic clinical skills at the end of that course.

**INSTRUCTIONS:**
The following are instructions regarding the completion and submission of the two different assessments provided.

1) Counselor Personality Assessment
2) Ranking and Rating of Mastery of Basic Clinical Skills.

**It is vital that you complete the assessments in order!**

**Counselor Personality Assessment:**

**Step 1: Counselor Personality Assessment**
You have received a Counselor Personality Assessment for each student enrolled in your COUN 5680 course. As you can see, each student has been assigned a form with his or her name printed at the top of the page. You are to complete a Counselor
Personality Assessment on all students before you proceed to Step 2.

**Ranking and Rating of Mastery of Basic Clinical Skills Instructions:**

As you can see, the students who are enrolled in your COUN 5680 course are listed in the first column on the page.

**Step 2: Ranking**
Rank the listed students from most effective (1) to least effective (the number reflecting the total enrollment in your class) in the mastery of basic clinical skills.

**Step 3: Rating**
Rate each student’s mastery of basic clinical skills by placing an x in the column that best represents the student’s achieved level of mastery.

**Deadline and Submission:** Enclose the signed Informed Consent Form and all completed assessments into the provided envelope marked confidential. Seal the envelope and sign and date over the seal. The submission deadline is Monday, **May 18, 2009**.

At the time of our initial meeting concerning this study you decided your preferred method of delivery, whether that be hand delivery to Janet Rogers in the Counseling Program office, Stovall Hall, Room 155 or an arranged pick-up. If you would like to modify your previously arranged submission method, please contact me, Kate Halinski at xxx-xxx-xxxx. Please do not mail the completed assessments.

Once Janet Rogers has received your assessments, she will enter the data onto a spreadsheet; by the time I receive them, the data will be de-identified regarding both the students’ and your identities.

**Foreseeable Risks:** No foreseeable risks are involved in this study.

**Benefits to the Subjects or Others:** This study is not expected to be of any immediate benefit to you. However, future students and counselor educators could potentially benefit from this research if it yields results that enable them to predict which students are most likely to succeed in a counseling program before students make the investment of time and money in pursuing the program.

**Compensation for Participants:** Your thoughtful completion of the abovementioned assessments is greatly appreciated. To thank you for your time and effort of completion, I will provide you with a $30 Visa gift card upon receipt of all completed assessments.

**Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records:** The confidentiality of your individual information, as well as the information of your students, will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Kate Halinski at telephone number xxx-xxx-xxxx or the faculty advisor, Dr. Jan
Holden, UNT Department of Counseling and Higher Education, at telephone number xxx-xxx-xxxx.

**Review for the Protection of Participants:** This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

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- Kate Halinski has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

________________________________  __________________________
Printed Name of Participant  

Signature of Participant  Date

**For the Principal Investigator:** I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the participant signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

________________________________  __________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator  Date
REFERENCES


Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2009).


The teaching of empathy for high school and college students: Testing rogerian methods with the interpersonal reactivity index. Adolescence, 29(116), 961-975.


Kelly, S. E. (1980). Analysis and comparison of predictor variables for admission to


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University of North Texas Counseling Program. (2008a). Master's admissions interviews: Instructions for small group co-leaders. (Available from Counseling Program, Department of Counseling and Higher Education, University of North Texas, 1155 Union Circle #310829, Denton, Texas 76203-5017).


