EGO DEVELOPMENT AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

AMONG COUNSELING STUDENTS

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This study investigated potential relationships between master's level counseling students' levels of ego development and their identified orientations to one of six guiding theories of counseling; students' theoretical orientation classifications when classified according to the theory’s domain of emphasis: affective, behavioral, or cognitive; students' degrees of confidence in identifying their theoretical orientations; and students' degrees of comfort in applying their theories in clinical practice. Seventy participants enrolled in a master’s level practicum course completed the Washington University Sentence Completion Test, a measure of ego development, and the Counseling Theory Survey, a survey developed by the researcher, in order to identify students' identified theoretical orientations, students' degrees of confidence in identifying their theoretical orientations, and students' degrees of comfort in applying their theories in clinical practice. Ego development level was operationalized as a dichotomous variable consisting of level E5 and below and E6 and above, based on the developmental task attained at E6: a shift from emphasis on in-group identity to self-evaluated standards. To determine potential relationships between the students' ego development levels and their theoretical orientations and their orientations when classified by domain of emphasis, 2 x 4 and 2 x 3 Chi-square
analyses were used. Independent t-tests were conducted to determine if the students’ degrees of confidence in identifying their theoretical orientation and their degrees of comfort in applying their orientation varied across the two groups. No statistically significant results were found. Alternative explanations for the identification of theoretical orientation, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research are discussed with emphasis on the need for greater integration of current theories related to the identification of theoretical orientation.
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CHAPTER 1

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Identification with a particular theoretical orientation is a crucial task for every counseling student. Comfort and ease with the counseling role can take many years, influenced by further life and career experiences during which one ideally would shift from a mere selection of an accepted theory to a more personalized conceptualization of human behavior and how most effectively to facilitate constructive change (Watts, 1993). However, a neonate counselor is presumably best served initially by aligning with one established theory (Fall, Holden, & Marquis, 2004).

A particular theory of counseling assists the developing counselor in systematically addressing an otherwise overwhelming amount of clinical information, enhancing the counselor’s overall sense of competence and potentially heightening the client’s confidence in the counselor (Gladding, 2003). A clear and consistent theoretical orientation provides the practitioner with a means of conceptualizing the client’s history; development; functioning; pathology, if any; and developmental potential as well as with an integrated system of techniques to affect change. For these and other reasons, multiple texts describing approaches to counseling and psychotherapy encourage each
student counselor to identify one approach for training purposes (Baruth & Huber, 1985; Capuzzi & Gross, 1999; Corey, 1996; Corsini & Wedding, 2000; Fall et al., 2004; Sharf, 2000).

Beyond the applied and functional value of using one theory, the tenets of each theory are often incommensurable with the tenets of others, making it logically inconsistent to endorse two theories simultaneously (Holden, 1998). Further, Holden (1998) has argued that, given the complexities of the various theories, attempting to comprehensively master multiple theories over the course of graduate training is unrealistic, whereas facility with one theory is much more attainable. Finally, counselors are best served from a legal perspective by consistently applying one theory. The use of an approach endorsed by tradition or the current professional literature is one of the best forms of defense in the case of a malpractice suit (Picchioni & Bernstein, 1992).

Ideally, the identification of a counseling theory is a multi-phase process of deepening self-knowledge, assessment, and integration rather than an isolated discrete choice made either arbitrarily or under the influence of others, such as the predominant orientation of one’s training program. Thus, the term identification, rather than choice or selection, better reflects the evolving dynamic interplay between one’s personal views and one’s theory of counseling.

Watts (1993) has proposed a four-stage model to describe the theory identification process. The first stage of Exploration involves students exploring their own personal values and beliefs about human change processes as well as
learning about the various theories of the profession. In the second stage of
Examination, students identify a theory that best fits with their own views and
begin to explore it within supervised practice. With the third stage of Integration,
the theory becomes intertwined with one’s way of being and may involve utilizing
techniques from other approaches while remaining theoretically consistent with
one’s own view. Finally, the fourth stage, Personalization, requires continually
refining and expanding the dialectic of one’s personal values and the process of
counseling.

Despite the short and long-range benefits of applying one counseling
timey for training, many students initially find themselves confused when
requested to do so. The sheer number of approaches to counseling can be
overwhelming, with a number of the prominent texts used in counseling theories
courses listing between nine and 14 approaches (Capuzzi & Gross, 1999; Corey,
recently approximated that over 400 approaches to counseling and
psychotherapy may exist. Further, each of the counseling approaches
individually can be exceedingly complex and comprehensive, making a
representative array of approaches very difficult to cover thoroughly in a survey
course. Students often find they agree with elements and ideas from multiple
theories, making the process even more difficult. Finally, many of students’
beliefs about human nature and change processes are implicit and unconscious
and can hinder the ability to clearly identify with a particular theory (Fall et al., 2004).

A possible approach to easing the difficulty of this decision involves identifying student traits, characteristics, attitudes, or philosophies and then determining how they may or may not align with each of the various approaches to counseling. Knowledge of these factors could assist in the self-knowledge specified in Watts’ (1993) initial Exploration stage. Known relationships between personal variables and particular theories could then expedite and facilitate the identification process.

Previous researchers have attempted to explore relationships between student variables and their identified theoretical orientation. A number of researchers (Erickson, 1993; Fredrickson, 1993; Freeman, 2003; Hart, 1982; McBride & Martin, 1988; Newman, 1979) have used the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to examine personality traits and their relationship to counselors’ theoretical orientations. Other researchers have addressed variables such as clinicians’ various life experiences (Rosin & Knudson, 1986) and philosophical assumptions and interpersonal styles (Murdock, Banta, Stromseth, Viene, & Brown, 1998).

Loevinger’s (1976, 1996) ego development is a broad, holistic, stage model addressing the development of character throughout the life span. According to the theory, ego structurally develops through 10 distinct stages in a hierarchical, invariantly sequential manner with an inner logic running through
their progression. The stages represent a reorganizing of the self-system at each level, resulting in greater awareness of self and other, flexibility, personal autonomy, and responsibility.

For the above reasons, ego is often referred to as a “master trait” of the personality subsuming various other lines of development including cognitive style, moral development, interpersonal relations, impulse control, and conscious preoccupations (Loevinger, 1976). Considering the intuitive relevance for these factors in the practice of counseling, researchers have addressed the relationship of ego development to a wide range of therapeutic elements, including empathic behavior (Carlozzi, Gaa, & Lieberman, 1983), counselor ability during training (Borders & Fong, 1989), counselor perceptions of clients (Borders, Fong, & Neimeyer, 1986), supervision (Blocher, 1983; Cebik, 1985), multicultural counseling competence (Hayes, 2001), degree of counselor burnout (Lambie, 2002), and counseling effectiveness (Lambie, 2002; Zinn, 1995). In Loevinger’s (1976) foundational text, she suggested a key area of future research to be the relationship between stages of ego development and identification with particular theories of counseling. However, as of yet, no one has systematically investigated that relationship.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, each student in a counselor preparation program would exert the effort to identify the guiding theoretical orientation that best aligns with one’s individual worldview, values, and attitudes rather than simply select a theory
based on ease of application, faculty endorsement, or some other form of external influence (Fall et al., 2004; Watts, 1993). If a particular construct could be shown to relate to or affect the identification of a particular theory of counseling, educators could utilize that construct to assist students in the identification of a theoretical orientation that is most appropriate and/or utilize it to assist students in their understanding and application of their self-identified theories. Counselor educators could also become aware of the characteristics of each of the ego stages and how they may affect students’ understanding and application of their theories. Previous researchers have investigated personality variables, philosophical orientations, and personal experiences in efforts to determine the factors related to the identification of a particular theoretical orientation. To date, no researcher has examined the role of ego development in the identification of particular guiding counseling theories.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between Loevinger’s (1976) ego development as measured by the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (Hy & Loevinger, 1996) and the particular identified theoretical orientations espoused by counseling students during a master’s level internship course. The secondary purpose of the study was to examine relationships between counseling students’ levels of ego development and their reported degrees of confidence in their identification of a particular theory and their degrees of comfort with applying their theories in clinical
practice. The expectation was that revealed relationships could then assist with future counselors identifying a theoretical orientation that best aligns with their own level of development. Further, revealed relationships could assist counselor educators to guide students and facilitate higher order thinking in the theory identification process.

**Review of the Literature**

In this section, I present the relevant literature related to the purpose of this study. The section is divided into three subsections: 1) a broad overview of the theoretical literature concerning the ego development construct and its development; 2) research investigating ego development and its relationship to other dimensions of counseling; and 3) research on various factors that may influence students’ identification of a guiding theory.

*Ego Development and Its Assessment*

The concept of a unifying structure of character that develops over time probably extends back at least to ancient Greece, if not to Hebrew and Hindu cultures before it (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Despite common belief in the English-speaking world to the contrary, the concept of ego did not begin with the work of Sigmund Freud or the later psychoanalytic tradition. Freud never actually used the term ego. Instead, he specifically referred to *das Ich*, literally, the I, a common phrase in ordinary German. Only in English translation was his concept rendered as the ego, a term, along with similar others such as the self and the
me, which was very much in vogue within the general currents of 19th century philosophy (Loevinger, 1976).

For Loevinger (1976), the first approximation of ego that bears resemblance to her use of the term is in the work of Alfred Adler. Adler used the characteristic concept, *style of life*, interchangeably with such concepts as self or ego, unity of personality, individuality, and method of facing problems (Loevinger, 1976). Of key importance was Adler’s emphasis on the unity and coherence of the personality, actively seeking goals and purpose, in contrast to Freud’s conception of the I (ego) as a compromise resulting from the frustration of aggressive and sexual drives (id) by societal mores and values (superego).

Loevinger’s (1966, 1976, 1998) contemporary conceptualization of ego represents a 'master trait' that serves as a frame of reference for various other personality traits, such as moral development (Kohlberg, 1969), worldview conceptualizations (Perry, 1970), interpersonal understanding (Selman, 1980), and cognitive complexity (Piaget, 1928). It is considered to be second only to intelligence in determining a person’s responses to situations (Weathersby, 1981). Thus, it appears to be one of the most comprehensive trait constructs in personality psychology.

Ego development represents a developmental characterology of psychological maturation beginning in childhood and extending throughout adult life (Loevinger, 1976). It is similar in structure to other significant developmental processes, such as cognitive or psychosexual development, in that it consists of
a series of stages of maturation defined independently of chronological age. However, ego development does tend to increase with age fairly uniformly throughout childhood and then stabilize differentially as a function of age sometime during adolescence and adulthood (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). The key age beyond which differential stages occur appears to be approximately 14, after which a wide spread of ego development levels may be found in any given cohort (Hauser, Powers, & Noam, 1991).

Loevinger (1976) suggested four specific domains that are representative and interdependent aspects of the ego. The first is character development, which consists of impulse control and moral development as the basis for ethical action and types of moral concerns. The second is cognitive style, which involves conceptual complexity and cognitive development. The third is interpersonal style, which is comprised of the individual’s attitude toward interpersonal relationships and the other in those relationships, preferred types of relationships, and overall understanding of relationships. Fourth, and finally, are conscious preoccupations, a term that refers to the predominant content of an individual’s conscious thoughts and behavior.

Ego development theory is an organismic approach to human development and proposes structural stage change in a hierarchical, invariantly sequential manner (Manners & Durkin, 2003). As an organismic approach, it is modeled on living systems as opposed to machines; considers inherent properties and goals; and emphasizes the whole rather than the parts, the
relations among the parts, and how the whole gives meaning to the parts (Miller, 2002). Organismic theories presume an active exchange between the system and the environment in which the system both selects from the environment and also acts from a repertoire of responses to accommodate itself to that environment (Blasi, 1976).

The system’s structure provides the framework and horizon of both selectivity and possible forms of response. This concept emphasizes the underlying organizational processes that operate upon the diversity of specific content. Laws and relations of change that are independent of the elements define the structure. Fundamentally, development consists of a change in the basic rules governing the various elements (Blasi, 1976).

Each stage represents a period of time during which thinking and behavior reflect the dominance of a particular structure. In addition, the stage concept consists of five traditional features: 1) Stages follow an invariable sequence, and no stage may be skipped; 2) Each stage derives from the previous stage, incorporates and transforms that stage, and prepares for the next stage; 3) An inner logic accounts for the stages’ equilibrium and stability; 4) Stages are universal, although individuals may not reach all of them and/or may progress at different rates; and 5) Each stage involves a coming-into-being and a being, with an initial period of transition and a period of achievement (Loevinger, 1976; Miller, 2002).
According to structural developmental theory, the selectivity and flexibility—termed assimilation and accommodation in Piaget’s (1926; 1928) conceptualization—provided by each structure allows for the overall system’s stability (Blasi, 1976). The foremost tendency of the system at each stage is to endure and remain the same, preserving the current structural characteristics. However, the system’s stability may have limits. Structural tensions may arise as a result of internal processes or environmental pressures, wherein the flexibility of responses becomes inadequate to deal with the stressors of the environment. The result is a disequilibration, in which case the structure must shift in order to accommodate the tension, or the system will disintegrate. In psychological development, the impulse toward structure change is typically influenced by the desire to become more competent, satisfy one’s needs more adequately, or grasp the world more fully (Blasi, 1976).

Whereas Loevinger’s model for the most part is in agreement with traditional structural systems, it is important to recognize a key exception. Specifically, not all elements of ego development are completely structural to the exclusion of content (Manners & Durkin, 2003). Character development, cognitive style, and interpersonal style all progress in a traditional structural fashion with each level reorganizing and possessing an inner logic and coherence. The domain of conscious concerns, however, represent changes in both structure and content. The nature of the concerns changes with each subsequent level while also structurally shifting as a function of the changes in
the other domains. Thus, it is more appropriate to characterize Loevinger’s ego development as a quasi-structural than a true structural theory.

Loevinger’s (1998) conceptualization of ego development arose from her early work in studying the personality patterns of mothers and women in general. She and her colleagues began with a strictly psychometric approach, administering objective test items and then statistically analyzing them in search of personality patterns or traits. Her research group was interested initially in examining women’s acceptance of the feminine role. However, post-analysis, the largest statistical cluster of items addressed a bipolar trait referred to as *punitiveness vs. permissiveness*. The characteristic of women who ranked high on this cluster – high in punitiveness – bore a strong resemblance to the characteristics described in Adorno’s (1950) model of the authoritarian personality. Consequently, Loevinger (1998) developed a new scale built on these items, called the Authoritarian Family Ideology. However, through subsequent research (Loevinger, 1998), she discovered that the authoritarian style did not represent so much an extreme of a particular trait but a mid-point in a continuum.

Women at the immature end of the continuum were not marked by authoritarianism as initially thought, although they possibly would endorse authoritarian items. The researchers found, instead, that these women were characterized by a chaotic, impulsive, disorganized, and extremely self-centered style of life. From these modes of operation, authoritarianism and conventionality
appeared to be a significant improvement. This realization was noteworthy.
Instead of attempting to measure linear or bipolar traits, the investigators
redefined their variable as a developmental sequence with qualitatively different
stages. They elected to adopt the semi-projective sentence completion test as a
method to examine the validity of their interpretation (Loevinger, 1998).

Loevinger and her colleagues remained committed to the articulated
feedback loop between theory and data in the elaboration of the ego
development concept. By the late 1960s, they had developed an initial 36-item
Sentence Completion Test (SCT Form 9-62) by adopting items from previous
sentence completion tests utilized in other models and by creating new items
particular to the researchers’ interests. At this point, the researchers introduced
an initial form for use with men as well. The team adopted initial theoretical
guidelines for scoring the tests from the research on interpersonal maturity and
interpersonal integration (I-level) that Sullivan, Grant, and Grant (1957) had
conducted. Loevinger’s team developed a rationalized categorical scoring
manual that provided examples of actual answers grouped into theoretically
justified categories (Loevinger, 1998). The authors micro-validated the initial
manual using multiple samples from various demographics, with excellent inter-
rater and internal consistency reliability (Loevinger, 1998). In 1970, the team
published the final version of the test, now called the Washington University
Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT), along with its scoring manual.
In 1985, Loevinger and her colleagues substantially revised the test items to improve the validity and reliability of the test specifically for males (Loevinger & Cohn, 1996). The new test, WUSCT Form 11-68, included many of the original items as well as an additional equal number of stems that addressed topics more applicable to men. The team reworked the test so that forms for men and women were closely comparable, more male items were selected from forms that had been used in the formation of the earlier scoring manual, and they included only the items that reflected the highest validity for both sexes.

The developers revised the scoring manual in 1996 and made minor modification in the test items, resulting in the current test in use known as WUSCT Form 81 (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). They revised the manual using a meta-analysis of over 1100 protocols, again improving the applicability of the test with men, condensing the manual for efficiency, and also reworking the categories of the scoring manual as well as introducing themes for each of the categories (Loevinger, Hy, & Bobbitt, 1998). For conceptual clarity, the developers also reorganized the original five I (interpersonal)-stages with three transitional levels into nine E (ego)-levels.

*Levels of Ego Development*

Currently, Loevinger’s model consists of nine levels, although, for reasons explained below, the WUSCT assessment does not address the first level. The following are brief descriptions of each level adapted from Loevinger (1976, 1998), Hy and Loevinger (1996), and Manners and Durkin (2001).
Pre-social/symbiotic (E-1). Exclusive focus on gratification of immediate needs; strong attachment to mother; engaged in differentiating self and objects; preverbal and unable to assess via sentence completion method and, therefore, postulated for theoretical completeness rather than realized through actual assessment.

Impulsive (E-2). Emphasis on physical needs and impulses; no sense of psychological causation; demanding; conceptually confused; self and others understood in simple dichotomies (good/bad, nice/mean, etc.); unable to distinguish emotional and physical malaise.

Self-Protective (E-3). Wary; complaining; opportunistic; beginning to be capable of delay for immediate advantage; blame assigned to others, circumstances, or a part of themselves for which they are not responsible; preoccupied with staying out of trouble and not getting caught.

Conformist (E-4). Conventional; moralistic; sentimental; identified with group or authority; rules accepted because they are the rules; friendliness and social niceness highly valued; behavior of self and others seen in terms of externals; conceptually simple; cooperative; loyal.

Self-Aware (E-5). Increased, although limited, self awareness and appreciation of multiple perspectives; exceptions for rules allowable, but only on broad demographic terms; slightly more focused on feelings, problems, adjustment; banal reflections on life issues such as god, death, and relationships.
Considered to still be basically a version of conformity. Considered to be the modal level for the urban United States.

**Conscientious (E-6).** Self-evaluated standards; ought differentiated from is; motives and consequences more important than rules; intense; responsible; empathic; long-term goals and ideals; rich and differentiated inner life; values achievement; striving for goals; attempts to improve self; thinking beyond personal concerns. Represents a clear development beyond conformity.

**Individualistic (E-7).** Sense of personality as a whole or style of life; tolerant of self and others; inner self and outer self are differentiated; values relationships over achievement; awareness of inner conflicts without resolution; particular concern with emotional dependence; awareness of psychological causation and development; role differentiation.

**Autonomous (E-8).** Recognition of others’ need for autonomy; moral dichotomies no longer typical; freeing from excessive striving and sense of responsibility; high tolerance for ambiguity and recognition of paradox; relationships seen as interdependent rather than dependent/independent; values uniqueness; vivid expression of feelings; self-fulfillment; clear sense of psychological causation; existential over hostile humor.

**Integrated (E-9).** Wise; broadly empathic; full sense of identity; very rare; less than 1% of population in urban areas; broad differences in descriptions of qualified raters but probably best illustrated by Maslow’s (1962) concept of the
self-actualizing person who is growth motivated, seeking to understand his/her intrinsic nature and achieve integration.

Loevinger (1996) identified two specific transitions between levels that represent certain critical developmental tasks. The first is the transition from E-3: Self Protective to E-4: Conformist which represents the shift from self-centered and hedonistic concerns, moral reasoning, and attitudes to ones that reflect in-group identity and values. The second is the shift from E-5: Self-Aware to E-6: Conscientious which represents the shift from in-group identity to true self evaluated standards. These transitions are parallel to Kohlberg’s (1969) classifications of his moral stages as pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional and/or the classification of cognitive stages as pre-formal, formal, and post-formal (Wilber, 1999). In the earlier I-stage model, both E-3 and E-5 were treated as transitional levels, labeled “Delta 3” and “I-3/4”, respectively, between the formal ego stages in order to reflect this concept.

*Evaluation of Loevinger’s Model*

Since its initial development, Loevinger’s model has been refined, extended, and validated through an extensive body of research (Loevinger, 1979, 1985, 1998; Manners & Durkin, 2001). To date, researchers have conducted over 280 studies to explore various aspects of ego development (Cohn, 1991). Results of the most recent comprehensive review of the literature have continued to support the conceptual soundness of the theory (Manners & Durkin, 2001).
Ego development and stage theories of development more broadly are not without criticism, however, both theoretical and empirical. Given the general emphasis of cultural sensitivity in the social sciences and public policy, some scholars take issue with the assertion of universality found in Loevinger’s and other stage theories (Marquis, 2008). What is important to recognize here is that, largely, the content of a given stage is empty and may manifest in a variety of culturally contingent forms. The claim of universality only holds for the general pattern of the stages, not any particular behavioral correlates (Blasi, 1976). More explicitly, the underlying organization of each stage can be understood as a “deep feature”: largely invariant, cross-cultural, and quasi-universal. In contrast are the specific behaviors, or “surface features,” that may be highly culturally influenced and unique to certain locales, historical periods, and so on (Wilber, 1999).

A second criticism turns on questioning the sequence of developmental stage theories, claiming that a given individual may express behaviors consonant with different stages in different contexts, for example, psychodynamic fixation or behaviors indicative of higher stages such as spiritual experiences (Marquis, 2008). This criticism fails to accommodate the notion that the structures themselves are content-free and are more aptly considered as a center of gravity that involves a coming into being and a being rather than a static behavioral repertoire. Emphasis on the series of the structures means that one does not see consistent and multi-contextual examples of the behavior of later stages before
the attainment of former stages. This issue also conflates the crucial distinction between the logic of a structural model and the dynamics of the model in how it is expressed with real individuals in the real world (Habermas, cited in Visser, 2003). The logic of Loevinger’s theory may be quite organized and clear; however, the empirical presentation will always be much messier. Hauser (1993) articulated it this idea in another fashion: “The stages themselves are constructions of the individual’s constructions, the best model that we can articulate of the special ways that he or she constructs his or her interpersonal world” (p. 25).

Some scholars also have mistakenly perceived in the model the idea that later stages are somehow superior, above, or more valuable than previous stages. However, Loevinger (1976, 1996) has consistently emphasized that psychopathology and maladjustment may be evident at any of the given stages. In a certain sense, later stages are generally more comprehensive, more flexible, more inclusive, and less habituated and instinctual than earlier stages, but it is important to recognize that adjustment is an issue at any stage. Taking Piaget’s (1926) stage model as an example, it would be incorrect to assume that a child at formal operations is somehow better or more valuable than a child at concrete operations, despite the fact that the former may be capable of exhibiting a more relatively non-distorted view of the world. Each stage is, at least initially, the most adaptive possibility for its given environment (Marquis, 2008).
Another aspect of the model that some scholars have criticized is the hypothesized rigid irreversibility of the stages. Researchers, including Loevinger herself along with her colleagues (1985), have examined this question empirically. In a number of longitudinal studies using the WUSCT, a small number participants' scores indicated regression, with lower E-levels at the repeated measure (Adams & Fitch, 1982; Loevinger et al., 1985; Redmore, 1983). Loevinger et al. (1985) hypothesized that the environmental context – in their study, the university environment or curricula – may have been stressful or otherwise threatening enough to evoke the regression. This hypothesis is in alignment with other clinical descriptions of regression as a return to a less complex, but more secure, way of being in response to external threat (Ivey, 1986). Hauser (1993) considered the sequence and irreversibility of the stages to be among the most crucial aspects of the theory, and he called for more longitudinal, repeated measures study designs to more appropriately test these aspects.

Research findings have also brought into question the concept of the ego subsuming other developmental domains and acting as a master trait. Using a structural equation model, Novy et al. (1994) attempted to examine alternative models for understanding how the ego construct relates to the domains of character development, cognitive style, interpersonal style, and conscious preoccupations. Their findings indicated that ego development and the four domains may be better conceived as five elements of a single process rather
than ego development simply as the underlying factor of the other four. The researchers did indicate some potential problems with the methodology of assessing the four domains and suggested that the potential difficulty did not detract from the overall importance of the ego development construct.

In perhaps the strongest critique, Noam (1993) also took issue with ego development as a master trait, that inappropriately condenses a range of developmental processes. Following earlier repeated criticisms by Broughton and Zahay-kevitch (1988) and Habermas (1979), Noam asserted that, as articulated, the underlying logic of ego stages is dangerously weak, arguing that Loevinger (1976) failed to provide a clear definition of the construct and its precise psychological function. Loevinger (1976) has seemed, at times, to avoid providing a clear definition; for example, “The subject of ego development cannot be encompassed by a formal definition, since ego development is something that occurs in the real world” (p. 54). Noam (1993) held that it is more accurate to assume multiple developmental issues embedded in the ego development construct, each with its own developmental trajectory, evolving through the lifespan and moving through important transformations, similar to the model postulated by Ken Wilber (1999).

Despite the well-reasoned criticism, Noam (1993) did recognize the tendency for people to organize experience in a synthetic, cohesive fashion and valued Loevinger’s model for that reason. However, he held that ego development should focus explicitly as a line of developmental self-integration,
with the other domains as secondary. Although not discarding the model and the use of the WUSCT, he recommended a modified, more open system of analysis by including the WUSCT with in-depth interview techniques and other domain-specific developmental measures to more properly assess potential developmental asynchrony.

Ego Development and Counseling

Loevinger theorized that the domains – character development, cognitive style, interpersonal style, conscious preoccupations – are interwoven in the fabric of ego development. Intuitively, it would seem that investigations regarding the construct of ego development and its role in the practice of counseling would be appropriate. Direct parallels can be drawn with the domains and multiple dimensions of counseling practice. For example, character development addresses the development of moral concerns and ethical decision making – a key focus in both the practice of, and content addressed in, counseling (Corey, 1996; Herlihy & Corey, 1996). Cognitive style encompasses cognitive complexity, tolerance for ambiguity, and understanding of psychological causation, all of which potentially have a bearing on a counselor’s ability to conceptualize clients via a guiding theory. Finally, interpersonal style captures the nature of relationships, including the understanding of the other and the types of relationships sought. Specifically, Loevinger (1976, 1996) suggested that this domain captures the development of the capacity for empathy that most
counseling theorists have considered a necessary condition of therapeutic personality change (Beck & Weishaar, 2000; Burns, 1996; Rogers, 1989).

In a relevant study, Carozzi, Gaa, and Lieberman (1983) explicitly investigated the relationship of ego development level and the capacity for empathy. They assessed empathy through the use of the Affective Sensitivity Scale, whereby research participants view film sequences and then attempt to identify the feelings of the individuals in the scenes via multiple-choice items. Participants were 51 dormitory advisors at an urban university in the southwest. The researchers divided the participants into two groups based on their ego level score: 1) those that scored at the ego level of conscientious-conformist (now called self-aware) or above; and 2) those that scored at the ego level of conformist or below. Empathy scores of the subjects in the former, high-level ego group were significantly higher than those of the lower-ego group. These results supported Loevinger's (1976) assertion that empathic ability begins to develop at the conformist level. Individuals at the self-aware (conscientious-conformist) level appeared to be better able to recognize the complexity of inner states. Further, the results of this study suggest that individuals at lower levels of ego development may be less able to demonstrate empathy.

In a more direct investigation into counseling practice, Borders and Fong (1989) examined the relationship between ego development and the counseling ability of beginning and advanced students. In the study examining beginning students, the researchers assessed counseling by a skills exam score and by
ratings of effectiveness on two session audiotapes (pre and post-training) using the Global Rating Scale. They found a significant moderate relationship between the subjects’ ego level scores and their rating on the pre-training tape. However, a multiple regression analysis procedure yielded a finding of no significant effect of ego development on overall counseling ability or knowledge of counseling skills.

In a second study, the researchers addressed advanced students’ counseling skills via audiotape ratings using the Vanderbilt Psychotherapy Process Scales (VPPS). Again, using a multiple regression analysis, they found no significant relationship between the VPSS scores and ego development level. The authors noted that their findings contradicted previous literature and that the best predictor of post-training performance was pre-training level. However, noting that ego development level was significantly related to pre-training ability, the authors suggested that students at higher levels of ego development may arrive with some interpersonal awareness that enhances their potential for future training (Borders & Fong, 1989).

In her earlier dissertation, Borders (1984) investigated the relationship of ego development level and counselor development, specifically as a model for the basis of developmental supervision. She implemented multiple measures of counseling variables, including structure and content of perceptions of clients using the Repertory Grid Technique, in-session counseling behavior with clients using the Vanderbilt Psychotherapy Process Scales, and supervisor’s ratings of
the counselor’s overall effectiveness using the Counselor Evaluation Rating Scale. Borders used five multiple regression analyses to test the relationship of students’ levels of ego development and the three counseling variables. None of the partial correlations were significant. However, a chi-square test for the differences of counselor perceptions of clients was significant, indicating that counselors at higher levels of development tended to use more process-oriented and interactive descriptors of their clients. Further post-hoc analyses suggested counselors’ cognitive complexity and integration scores tended to be related to higher ego levels.

In a more recent doctoral dissertation, Zinn (1995) investigated the relationship of ego development and the effectiveness of counselor trainees. He recruited participants from two master’s-level practicum courses, and assessed counselor effectiveness using the Counselor Rating Form and the Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale. He examined the relationships between ego development and the two effectiveness measures using a bi-variate correlational analysis. He found no identifiable results or trends. However, upon examining the personality characteristics of the participants with the most prevalent level of ego development, he found that they aligned with those of effective counselors as defined by both clients and instructors.

McIntyre (1985) inquired into the relationship between counselors’ and clients’ ego development levels and counselors’ expressed empathy and expressed client preferences. Participants were presented four typewritten
analogue with each representing a client at a different ego development level. Counselors responded to the analogues and rank ordered their preferences. The researchers then rated the responses for expressed empathy using the Response Empathy Scale. Using an analysis of variance for repeated measures, the researcher found no main effect for subject level, a significant main effect for analogue level, and a significant interaction between subject and analogue levels. Thus, the hypotheses that counselors’ expressed empathy varies among levels and that counselor and analogue ego developmental levels interact so that expressed empathy peaks when levels match, were supported. Further, a Chi square analysis indicated that counselors preferred analogues of clients whose developmental level was the same as their own or one level higher.

For a dissertation study, Panici (2001) examined the relationships between personal and educational experience, ego development level, and multicultural counseling competence. Counseling students completed the WUSCT, the Multicultural Counseling Inventory, and an Experience Questionnaire. He found positive correlations between levels of subject experience and factors associated with multicultural competence. He also found positive relationships between the variables of age, type of training, language fluency, and multicultural counseling competence. He did not find statistical significance for the hypotheses that ego development level and experience would interact to produce higher scores on the Multicultural Counseling Inventory.
Callanan (1986) examined the relationship between moral reasoning and ego development and the quality of the counselor-client therapeutic relationship. Clients and counselors at a university counseling center completed the WUSCT, the Defining Issues Test of Moral Development, the Counselor Rating Form, and an information questionnaire. Analysis yielded the finding that self-reported client satisfaction was significantly higher for clients working with counselors at higher ego development levels. He also found two patterns concerning interaction between counselor and client ego development levels. Positive terminations were apparently related to 1) higher ego level counselors working with lower ego level clients; and 2) moderate ego level counselors working with moderate, but slightly lower, ego level clients.

Guhman (1994) examined the relationship between ego development and the supervision needs of counselors in training. In this longitudinal pre-test/post-test study, graduate counseling majors completed the WUSCT, the Supervisor Behavior List, and a general information sheet. A control group of graduate sociology majors completed the WUSCT and an information sheet. The results indicated no differences in the patterns of ego development levels between the counseling students and the control group. Further, Guhman found no statistically significant increase in the counseling students’ levels of ego development after one year of training. He found no significant main effects for gender; however, post hoc analysis revealed that women’s ego development scores tended to increase whereas men’s scores tended to remain the same. He
also found no significant relationships between ego development level and a counseling student’s perception of supervision needs. Regardless of ego development level, counseling students emphasized the importance of supervision needs such as instruction/feedback, rapport, and evaluation.

Development of Theoretical Orientation

In efforts to understand the factors that contribute to counseling students’ identification of particular guiding theories, researchers have examined a wide range of variables. In this section, I present a brief overview of the literature related to counseling students’ development of theoretical orientation.

Hart (1982) examined the individual determinants of the selection of theoretical orientation. Attempting to develop an earlier body of work by Coan (1968) that addressed the belief systems of psychologists, the author administered the MBTI and the Theoretical Orientation Survey (TOS) to undergraduate psychology students. Analyses disclosed that students’ standings on the objectivism vs. subjectivism factor of the TOS could be predicted from the MBTI scores. Students who held an objective orientation tended to score high on Extroversion, Sensing, Thinking, and Judging scales of the MBTI. The inverse was supported as well: Students endorsing a subjective orientation score scored high on the MBTI on Introversion, Intuition, Feeling, and Perceiving.

In another study, Rosin and Knudson (1986) addressed perceived experiences of psychologists’ life experiences on their selection of theoretical orientations. Research participants were doctoral level practitioners with five or
more years of experience and students from clinical psychology graduate or internship programs. Participants were interviewed and they completed the Theoretical Orientation Survey. Researchers then presented each participant with a transcript of the participant’s interview. Researchers asked participants to rate and categorize items they affirmed contributed to the development of their theoretical orientations. Two independent judges also rated and categorized the responses.

The authors reported that a chi-square test of significance yielded results that supported that psychodynamic therapists tended to report mental illness in their families significantly more than behavioral therapists. Further, the researchers found that therapists who endorsed psychodynamic orientations reported having sought personal therapy significantly more than behavioral therapists. Psychodynamic therapists also endorsed more personal than professional reasons for seeking therapy and reported more conflict in their families of origin than did behavioral therapists. However, due to the cross-sectional design of the study, the authors offered no conclusions regarding the causal influence of therapists’ personal history upon their theoretical orientation. Instead, they concluded that their data was reflective of core underlying philosophical assumptions of the behavioral and psychodynamic orientations, for example, realism versus idealism, objectivism versus subjectivism, and extraspection versus introspection.
Hollander (1994) investigated the relationship between personality, worldview, and theoretical orientation. She administered the NEO Five-Factor Inventory, the Theoretical Orientation Survey, and the Organicism-Mechanism Paradigm Inventory (OMPI), along with a questionnaire addressing eclectic and epistemological beliefs, to school and clinical psychologists. She found three significant and interrelated predictors of theoretical orientation: the NEO openness to experience factor, the TOS organicism factor, and the organicism of the OMPI. Students who endorsed a cognitive behavioral orientation were associated with low openness and organicism and higher objectivism scores. The researcher found that orientation of the student’s training program was a strong predictor of the student’s orientation.

In a study addressing a sample of counselor education students specifically, Freeman (2003) examined the relationship between preference for a particular orientation and personality traits as measured by the MBTI and the Self-Directed Search (SDS). Along with the MBTI and the SDS, research participants completed a counseling theory survey classifying them into one of three groups based on their theoretical orientation: Cognitive, affective, or behavioral. Deviating from previous studies examining similar variables, discriminate function analysis yielded no significant results. The author concluded that selection of a theoretical orientation may be more complex than isolation of particular variables and suggested the applicability of a more integrated, common-factors approach in teaching counseling theories.
In another study, Ripley (1988) found that personality as measured by the Clinical Analysis Questionnaire (CAQ) and background was related to the selection of theoretical orientation as measured by the Therapist Orientation Questionnaire (TOQ). The therapist’s personality characteristics and historical background significantly influenced the TOQ scales of psychoanalytic orientation, social adjustment/treatment plan, feeling awareness, and counter-transference security. Therapists who endorsed a psychoanalytic orientation tended to be more experienced, insecure, and imaginative. Both experienced and insecure therapists endorsed experiential techniques to enhance feeling awareness. Therapists who endorsed the TOQ scale of the importance of social adjustment were associated with higher CAQ scores of conformity and impulsivity.

Delshadi (1998) investigated the development of therapists’ clinical orientations using the Theoretical Orientation Survey and a researcher-developed Development of Orientation Questionnaire. Research participants were practicing psychologists and psychology students who indicated how influential various variables were in their selection of their current orientation and, if they had changed orientations, their previous one. Therapists with a TOS score indicating a subjective belief system endorsed subjective orientations, whereas therapists with an objective belief system endorsed more objective orientations. Subjective therapists also reported more influence from internal variables such as their personality and values in their selection of their orientations, whereas objective therapists cited more influence due to external variables such as
professional regard, research, and exposure. Therapists reporting subjective orientations also endorsed a greater level of compatibility with their orientation. Experienced therapists were less likely to borrow techniques from other approaches and were more satisfied with their orientation than beginning therapists.

Summary

In this section, I provided a review of the literature related to the purpose of this study, namely, to investigate the relationship between a counselor’s ego development and that counselor’s identification with a particular theoretical orientation. I organized the review into three subsections.

In the first subsection, I undertook a substantial discussion of the ego development construct to provide a theoretical foundation for this investigation. Loevinger’s conceptualization of ego embraces multiple developmental domains that are, at least in theory, related to the practice of counseling.

In the second subsection, I discussed the empirical literature related to counseling and ego development. Ego development appears related to key counseling qualities, such as empathy and cognitive complexity. However, research addressing the relationship of ego development to specific counseling skills and effectiveness has often been contradictory and inconclusive.

In the final subsection, I examined previous approaches to the problem of the identification of theoretical orientation, again with varying results. There does seem to be support for a continuum of “tough” and “tender” (James, 1907/1964)
or “Lockean and Leibnitzian” (Allport, 1955) personality types that is associated with counselors’ identification with particular theoretical orientations. However, retrospective investigations into specific traits, qualities, or experiences that hypothetically or reportedly lead to the acceptance and development of particular theoretical orientations seem to be inconclusive. A thorough review of the literature has not disclosed any research regarding the relationship between ego development and the identification with a particular theory—or class of theories, such as affective, behavioral, and cognitive—of counseling. Nor does there seem to be any research addressing counselors’ level of comfort with their theory or confidence in their theory identification and their respective level of ego development.
CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented a brief rationale for the value of counseling theory for the developing counseling student, introduced the central problem of investigating the relationship of Loevinger’s construct of ego development and students’ identification with particular theories of counseling, and provided a review of the relevant literature. To review, the objectives of this study were to determine whether there is a relationship between Loevinger’s ego development as measured by the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) and masters-level counseling students’ identification with particular theories of counseling, their theories when the theories are classified by their domain of emphasis, their reported confidence in the identification of their theories, and their reported comfort in the clinical application of their theories as determined by the Counseling Theory Survey (CTS). For this study, the ego development level of the participants was the independent variable, and the counselors’ identification with particular theories of counseling, their theories when classified according to their domain of emphasis, their reported confidence with the identification of their theories, and their reported comfort in the clinical application of their theory were the dependent variables of interest. In this
chapter, I present the research methods, logic, and design I used to determine whether there was a relationship between the variables as well as provide the details of the population and particular sample that I used.

Research Questions

To address the objectives of the study mentioned above, I proposed to examine the following questions:

R1: What is the relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and their identified theoretical orientations?

R2: What is the relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and their identified theoretical orientations when the orientations are classified by their primary domain of emphasis?

R3: What is the relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and how confident the students report they are in the identification with their theory?

R4: What is the relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and how comfortable the students report they are in the clinical application of their theory?

Research Hypotheses

I proposed the following research hypotheses to study the research questions. Included with the research hypotheses are the stated alternative hypotheses of what would be the expected outcome of the relationship (Keuhl, 2000).
H01: There is no relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and their identification with particular counseling theories.

HA1: There is a significant relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and their identification with particular counseling theories.

H02: There is no relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and their identification with particular counseling theories, when classified according to their content emphasis: affective, behavioral, or cognitive.

HA2: There is a significant relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and their identification with particular theories of counseling, when classified according to their content emphasis: affective, behavioral, or cognitive.

H03: There is no relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and how confident the students report to be in their identification with their theory.

HA3: There is a significant relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and how confident they report to be in their identification with their theory.

H04: There is no relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and how comfortable the students report to be in the clinical application of their theory.
HA4: There is a significant relationship between counseling students' levels of ego development and how comfortable the students report to be in the clinical application of their theory.

Type of Design

The design for this study was an exploratory, quantitative, causal-comparative design. A quantitative research design enables the researcher to collect information and then quantify it as numerical values, which may include nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio variables (Cozby, 2007). In a causal-comparative design, two groups are compared in order to explore potential relationships or effects. Because the information collected from the participants is numerical, the researcher is able to apply different statistical procedures to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

The quantitative survey design was appropriate for this study because it allows one to directly answer the questions of whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the ego development level of counseling students and their identification with particular theories of counseling and their theories when classified according to their domain of emphasis, how confident they report to be in the identification of their theories, and how comfortable they report to be in the clinical application of their theories. The assessment and survey used in this study were designed to measure each one of the variables so that an analysis could be executed. The WUSCT was designed to measure the
ego development level of the participant by yielding a total protocol score ranging on a continuous ordinal scale ranging from two to nine. Because it was highly probable that the scores would cluster near the modal level (E-5) and that outlying low and high scores are rare in an urban, university educated population, I classified the TPR scores into dichotomous categories; one representing scores at E5 and below and one representing scores at E6 and above, similar to the classification of Carlozzi, Gaa, and Lieberman (1983). This dichotomous classification represents the differentiation of a critical developmental transition in values from in-group belonging to self-evaluated, reflexive standards.

In the counselor preparation program from which participants for this research came, students may choose from six established counseling theories to identify the one with which their values and beliefs most closely align. These six theories became the nominal variables for this study. I then classified these six theories into three groups based on their area of content emphasis; that is, affective, behavioral, and cognitive. The other two variables – how confident students report to be in their theory identification and how comfortable they report to be in the clinical application of their theory – are considered continuous and ordinal because they were assessed by Likert-type scale items on the CTS with values ranging from one to five.

In addressing hypotheses one and two, because the dependent variables were categorical/nominal and not derived from measures that possess equal intervals, the appropriate means of analysis was a nonparametric statistic.
Nonparametric statistics are tests of statistical significance that are designed not to rely on any assumptions regarding the shape or variance of population scores, such as normal distribution of scores about the mean (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The specific nonparametric statistics used were chi square cross tabulation tables for each of the relationships, because it is the most appropriate test to determine whether there is a significant relationship between two categorical variables (Cozby, 2001; Moore & McCabe, 2006).

For hypotheses three and four, the dependent variables were continuous; the Likert-type measures of confidence and comfort. For this reason, the method employed was a parametric statistic, an independent samples t-test, to determine whether there were differences between the two ego development groups. The independent samples t-test was appropriate for these hypotheses because it determines whether there are differences between two independent populations. The one assumption that has to be made for the independent sample t-tests are that the populations are normally distributed. However, the independent sample t-test is a robust procedure as long as the sample sizes from each population and the shape of each population are approximately the same (Moore & McCabe, 2006). Research has demonstrated that moderate deviations from the assumptions have very little effect upon the value of the parametric statistic (Gall et al., 1996). As long as the distribution of the confidence and comfort scores are assumed to be approximately the same, then the independent samples t-test would result in appropriate conclusions.
Definition of Terms

_Ego/Ego Development_

According to Loevinger (1976), ego is a holistic construct representing the fundamental structural unity of personality organization. Ego involves both the person’s integrative processes in dealing with diverse intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences, as well as the consequent frame of reference that is used to create self-consistency and meaning. Ego evolves through nine stages of psychological maturity with characteristics ranging from an external approach to oneself and the world, including such features as external sources of reinforcement, lack of insight into oneself, and projection of blame, to an increasing internalization of one’s experience, interests, autonomy, and control, including awareness of thoughts, desires, motives and emphasis on self-reliance and competence.

Ego constitutes an over-arching master trait, broadly subsuming a number of other developmental sequences that include: 1) character development, which incorporates impulse control and moral development as the basis for moral preoccupations and concerns; 2) cognitive style, which incorporates level of both cognitive complexity and cognitive development; 3) interpersonal style, which addresses the attitude toward interpersonal relationships and other people, understanding of relationships, and preferred type of relationship; and 4) conscious preoccupations, which involve the dominant themes of the person’s thoughts and behavior. Antecedent constructs from the psychological literature
include Adler’s “style of life” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956); Sullivan’s (1953) “self-system;” and Erikson’s (1968, 1982) “psychosocial development.”

As addressed above, ego development was operationalized as a dichotomous variable. Total protocol scores at E-5 or lower were represented as one group, and scores at E-6 and higher were represented as the contrasting group. The two groups are differentiated based on the significance of the developmental task of reflexivity theoretically attained at E-6.

**Counseling Theory**

A counseling theory provides the practitioner with a consistent rationale for understanding human development, pathology, and treatment. Counseling theories address problems differently and vary in their approaches to the therapeutic relationship, the role of the counselor and client, and the types of therapeutic interventions and techniques employed. Counseling theory, personality theory, and theory of psychotherapy are synonymous terms and are often used interchangeably throughout the counseling profession.

**Theoretical Orientation**

A theoretical orientation is the counselor’s preferred framework for conceptualizing human nature and the problems presented in counseling. In training and practice, counselors are often encouraged to identify one particular theoretical orientation that best corresponds with their worldviews, while having a basic understanding of fundamental techniques common to all approaches. The counselor’s theoretical orientation was operationalized as a nominal variable.
consisting of six categories – the six counseling theories that the research
participants in the study considered in identifying their theoretical orientations.

Regarding the choice of the six theoretical orientations versus the many
others found in the professional literature, the population from which the sample
for the proposed study was drawn were students of a particular counseling
program. That program’s policy is to expose students to a variety of theories
during the counseling theories course in the first semester of study and then to
indicate six theories from which each student is required to identify the one most
similar to the student’s views about how people are innately endowed, develop,
and change, to then use as the counselor’s guiding theory during their master’s
training period. Thus, the six theoretical orientations reflect those that research
participants considered in identifying their guiding theories. The six theoretical
orientations were: 1) Cognitive, 2) REBT/Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, 3)
Reality/Choice Theory, 4) Person-centered/Rogerian, 5) Individual/Adlerian, and
6) Behavioral.

Counseling Theory Classification

Each theory assessed in this study was classified according to one of
three domains of emphasis. The domains are: 1) affective, 2) behavioral, or 3)
cognitive. Counseling theories tend to emphasize one domain as primary while
considering the other domains as less essential in their models. For example,
counselors using affective theories focus communication largely on their clients’
feelings, whereas those using cognitive theories generally attempt to change
clients’ thoughts, and those using a behavioral approach accentuate altering
clients’ actions. I have adopted this system of classification from the work of
Baruth and Huber (1985) and Freeman (2003). Following Baruth and Huber’s
(1985) original classification system, Freeman (2003) polled 26 counselor
educators to determine how they would classify the theories. The results
matched the original classification system of Person-Centered/Rogerian as
affective; Behavioral and Reality/Choice theory as behavioral; and Cognitive,
REBT, and Individual/Adlerian as cognitive. The counseling theory classification
was operationalized as a nominal variable that consists of three categories: 1)
affective, 2) behavioral, or 3) cognitive.

Confidence with Identification of Counseling Theory

How confident the partici- pant was in their identification with their
counseling theory was obtained via a five point Likert-type scale. A score of one
indicated that the participant was not confident with their theory identification,
whereas a score of five indicated that they were very confident with their theory
identification. This variable was operationalized as a continuous, ordinal variable
that ranged from a score of one to five.

Comfort with Application of Counseling Theory

How comfortable counseling students were with the clinical application of
their theory was determined via a five point Likert-type scale. A score of one
indicated that the participant was not comfortable with the clinical application of
their theory, whereas a score of five indicated that they were very comfortable
with the clinical application of their theory. This variable was operationalized as a continuous, ordinal variable that ranged from one to five.

Methods and Procedures

Instruments

*Washington University Sentence Completion Test Form 81 (WUSCT).*

Loevinger and Wessler (1970) first published the WUSCT in 1970. Revised in 1985 (Loevinger, 1985) and again in 1996 (Hy & Loevinger, 1996), the current version is now Form 81. The WUSCT is a semi-projective instrument of 36 incomplete sentence stems designed to measure stages of Loevinger’s (1976) ego development. Men and women complete alternate forms with slight differences in the pronouns used in the sentence stems. The directions simply instruct the respondent to complete the stems; they provide no further instruction. Completion time ranges from about 20 to 30 minutes.

Two independent raters are required for scoring. Loevinger (1996) recommends that raters be of above average intelligence with some graduate training in psychology. Raters learn the scoring technique through the systematic three-week self-training program specified in *Measuring Ego Development* (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Responses are removed from their original protocols and are grouped by each item number to be scored together, that is, all responses to item one, followed by all responses to item two, and so forth. Raters evaluate individual items according to the levels and categories provided in the comprehensive scoring manual, assigning a level and category to each response.
(Hy & Loevinger, 1996). The manual contains categories, themes, and multiple examples of typical responses to the sentence stems at each of the ego levels. After all item responses have been scored, the raters compare their results for each individual item and resolve any item discrepancies via discussion and consensus. The individual item responses are then regrouped according to each protocol. An individual rater can then create a frequency and ogive distribution for the rankings of the item responses in each protocol. Using a system of ogive rules, the rater scores the protocols for a total protocol rating (TPR) of ego level (E-level).

A number of studies provide substantial support for the reliability of the WUSCT. Loevinger and Wessler (1970) initially reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .91 using the item sum score, a result almost identical to results they and others found in later studies (Browning, 1987; Loevinger, 1998; Novy & Francis, 1992). Multiple studies across a broad range of populations demonstrate high levels of inter-rater reliability (Manners & Durkin, 2001). Novy and Francis (1992) reported high and significant correlations for split half reliability where the researchers compared the 1st and 2nd half of the items with each other and with the 36-item test itself.

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, Manners and Durkin (2001) reported broad substantial support for the construct validity of ego development in two primary ways: 1) in terms of the validity of the three central tenets of the theory – the unitary nature of the ego, the ego as an integration of
other personality characteristics, and the sequence of ego stages; and 2) in terms of the relation to the external criterion of alternative measures. Loevinger and Wessler (1970) conducted an initial factor analysis that revealed 20% of the total variance was accounted for by the first factor, with the second factor accounting for only 5.6%. The first factor also correlated highly with the sum of item ratings, providing further support for the unitary nature of the ego construct. Ego development was also distinct from intelligence and verbal fluency as well as uninfluenced by socio-economic status (Manners & Durkin, 2001).

_Counseling Theory Survey._ The Counseling Theory Survey (Appendix A) was used to obtain demographic data and attitudes of the research participants. The components of the survey included name, age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, type of education, counseling specialty, experience as a client in personal counseling prior to entering the master’s program, personal theoretical orientation, confidence in one’s theoretical identification, and comfort with the clinical application of one’s theory.

_Population_

The population for this study consisted of university students that were actively enrolled in a master’s level counseling internship course within a counseling program accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). In particular, I recruited research participants from a convenience sample of students enrolled in master’s level internship courses in the counseling program at the University of North Texas,
during the summer and fall 2007 semesters. These students were in their final coursework of their degree program, applying their clinical acumen in a professional internship context, having completed the majority of required coursework for their degrees including counseling theory, counseling skills, multiculturalism, ethics, and practicum, among others.

**Sample Size**

The ideal sample size for this study was determined by several different factors. These factors included the power of the study, the effect size of the study, and the level of significance. The power of the study is a measurement of the probability of rejecting a false null hypothesis (Moore & McCabe, 2006). As a general rule of thumb, the minimum power of a study should be at least 0.80, because this would provide adequate evidence against the null hypothesis (Keuhl, 2000). The next relevant factor is the size of the effect, which is a measurement of the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables in the analysis. The effect size for a given study more often than not depends on the statistical procedures that are implemented in the study. The final factor is the alpha level of significance. This value is usually predetermined as being equal to 0.05.

For the chi square tests implemented in this study, assuming that the power is equal to 0.80, a large effect size of $w = 0.50$ is going to be measured, and the level of significance is equal to 0.05, the minimum number of participants required was 52 (Cohen, 1988). This number was based on the largest chi
square test performed with five degrees of freedom. A power analysis for the independent sample t-test was performed in the same fashion. Based on a power equal to 0.80, a large effect size of $d = 0.50$, the level of significance equal to 0.05, and that the tests were two-sided, the minimum number of participants required was 52. This result indicated that in both analyses, in order to observe a large effect size, a minimum number of 52 participants would be required.

Recruitment of Research Participants

Prior to initiating any of the procedures or use of the instruments described herein, I obtained full approval from the University of North Texas (UNT) Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) via standard application protocols. Following approval, I recruited research participants from the aforementioned convenience sample of students enrolled in master’s level internship courses in the counseling program at the University of North Texas. Potential research participants received an informed consent form specifying their voluntary agreement to participate in the study and their freedom to withdraw at any time. Participants who elected to participate were allowed to enter their names into a raffle drawing for one $25 gift certificate from a local bookseller per each scheduled internship class meeting.

Procedure

Following the approval from the UNT IRB, I attended all scheduled internship classes – a total of eight – to present the opportunity for students to participate in the study. I provided a brief description of the goals of the study,
the purpose of the instruments, and a detailed description of informed consent and confidentiality. Students who expressed interest were provided with an envelope containing the following: 1) a cover letter describing the nature of the study, presenting instructions for completing the instruments, and explaining how to obtain their personal results, if desired (Appendix B); 2) an informed consent form specifying the student’s voluntary agreement to participate in the study and the freedom to withdraw at any time (Appendix C); 3) an entry form for the raffle drawing with the opportunity to win one of eight $25 gift certificates to a local bookseller; 4) the Washington University Sentence Completion Test Form 81, with males receiving the WUSCT for men and females receiving the WUSCT for women; and 5) the Counseling Theory Survey. A coded number represented each subject for confidentiality purposes. Each participant had the same code number for all instruments.

Participants completed and returned the packets while I was in attendance. Participants returned the entry form for the raffle separately from the assessments. At the completion of data collection for each internship meeting, I conducted a raffle from the returned entry forms and notified the winner immediately. I then presented the gift certificate in person.

I entered the data from the completed WUSCTs into Microsoft Excel for management. I and a research assistant each scored the individual item responses according to the instructions specified in the scoring manual, *Measuring Ego Development* (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Both the assistant and I
met Loevinger’s (1996) background recommendations for raters, in that we both possess graduate degrees in counseling, including extensive coursework in psychology. Prior to scoring the WUSCTs, the assistant and I completed the self-training exercises presented in the scoring manual. Following the manual, we separately scored each item individually and resolved disagreements regarding individual items by consensus.

I then computed the frequency and ogive distributions for each protocol and determined the total protocol ratings according to the specified ogive rules. I coded each TPR categorically by its corresponding number, for example, E-1=1, E-2=2, and so forth. I coded responses from the Counseling Theory Survey with a categorical scale with a number representing each response, for example, Cognitive=1, REBT=2, and so forth. I also classified each of the participants’ personal theoretical orientations into one of the three domains of 1) Affective, 2) Behavioral, or 3) Cognitive. I then provided the total protocol ratings of ego level, the data from the Counseling Theory Survey, and the classification of each participant’s theoretical orientation to a statistician to enter into SPSS for analysis.

Summary

This chapter detailed the research design and methodology used for the current study. I began by specifying my research questions and concordant hypotheses, followed by a detailed rationale of the choice of a causal-comparative, quantitative design. The choice and rationale for the use of non-
parametric and parametric statistical procedures were also explained. I then discussed each of the key terms used in the study and their operationalization. I also addressed issues related to the population and the ideal sample size. Finally, I outlined the procedures of the study in detail. In the concluding chapter, I present the results of the study and provide a discussion of the outcome, including limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The objective of the current study was to determine whether counseling students' levels of ego development would be related to their identification with particular theories of counseling, to their particular theories when the theories are classified according to their domain of emphasis, to the students' reported confidence with their theory identification, and to the students' reported comfort with the application of their theory in clinical practice. In line with this objective, 70 participants completed the Washington University Sentence Completion Test Form 81 and the Counseling Theory Survey. Of the original 70 cases, one was dropped due to incomplete data, leaving 69 remaining for further analysis. The one participant involved in the incomplete case provided no reason or explanation for discontinuing participation. For this study, the following alternative hypotheses were specified:

1. There would be a significant relationship between counseling students' levels of ego development and their identification with particular counseling theories.

2. There would be a significant relationship between counseling students' levels of ego development and their identification with particular theories
of counseling, when the theories are classified according to their primary domain of emphasis.

3. There would be a significant relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and how confident they report they are in their identification with their theory.

4. There would be a significant relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and how comfortable they report they are in the application of their theory in clinical practice.

To test the hypotheses, chi-square cross-tabulation and independent t-test procedures were conducted. A statistical significance level of .05 was specified.

In this chapter, a rationale for the chosen statistical analyses will be presented, followed by the descriptive statistics addressing the sample and the study’s variables. Following, the results vis-à-vis the study hypotheses will be detailed with a discussion of the findings as well as possible limitations and weaknesses and suggestions for future research.

Results

Method of Statistical Analysis

The analyses for this study were conducted in the statistical software program SPSS, in which the specific commands used included descriptive statistics as well as chi square cross-tabulations and t-tests. The descriptive statistics were used to illustrate the distribution of the variables in the study. This presentation includes frequency tables that provide the numbers and
percentages of observations in each category. The chi square cross tabulation and t-test commands were then used to present the relationships between combinations of variables.

The chi square tests used in this study determine the relationship between categorical variables that comprise the rows and columns of the cross-tabulation table (Moore & McCabe, 2006). More specifically, the chi square test determines whether the variables are independent of one another by computing the expected counts for each one of the cells in the table. The expected values for the cells were calculated by using the following equation:

\[ E_i = \frac{\text{row total} \times \text{column total}}{n} \]

where \( E_i \) is the expected value for the \( i^{th} \) cell, and \( n \) is the total number of observations in the study (Moore & McCabe, 2006). The expected value was then compared with the observed value to determine whether there was a significant difference between the two variables. This calculation was done by the following equation:

\[ \chi^2 = \frac{\sum (O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i} \]

where the numerator was the sum of the squared differences between the observed \( (O_i) \) and expected \( (E_i) \) values for the \( i^{th} \) cell of the table, and the denominator was the expected value of the \( i^{th} \) cell (Moore & McCabe, 2006).
If the variables were not related to one another then the expected values would be approximately equal to the observed values. Conversely, if the variables were related or dependent on one another, then the expected values would be much different from the observed values. This outcome would result in a large test statistic that follows a chi squared distribution with \((r – 1)(c – 1)\) degrees of freedom, where \(r\) is the number of rows in the table and \(c\) is the number of columns in the table. If the test statistic exceeded the critical \(\chi^2\) value, then it could be concluded that the two variables were related to one another and, therefore, depend on one another.

The chi square contingency tables do have some assumptions, including that the count of each cell should be at least 5 and, because of the division involved, no cell can equal zero. In cases where cells do equal less than five, adjacent rows or columns can be combined if that procedure is theoretically consistent and it does not result in a distortion of the data (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1989).

The t-tests that were implemented determine if there is a statistically significant difference between two independent samples (Moore & McCabe, 2006). The formula used for this statistic is:

\[
\begin{align*}
t - \text{test} &= \frac{(X_1 - X_2)}{SE(X_1 - X_2)}
\end{align*}
\]

The numerator in this equation is the difference between the mean scores for the variable of interest of the two independent groups in the study with \(X_1\) being the
mean score for the first group and \((\bar{x}_2)\) being the mean score for the second group. The expression in the denominator is the standard error for the difference between the sample means which is equal to \(\sqrt{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{s_2^2}{n_2}}\) where \(s_1^2\) is the standard deviation for the first group and \(s_2^2\) is the standard deviation for the second group, while \(n_1\) and \(n_2\) are the number of participants in the first and second group, respectively. If there was no difference in the average scores of the variables, then the numerator would be expected to equal zero which would result in the t-statistic being small. This result would lead one not to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference between the two groups. However, if the t-statistic exceeds the critical value on the proscribed degrees of freedom of \(n-2\) (where \(n = \) the total number of participants), then one would reject the null hypothesis, and accept the alternate hypothesis, that there is a difference between the two groups.

To address the first hypothesis, that there is no relationship between counseling students' levels of ego development and their identification with particular counseling theories, the chi square test was to be comprised of a two by six contingency table. This meant that the critical value for testing this hypothesis was equal to a chi square statistic on five degrees of freedom \(([2 – 1])(6 – 1) = 5\). If the test statistic were greater than this value, then it could be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the students at differing
levels of ego development and their identification with particular counseling theories.

To address the second hypothesis, that there is no relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and their identification with particular counseling theories when classified according to their content emphasis, the chi square test was to be comprised of a two by three contingency table. This means that the critical value for testing this hypothesis would be equal to a chi square statistic on two degrees of freedom ([2 – 1][3 – 1] = 2). If the test statistic is greater than this value, then it could be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the students at differing levels of ego development and their identified theories when they are classified according to their content emphases.

For the third hypothesis, that there is no relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and how confident they report to be in their theoretical identification, an independent sample t-test was implemented. Using the t-test statistic presented above resulted in \( \bar{X}_1 \) being the mean score of the reported confidence variable for the E4/E5 group and \( \bar{X}_2 \) being the mean score of the reported confidence variable for the E6/E7 group. The expression in the denominator is then the standard error for the difference between the sample means which is equal to \( \sqrt{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{s_2^2}{n_2}} \) where \( s_1^2 \) is the standard deviation of the confidence variable for the E4/E5 group and \( s_2^2 \) is the standard deviation of the
confidence variable for the E6/E7 group, while \( n_1 \) and \( n_2 \) are the number of participants in the E4/E5 group and E6/E7 group, respectively. If the test statistic were greater than the critical t-value on \( n-2 \) degrees of freedom, then it would be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the two populations regarding their reported level of confidence in the identification of their theories.

For the fourth hypothesis, that there is no relationship between specific levels of ego development and how comfortable the counselors report to be in the clinical application of their theory, an independent sample t-test was implemented. Using the t-test statistic presented above resulted in the \( \bar{x}_1 \) being the mean score of the reported comfort variable for the E4/E5 group and \( \bar{x}_2 \) being the mean score of the reported comfort variable for the E6/E7 group. The expression in the denominator is then the standard error for the difference between sample means which is equal to \( \sqrt{s^2_{1} + s^2_{2}} \) where \( s^2_{1} \) is the standard deviation of the comfort variable for the E4/E5 group and \( s^2_{2} \) is the standard deviation of the comfort variable for the E6/E7 group, while \( n_1 \) and \( n_2 \) are the number of participants in the E4/E5 group and E6/E7 group, respectively. If the test statistic were greater than the critical t-value on \( n-2 \) degrees of freedom, then it would be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the two populations regarding their reported level of comfort when applying their theories in clinical practice.
**Descriptive Statistics**

*Sample characteristics.* The statistics describing the respondents of the study are shown in Table 1. Over three-fourths of the respondents were female and Caucasian. A clear majority of the sample fell between the ages of 21 to 31, followed by almost one-fourth in the age range of 31 to 40, and the remaining participants aged 41 or older. Most of the respondents had a bachelor’s degree and only a minority had master’s degrees. Close to half of the sample had a degree in mental health and almost a fourth had a degree in education. More than half of participants were in the community counseling track; about a fourth of the respondents were in the elementary school counseling track, and the rest were either in the secondary school or college and university counseling tracks. One fourth of the sample reported never having had any counseling sessions prior to beginning the counseling program. The majority of the remaining participants reported having between 1 to 10 sessions, with 19% reporting having had between 11 and 30 sessions, and 16% reporting having had 30 or more counseling sessions.
Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages for Sample Characteristics \((N = 69)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>88.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>76.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 35</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 to 40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 to 45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 to 50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 to 55</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 or older</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 1 *(continued)*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical health</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social science</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical science</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious studies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Track</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and University</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 1 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counseling sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 or more</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description of study variables. The frequencies and percentages for the independent and dependent variables of the study are presented in Table 2. Counseling theory affiliation ranged from almost half of participants identifying with Individual/Adlerian theory to none identifying with Behaviorism. When the respondents’ theoretical orientations were classified according to their domains of emphasis, a clear majority of the respondents indicated identifying with a theory with a cognitive emphasis. Half of the respondents were at the fourth or fifth level of ego development, with only one case at E-4; the other half was classified as being at the sixth or seventh level of ego development, with only three cases at E-7. There were no cases at E-2, E-3, E-8, or E-9.
Table 2

*Frequencies and Percentages for Study Variables (N = 69)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theoretical orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REBT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality/Choice Theory</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person-centered</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual/Adlerian</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theoretical classification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of ego development</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The means and standard deviations for the reported confidence in the identification of one’s guiding theory and reported comfort with using the theory in clinical practice are presented in Table 3. For the confidence variable, the mean
rating for the sample was 3.97 (SD = .66); thus, respondents indicated that they were considerably confident in their theoretical identification. For the comfort variable, the mean comfort rating was 3.77 (SD = .75); accordingly, respondents reported to be generally comfortable with the application of their theoretical orientation in clinical practice.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for Confidence and Comfort Ratings (N = 69)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>2 to 5</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>2 to 5</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Level of Ego Development and Theoretical Orientation (Hypothesis 1)*

It was predicted that there would be a significant relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and their identification with particular counseling theories. A cross-tabulation procedure was conducted to test this prediction. Due to the fact that each cell of the cross tabulation table must have a minimum value of five and that there were no participants who identified with Behavioral theory and only one participant who identified with Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, the Behavioral theory column was eliminated and the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy column was combined with the Cognitive theory column because they are the most theoretically similar; both theories emphasize cognitions over affect and behavior. This combination is
appropriate because it remains theoretically consistent. The findings of the cross-tabulation procedures in Tables 4 and 5 did not support rejecting the null hypothesis ($\chi^2 (3) = .486, p = .922$). Thus, the first hypothesis was not supported by the data. Further, the eta value indicated less than 1% of the variance was explained.

Table 4

*Cross-tabulation Results for Theoretical Orientation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Orientation</th>
<th>Cognitive/REBT</th>
<th>Reality</th>
<th>Person-Centered</th>
<th>Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4/5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6/7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

*Chi-Square and Eta Values for Theoretical Orientation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Eta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson chi-square</td>
<td>.486</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.922</td>
<td>.076</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Level of Ego Development and Theoretical Content Emphasis (Hypothesis 2)*

It was hypothesized that there would be a significant relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and their identification with particular counseling theories, when the theories were classified according to
their content emphasis. A cross-tabulation procedure was conducted to test this hypothesis. The findings of the cross-tabulation procedures in Tables 6 and 7 did not support rejecting the null hypothesis ($\chi^2 (2) = .225, p = .894$). Accordingly, the second hypothesis was not confirmed. In addition, the eta valued indicated less than 1% of the variance was explained.

Table 6

*Cross-tabulation Results for Content Emphasis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Emphasis</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Behavioral</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4/5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6/7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

*Chi-Square and Eta Values for Content Emphasis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Eta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson chi-square</td>
<td>.225</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.894</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Level of Ego Development and Confidence in Theoretical Identification*

*(Hypothesis 3)*

It was hypothesized that there would be a relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and how confident they report they are in identification with their theory. The findings in Tables 8 and 9 suggest that
confidence scores did not vary across students' levels of ego development (t (67) = .740, p = .462). Hence, the third hypothesis was not substantiated by the data. Further, the eta value indicated less than 1% of the variance was explained.

Table 8

Means and Standard Deviations for Confidence Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4/5</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6/7</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9

Independent t-test Results for Confidence Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Eta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence score</td>
<td>.740</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>.462</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Level of Ego Development and Comfort with Theory in Clinical Practice

(Hypothesis 4)

It was posited that there would be a relationship between counseling students' levels of ego development and how comfortable they reported they are with the application of their theory in clinical practice. The findings in Tables 10 and 11 indicate that comfort level scores did not vary across students' levels of ego development (t (67) = -.528, p = .599). Thus, the fourth hypothesis was not
supported by the data. The eta value indicated that less than 1% of the variance was explained.

Table 10

*Means and Standard Deviations for Comfort Level Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4/5</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6/7</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11

*Independent t-test Results for Comfort Level Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Eta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comfort level score</td>
<td>-.528</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>.599</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Findings**

None of the study’s alternative hypotheses were supported by the data. The first hypothesis that there would be a significant relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and their identification with particular counseling theories was not verified. The second hypothesis that there would be a significant relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and their identification with particular theories of counseling, when classified according to their emphasis, was also not substantiated by the data. Similarly, the third hypothesis that there would be a significant relationship
between counseling students’ levels of ego development and how confident they report they are in the identification with their theory was not confirmed. Finally, the fourth hypothesis that there would be a significant relationship between counseling students’ levels of ego development and how comfortable they report they are in identification with their theory was also not supported. In addition, the eta values, a measure of association between the variables, for each hypothesis indicated less than 1% of the variance was explained, a very, very small effect size.

Discussion

Discussion of Sample Characteristics

In this study, the modal age group ranged from 26 to 30 years, consisting of almost half of the participants. This group was followed in size by the groups ranging from 21 to 25 years and 31 to 35 years. The remaining groups above age 35 were more broadly distributed. Thus, a sizeable majority of the sample was below age 30 with a broader distribution in the groups ranging from age 31 to age 56 and above. Well over half of the sample appeared to be completing the counseling program at an earlier age distributed over a 10 year range whereas the remaining participants appeared to be completing the program later in life over a much broader 25 year range. This sample appeared to be slightly older than the Smith, Robinson, and Young (2007) sample of 204 counseling students from nine CACREP counseling programs across five states in their study of wellness, psychological distress, and social desirability among master’s level
trainees. In their sample, the age range was 21 to 51 with an average age of 27.8 and a modal age of 24 (Smith et al., 2007). This sample in the current study also appeared to be slightly younger than another sample of 204 subjects by Roach and Young (2007), investigating wellness promotion by counselor training programs. In their study, the ages of the sample ranged from 21 to 58 with a mean of 31.36.

Regarding gender, females were much more represented by a factor of almost nine females to every male. However, this distribution is comparable to those found in other recent large-sample studies regarding CACREP counseling programs across the United States. Granello (2002) had 82% females in a study of cognitive development in counseling students, Roach and Young (2002) had an 85.9% female sample in their study, and Smith et al. (2007) had a sample consisting of 88.2% females. The disproportionately small number of male research participants should not be considered a liability as it appears to reflect similar patterns in other studies of the same population and a general trend in counselor education.

The overwhelming majority of respondents were White/Caucasian, followed by Asian respondents who comprised half of the remaining group. The remaining 11.5% of the sample consisted of three groups led by African-American, followed by Latino, and Other. These results are somewhat different than those found in other recent studies of CACREP counseling programs with a larger representation of Asian students found in the current study. These results
may have been an anomaly or the program from which the sample was drawn may have been unusually successful at recruiting Asian-American and/or Asian international students. Granello’s (2002) sample had 90% Caucasian students with 5% African-American, 1% Asian-American, 1% Hispanic and 3% in an Other category. Roach and Young (2007) found their sample to be 60.9% Caucasian, 27.7% African-American, 8.4% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.5% Native American. The contrast between Granello’s (2002) sample and the sample of this and Roach and Young’s (2007) study may indicate a trend of increasing minority representation within master’s level counseling programs.

The substantial majority of the participants had only bachelor’s degrees, indicating that the counseling program would be their first graduate degree. For the remainder of the sample, the counseling degree would be at least their second graduate degree. Of the types of degrees previously obtained prior to entering the counseling program, the leading categories were mental health, education, and social science. The rest of the participants were broadly distributed among the remaining degree categories. These results are not surprising considering that the counseling program would be a natural continuance for those pursuing higher education in the mental health, education, and social science fields.

Well over half of the sample was following the community/agency track in the counseling program. This was followed by approximately a quarter of the sample enrolled in the elementary school counseling track, 14.5% in the
secondary school counseling track, and 4.3% in the college/university counseling track. All four of the tracks fall under the same graduate program of Counseling in the Department of Counseling and Higher Education from which the sample was taken. These findings are very similar than those in Roach and Young’s (2007) study, who found 40% of their sample in a school counseling track, which combined elementary, secondary, and college counseling, and 60% in the combined tracks of mental health counseling, marriage and family counseling, and community counseling, which parallels the community/agency track identified in this study.

Almost one fourth of the sample reported that they had received no personal counseling prior to entering the master’s counseling program, which does require a minimum number of personal counseling sessions over the course of the training. Of the remaining group that had received some personal counseling prior to entering the program, the distribution was bimodal, with one concentration centered around having received one to five and six to ten (23.2%) sessions, and another concentration of the sample reporting having received 30 or more sessions (15.9%). When compared with other recent findings regarding counseling students, this study appears to indicate a substantial greater number of students having received some personal counseling prior to entering the program as well as a notable representation of students having participated in longer term counseling (30+ sessions). In the Smith et al. (2007) study, only 56.4% of the sample indicated having received personal counseling prior to
initiating their counseling program. Of those that had received counseling, the average number of sessions ranged from 1 to 100 with an average of 12.3 sessions and 75% percent of the sample responded that they had received fewer than 12 sessions. The bimodal distribution of the current study may be reflective of the models of treatment that the counselors received, in that certain theoretical orientations may value shorter term interventions while others may value longer, open-ended counseling. For example, the former mode of the sample may represent shorter term or brief approaches such as Reality/Choice Theory, Cognitive, or Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, which would commonly last 8-12 sessions, while the latter mode may represent longer term approaches such as Person-centered or Psychodynamic which can easily continue for 30 sessions or more.

**Discussion of Study Variables**

The theoretical orientation with the largest representation within the sample was Individual/Adlerian. This group was followed, in order, by Cognitive, Reality, Person-Centered, and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy. None of the participants reported identifying with Behavioral theory. These results are notably different from the findings of similar studies in counselor education. In an examination of personality variables as predictors of counseling theory, Freeman’s (2003) sample consisted of 20% preferring the theory of Carl Rogers (Person-centered), followed by Albert Ellis (REBT) at 14%, William Glasser (Reality) at 13%, Alfred Adler (Individual) at 10.6%, and Aaron Beck (Cognitive)
at 9.8%. It should be noted that in Freeman’s sample the subjects were asked to identify their preferred theorist, not simply select an identified theory. Also, Freeman’s (2003) survey included other counseling theorists not included in this study that comprised the remainder of the distribution, including Irvin Yalom (Existential) at 11.4% and Fritz Perls (Gestalt) at 7.6%, among others.

The high representation of Individual theory among the participants may be due to the endorsement of the theory by a number of the faculty members in the program from which the sample was drawn. Likewise, the low representation of the Behavioral theory in the sample may be a result of none of the faculty members endorsing the orientation. This interpretation would be consonant with that of Hollander (1994) who suggested that the orientation of one’s training program was a strong predictor of one’s theoretical orientation.

When the participants’ theories were classified according to their areas of content emphasis, the clear majority of the sample reported to have identified with a theory having a cognitive emphasis. This was followed by theories with a behavioral emphasis and, finally, by theories with an affective emphasis. By contrast, in two combined studies of psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, and social workers, Prochaska and Norcross (1999) found that 23% of counselors preferred affective theories. Prochaska and Norcross (1999) also suggested that counselors, in general, tend to prefer affective theories, which is contradicted by these results. Further, these results appear to be virtually a reversal of the findings by Freeman (2003) whose sample included 53% of the participants
identifying with affective theories, 35% identifying with cognitive theories, and 12% identifying with behavioral theories.

A possible explanation of these contrasting results is the debatable classification of Individual theory as having a cognitive emphasis. As noted above, the sizeable student identification with Individual counseling in this study may be due to the program faculty emphasis on Individual counseling theory, whereas the theory appears to be less represented in other counseling programs. Individual counseling is classified in the cognitive domain due to the applied emphasis of obtaining early recollections in order to uncover and later modify the client’s basic mistakes. However, many of the theoretical concepts in Individual counseling connect the orientation with more affectively-emphasized approaches. For example, the priority of holism over reductionism, subjectivity over objectivity, and teleology over causality as well as encouraging the expansion and development leading to self-realization all seem to align Individual counseling more with humanistic and typically affectively classified approaches such as Person-centered, Gestalt, and Existential. (Mosak, 2000). If the thirty one participants who identified with Individual counseling are then re-classified as having an affective domain of emphasis, then the distribution of this study reflects the others mentioned above with 41 participants (59%) identifying with an affectively oriented theory, 16 participants (23%) identifying with a cognitively oriented theory, and 12 participants (17%) identifying with a behavioral oriented theory.
Over half of the sample exhibited total protocol scores placing them at the E-5 (Self-aware) level of ego development, implying that a majority of the students had attained the stage at which they would at least begin questioning broad stereotypes of the in-group which dominated at the previous stage, E-4 (Conformist). Development to this stage may be facilitated by the competing demands of different authority figures. At this level, one’s ability to conceptualize inner life expands and the distinction between the in-group and self increases. Interpersonal relationships begin to deepen and tend to be based not only on actions, but personal feelings as well. The representation of the E-5 level in this sample parallels Loevinger’s (1976, 1996) suggestion that E-5 is the modal level for the urban, educated, United States.

The second most represented ego level was E-6 (Conscientious) with almost the other half of the sample. The attainment of this stage represents a mysterious shift away from group imposed norms to self-evaluated standards of duties and obligations. However, often the behavior of those at E-6 may mirror that of the in-group or previous levels; it is the inner rationale that differentiates them. Here, motives and consequences supercede rules and “ought” is clearly differentiated from “is”. Reflexivity is clearly in place, with a self-critical, but not self-rejecting, attitude, and social concern increases. The individual develops a clear sense of multiple possibilities in situations, freedom of choice, and rationales for those choices. Work is now an opportunity for growth and
achievement and achievement transcends mere social approval to meeting one's own personal expectations (Loevinger, 1996).

The highest ego development level with representation in this sample was E-7 (Individualistic). These three cases consisted of one female with an age classified 36-40 and two males with ages classified 41-45 and 56 and above. The key distinction at this stage is the development of individuality and the personality as a style of life. Tolerance for individual differences increases and relationships deepen, with a key differentiation of the various forms of dependence: emotional, financial, and physical. Another critical development is the introduction of the recognition of psychological causation and psychological development, aspects which are only rarely spontaneously disclosed at the earlier levels. Another feature is the emergence of an understanding of role differentiation (Loevinger, 1996).

The least represented ego development group among the sample was E-4 (Conformist), consisting of one case; a female between the ages of 26 and 30. The Conformist stage is marked by identification of self with group authority with rules accepted simply because they exist; no further rationale is required. It is a period of great cognitive simplicity with clear distinctions between right and wrong for all peoples or for groups distinguished on very simple demographic terms. Social acceptability and appropriateness is of utmost importance. Appearance, material things, reputation, and belonging are all priorities. Inner life is described in simplistic emotional language and relationships are governed by
actions, not emotions, with the main activity as talking (Loevinger, 1996). The
Conformist stage is also considered to be where the capacity for empathy
begins, which then extends to broader groups through the consequent stages
(Carlozzi et. al., 1983).

The distribution of ego development stages in this sample is slightly lower
than that found in other studies. In a longitudinal study of student cognitive
development over a counseling training program, Fong, Borders, Ethington, &
Pitts (1997) followed forty-eight students over multiple points in their CACREP-
accredited program. At the final measure, taken at the conclusion of the program,
ego development stages ranged from E-4 (Conformist) to E-7 (Individualistic) but
with median and modal stage at E-6 (Conscientious). Thus, the current study had
a similar range of ego levels but with the average level slightly lower.

In an earlier study investigating ego development and counselor ability
during training, Borders and Fong (1989) derived a sample of forty-four advanced
students drawn from field based practicum or internship experiences. In their
sample, the ego development levels ranged from E-3 (Self-Protective) to E-7
(Individualistic), with a mean and modal level at E-6 (Conscientious). However,
it should be noted that this study utilized the earlier I (interpersonal)- Level
categorical system of the 1970 manual. The categories were modified to the
current system for the purposes of this discussion. Even with the outlier of one
case at E-3, the Borders & Fong (1989) sample appears to score slightly higher
than the sample of the current study.
Although slightly lower, the sample of the current study appears similar to findings in previous studies investigating counseling students and ego development and reflective of the proposed distribution in the ego development model (Loevinger, 1996). This all stands to reason given the age, education level, and urban proximity of the sample.

On average, the students in the sample reported to be reasonably confident in the identification of their theoretical orientation with and a mean response of 3.97 on a Likert-type scale ranging from one to five. None of the students reported a score of one, or very unconfident, in their responses. Similarly, the students reported to be reasonably comfortable, on average, with the application of their theory in clinical practice with a mean response of 3.77 on a similar Likert-type scale. Again, none of the students reported a score of one, or very unconfident, in their responses. One interpretation of these results is that the scores are the result of the successful completion of coursework and practicum in the training program which emphasizes the cultivation of a theoretical and applied identification with one particular theory. Given that the students were in the final phase of their academic training, the ideal would be that they had attained a high level of comfort with and confidence in their theoretical orientation.

Discussion of the Results for the Hypotheses

The research questions of this study attempted to address if there was any significant relationship between master’s level counseling students’ levels of
ego development and their identification with a particular theory of counseling, 
their theories when classified according to their primary domain of emphasis, 
their reported degree of confidence in having identified their theory, and their 
reported degree of comfort when applying their theory in clinical practice. The 
intent of this study was to ascertain what effect, if any, ego development may 
have on the identification and application of a guiding theory of counseling. Initial 
descriptive interpretations could then be examined more in depth with future 
studies to determine potential predictive relations. These relationships could be 
used to assist students in the theoretical orientation identification process as well 
as aid counselor educators in guiding students and cultivating higher order 
thinking regarding the students’ identifications.

The results of the study can be summarized succinctly: None of the 
alternative hypotheses were supported by the data. Further, the measures of 
association of the variables for each of the hypotheses were quite low, indicating 
very, very small effect sizes. By the methodology implemented in this study, 
there appears to be no relationship between these counseling students’ levels of 
ego development and their identification with a particular counseling theory, their 
theories when classified according to their domain of emphasis, their degree of 
confidence in identifying their theoretical orientation, or their confidence in 
applying their theory in clinical practice. Some potential explanations and 
implications for these results follow.
It may be that ego development is a crucial variable related to the identification of counseling theory, but that, rather than differentiating theories as a result of one’s level of development, one’s level of ego development may affect one’s interpretation and understanding of their theory. By the results of this study, it appears that student counselors who identify with Person-centered theory are evenly split between the Conformist/Self-aware and the Conscientious/Individualistic groups. It may be that each of the groups interpret and utilize their theory differently based on their level of ego development. For example, Person-centered theory may be identified by Conformist/Self-aware students because, at first reading, the interventions of empathy and reflective listening appear straightforward, concrete, and easily applicable, whereas Conscientious and Individualistic students may be more perceptive to the theory’s subtlety, accentuating the concepts of organismic development, the primacy of phenomenological experience, and symbolization of self and other.

Brabeck and Welfel (1985) have discussed a similar phenomenon in examining students’ views of eclecticism and the relationship within Kitchner and King’s (1981) reflective judgment theory. Kitchner and King (1981) have posited a 7-stage developmental model, similar to Loevinger’s, addressing intellectual development of adolescents and adults. In their system, the lower three stages are marked by belief in fixed, certain truths, often proscribed by experts. The middle two stages portray truth as contextual and relative while the final two stages involve the critical evaluation of competing views in light of evidence in
order to arrive at reasoned, reflective judgments. In their study, Brabek and Welfel (1985) examined students’ eclecticism by having them produce papers defending one theory as better than others, including their rationale, advantages and limitations, their degree of certainty of their perspective, and their views regarding the profession arriving at a point where their theory would be demonstrated as superior. They found that master’s level trainees tended to function at a relativistic level and, when further encouraged by relativistic messages regarding counseling theory in their textbooks, they produced rationales founded primarily upon tolerance of other approaches and diversity as opposed to a reflective, empirical evaluation of their theories’ truth claims. As ego development appears to address similar concerns within the domain of intellectual development, it may be that trainees differentiate regarding their understanding, interpretation, and rationale for their theories as a function of their ego developmental level.

In a similar fashion, counseling students may display varying aptitudes in the practice of their theoretical orientation correlative with their level of ego development. Different levels of development may relate to students’ empathic engagement, capacity for abstraction, perspective taking, ability to accurately conceptualize, perception of cognitive distortions, and so on, within their own theoretical identification. These and other possibilities are addressed in the following section regarding future research.
The professional literature suggests a number of variables, unrelated to ego development that may have an effect regarding students’ identification with particular theories of counseling. Strupp (1978) argued that one’s theoretical orientation is, by far, no accident, but, rather, “overdetermined and deeply rooted in one’s biography” (p.314) and that one should not expect clear and distinct answers to such an ambiguous question. Rather, he implores practitioners to elevate the importance of their person as an empathic, compassionate, listener who is able to move close and deep to the client’s concerns. Perhaps ego development, even with its broad encapsulation of multiple developmental themes, remains too distinct a construct to capture such a complex decision as the identification with a theoretical orientation.

In a related discussion, Cummings and Lucchese (1978) state that the identification of a theoretical orientation is less a process of understanding and eliciting one’s personal beliefs, but more an issue of indoctrination resulting from one’s training and, as a precursor, pure chance. The authors suggest that selection of a training program and/or practicum/internship experiences can be so influenced by the practical exigencies of life such as accessibility, location, proximity to family, and economic necessity that they are rendered virtually random. Once a decision for training has been made, the student’s main concern becomes endurance and survival within their training program, and this priority often involves satisfying the demands of one’s teachers and supervisors. Further, the authors suggest that clinical training can be a very ambiguous time, wrought
with anxiety and concern, which is easily ameliorated through internalizing the theoretical orientation of a significant other. In their analysis, personality and developmental variables such as ego development may influence a student's theoretical orientation somewhat, but it is more likely an accident of circumstance, which may even produce an identification contrary to the student's personality.

Another investigator implicated the theoretical orientation of one's own counselor in personal counseling as the primary determinant of one's theoretical orientation, followed by course work and readings and one's experience as a practitioner (Seiner, 1978). Although these findings addressed professionals in practice as opposed to counselors in training, the orientation of students' former or current therapists may be a relevant factor. Given the considerable amount of the sample that had received some degree of counseling prior to entering the program, this factor may have been more relevant in identifying their theoretical orientation.

By contrast, from the results of large sample (n=479) survey study, Norcross and Prochaska (1983) argued that theoretical orientation was not principally influenced by random chance events or one's own therapy but by clinical experience, a finding anticipated in a number of other earlier studies (Henry, Sims, & Spray, 1971; Sundland, 1977). This primary factor was then followed by a clinician's values and personal philosophy. The influence of one's own therapist was shown to have only a weak or moderate effect and the
relevance of accidental circumstances was virtually negligible. Consequently, it is possible that the participants of the current study came to identify their theoretical orientation through their initial clinical experiences from their practicum prior to beginning their internship.

Other investigators have offered that family of origin issues may have a significant influence on the identification with a particular theory of counseling (Johnson, Campbell, & Masters, 1992). Johnson et al. (1992) found that perceptions of counselors’ family-of-origin environments, specifically aspects such as range of feelings exhibited, presence of empathy, and openness to others, had a statistically significant influence upon counseling practitioners theoretical identifications. Results indicated that perceptions of wide ranges of feeling in one’s family-of-origin were associated with more empirical orientations, focusing on components of the theory rather than broader patterns and explaining events in terms of material processes. Similarly, greater experiences of empathy in the practitioner’s family-of-origin were associated with the individual focusing more on observable behavior and events over the conscious experience of others. The authors suggest it is possible that practitioners’ orientations may be a recapitulation and compensation for the family-of-origin dynamics. This explanation, too, could be considered as an explanation for the lack of relationship between ego development and the identification of a theoretical orientation.
In summary, given that the results of the current study did not support the relationship of ego development to particular theories of counseling, a number of possible explanations should be considered. It may be that ego development affects the theoretical identification process in another fashion, such as in alternative interpretations of one’s theory or alternative application of one’s theory. It also may be the case that ego development is simply unrelated to theoretical identification and the process is better explained by other variables, interactions of variables, or pure chance. The professional literature on this phenomenon appears sometimes complimentary, sometimes contradictory, and clearly inconclusive.

Limitations and Weaknesses of the Study

A number of possible limitations to the study present concern. First, is the possibility of Type I or Type II errors in the statistical analysis. The alternative hypothesis may have been rejected when they are, in fact, true. This limitation is always present in statistical significance testing, and it is possible the opposite condition may be accurate.

Second, the information from the Counseling Theory Survey is self-report and open to normal self-report error problems. The participants may have consciously or unconsciously distorted their responses in some fashion. For example, participants may have reported that they were more confident with their theory identification or more confident in clinical practice than they actually are, producing a socially desirable response at the conclusion of their didactic training.
rather than an honest evaluation of their feelings. Alternatively, students may endorse higher levels of confidence as a reaction formation, a compensation strategy enacted consciously or unconsciously to ward off the anxiety of transitioning into real world practice without the support of the counseling program. In a similar fashion, participants may have indicated identifying with particular theories when those theories may not have actually reflected their true underlying assumptions or clinical practice.

Third, despite the strong inter-rater and other reliability findings with regard to the self-training program of the WUSCT, both raters in this study were relatively new to the administration and protocol scoring procedure. Consequently, the raters may have been prone to errors in scoring either at the level of rating the individual items or in determining the total protocol ratings.

Fourth, the counseling students who comprised the sample for this study were still in a relatively neophyte stage of professional development. It is possible they may have been unclear regarding their theoretical orientations and their responses may have been based on superficial premises, arbitrary, or forced by the curriculum of the program rather than reflectively concluded and developed.

Fifth, is the issue of utilizing a convenience sample at one university. This choice was made in efforts to control for exposure to alternative approaches to teaching counseling theories, curricula and coursework, and facilitating student development. The results and conclusions established here may not be found with a different sample and caution should be used when generalizing these
findings to any other context. Further, although the sample size met the criteria for appropriate power in the analysis, it did not provide appropriate representation of the Behavioral theory and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy columns in the cross tabulation tables. A larger or different sample may produce different results.

Sixth, the general leaning of the faculty’s theoretical orientation of the counseling program from which this sample was drawn tended to be humanistic, and particularly affiliated with Individual/Adlerian theory. As noted earlier, this factor may have disproportionately influenced the participants resulting in an disproportionate representation of theoretical orientations when compared with the broader population.

Seventh, again, as noted above, despite support within the literature, there may be some debate regarding the classification of Individual theory as a cognitive approach. There is a plausible rationale for the classification of Individual theory as an affective which may have altered the outcome of this study. Further, the use of these categories may not accurately reflect the theories’ underlying assumptions. The theories may not fit uniformly into one category without some crossover in other domains of emphasis.

Eighth, the study may have benefited from a number of changes in design, including the use of alternative self-report measures regarding theoretical identification or traits associated with theoretical orientation as well as observational measures discriminating students’ actual application of their
theories. With such measures, the statistical analysis may have been modified as well to account for the alternative variables, possibly bearing different results. Another related issue was the use of only one item to assess the students’ degrees of comfort and confidence. Reliability of these measures could be improved through the use of multiple items that accurately assess these dimensions which could then be contrasted with one another.

Finally, despite the strong validity findings regarding the WUSCT, the specification of ego development level is still a fixed and limited representation of the dynamic flow of human experience and behavior. Loevinger (1976) has pointed out that great care should be used when trying to predict particular behavior based on ego development level. Researchers and educators should remain cautious when applying the results to unique contexts.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings as well as the limitations of the current study allow for a number of possibilities for further research regarding the identification of counseling theory and ego development as related to counselor education. As mentioned above, future research may involve alternative measures of students’ identification with particular theories as opposed to the direct, categorical self-report method employed in this study. Standardized measurements may be implemented in order to assess the degree to which counseling students identify with the underlying assumptions of various theories or categories of theories. When classified by particular levels of ego development, these groups could be
assessed for significant relationships. Future research regarding ego development and counselor education may also involve observational measures, such as qualified rater assessment of clinical performance and outcome. These methods could potentially overcome the self-report limitations and/or distortions found in this study.

More research is also needed regarding how ego development may affect a student’s understanding and application of counseling theory. One possible approach would be a qualitative, phenomenological analysis of students’ case conceptualizations, either verbal or written, in light of their levels of ego development. Students may arrive at alternative constructions of meaning and relevance within the various theories due to their ego developmental level.

Similar studies regarding ego development and identification could also be undertaken with alternative populations such as experienced professionals in the field and in programs that follow alternative training models, such as the common factors approach. Ego development may be a relevant factor in theoretical identification in programs that provide training in other common theoretical approaches that were not addressed in this study such as Psychodynamic, Gestalt, Existential, and Family Systems.

Ego development may have the potential to assist in the assessment of counselor education more broadly. Personal growth and development are terms often casually utilized in counselor education, but the question of what actually grows or develops over the course of one’s training remains vague and opaque.
Is personal growth and development within counselor training simply the acquisition of a theoretical knowledge base and clinical skill set or does it represent a more direct personal change involving an inner evolution of relational capacity, reflexivity, ethical considerations, and the like? If it is the latter, the ego development model may serve the field well in assessing these changes.

Research is needed to further explore claims of prior studies involving ego development and counselor education. More research should be undertaken to explore the results of Borders and Fong’s (1989) study, suggesting that ego development level may somehow related to pre-training counseling ability. Assessment of ego development may have a place in the evaluation process for applicants entering counselor training programs. The precise relationship of ego development and capacity for empathy should be further explored as the ability is often considered so central to the practice of counseling. Future studies may address modifications in teaching and supervision styles based on students’ ego developmental levels in order to facilitate more productive training experiences. More studies are required investigating process and outcome variables related to ego development and developmental models of counseling, such as those proposed by Wilber (1999) and Ivey (1986). This type of research may offer important implications for the often asked question: Which treatment works best for which individual (or system) under which conditions (Ivey, 1980; Lazarus, 1984; Wilber, 1999).
Regarding the ego development model specifically, more longitudinal studies are needed in order to assess the invariance and directionality of the stages, as well as to clarify the concept as a master trait, subsuming other developmental lines. More research correlating ego development with other lines of development, such as Kohlberg’s moral development, should be addressed as well. These should be undertaken with a variety of populations but may also be valuable in assessing student development in counselor education programs.

Finally, given the breadth of studies related to theoretical identification and both students in training and professional practitioners, suggesting everything from pure chance, to personal counseling, to family of origin dynamics, to one’s training program, to personality traits, as possible variables related to the identification of particular theories of counseling, more research is clearly needed in this area. Greater efforts should be made at synthesizing the current findings and establishing a model that may better explain the wide range of potential factors.

Conclusion

This study was initiated as the gateway to a future research agenda regarding ego development and counselor education and supervision and as an opportunity to develop fluency with Loevinger’s (1996) model and her means of assessment. To that degree, despite the lack of significant findings, it has been a success. The experience has provided a welcome opportunity to explore the research base related to this area and gain practical experience in

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developmental assessment. Finally, in that the results of this study have disclosed at least one methodology related to ego development and counseling theory that does not appear to be valid, the next endeavor will perhaps be one step closer to finding one that does.
APPENDIX A

COUNSELING THEORY SURVEY
Counseling Theory Survey

Instructions: Please complete the following information.

Age:

☐ 20 or younger  ☐ 41-45
☐ 21-25  ☐ 46-50
☐ 26-30  ☐ 51-55
☐ 31-35  ☐ 56 or older
☐ 36-40

Gender:  ☐ Male  ☐ Female

Ethnicity:

☐ African/African-American  ☐ White/Caucasian
☐ Asian/Asian-American  ☐ Bi-Racial
☐ Hispanic  ☐ Other
☐ Native American

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

☐ Bachelor’s (B.A., B.S., B.A.A.S., etc.)
☐ Master’s (M.A., M.S., M.Ed., M.B.A., etc.)
☐ Doctoral (Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D., etc.)
Which category best describes the major of your last completed degree?

(Please select only one)

- Mental Health (Counseling, psychology, social work, etc.)
- Physical Health (physician, nursing, pre-med, physical therapy, chiropractic, etc.)
- Social science (sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, criminal justice, etc.)
- Humanities (English, visual and performing arts, philosophy, foreign languages, etc.)
- Education (secondary education, reading, special education, health promotion, etc.)
- Physical science (physics, biology, chemistry, geology, astronomy, etc.)
- Business (accounting, finance, management, marketing, etc.)
- Engineering/Computer Science
- Library/Information Sciences
- Religious Studies (ministry, theology, etc.)
- Mathematics
- Other

What is your current track of study in the counseling program?

- Community
- Elementary School
- Secondary School
- College and University

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Please indicate the total amount, if any, of personal counseling or psychotherapy that you cumulatively experienced as a client prior to beginning this master's program.

- None
- 1-5 sessions
- 6-10 sessions
- 11-15 sessions
- 16-20 sessions
- 21-25 sessions
- 26-30 sessions
- 30 or more sessions

Of the following theories of counseling, which is the one that you, personally, most agree with regarding the basic principles of human development, psychopathology, and change processes?

- Cognitive
- REBT/Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy
- Reality/Choice Theory
- Person Centered/Rogerian
- Individual/Adlerian
- Behavioral

Please circle the number that best represents your level of confidence in having identified the guiding theory that best fits your views of human development, psychopathology, and change processes?

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<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Very Unconfident</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Very Confident</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Please circle the number that best represents your level of comfort with applying your guiding theory in clinical practice?

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<tr>
<th>1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very Uncomfortable</td>
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<td>Very Comfortable</td>
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THANK YOU for your participation in this research study!
APPENDIX B

INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS
Dear Potential Participant,

Thank you for considering participating in this study. This study attempts to examine the role of ego development in counseling students’ identification of a guiding theory of counseling. Ego development is a broad stage construct encompassing moral reasoning, interpersonal relations, and cognitive complexity. Ego development is assessed in this study via a written test that requires responses to a variety of sentence stems. In addition, there is a brief demographic survey requesting information about your counseling theory. The complete assessment takes about 30 minutes to complete. By electing to participate, you are eligible to enter your name into a raffle drawing for one $25 gift certificate to Borders Books and Music.

If you would like to participate, please read the enclosed consent form carefully and sign each copy. Please complete the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) and the Counseling Theory Survey according to the printed instructions. Please do not put your name or any identifying information on either the WUSCT or the Counseling Theory Survey. When completed, please return the WUSCT, the Counseling Theory Survey, and one copy of the consent form in the provided envelope. I will sign the other consent form that you may then keep for your records. If you wish to obtain your individual results from either of the assessments, please record the number located at the top right hand corner of your envelope. You will need this number in order to obtain your results from me. To obtain your individual results, please contact me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or at xxxxxxx@unt.edu. Individual results will be available 30 days after you have completed these assessments.

If you wish to be entered in the raffle drawing, please complete the Raffle Entry Form and return it separately from the other documents. Once all of the assessments have been returned, I will conduct the raffle and announce the winner. Again, thank you for your valuable time. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask or to contact me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,

E. Scott Warren, M.S., L.P.C.
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Title of Study: Ego Development and Theoretical Orientation Among Counseling Students

Principal Investigator: E. Scott Warren, a graduate student in the University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Counseling, Human Development, and Higher Education.

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the proposed procedures. It describes the procedures, benefits, risks, and discomforts of the study and your right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees or assurances can be made as to the results of the study.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of ego development in counseling students’ selection of a guiding theory of counseling. Ego development is a broad construct encompassing moral reasoning, interpersonal relations, and cognitive complexity.

Description of the Study: This study will assess participants’ level of ego development via the Washington University Sentence Completion Test Form 81 and obtain demographic data along with participants’ guiding theory of counseling via a brief survey.

Procedures to be Used: Participants will complete the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) Form 81 that consists of 36 written incomplete sentence stems. Participants are instructed to complete the stems in any way that they wish. Completion time of the WUSCT is approximately 25 minutes. Participants will also complete a brief survey requesting demographic information and their current guiding theory of counseling. Completion time of the survey is approximately 5 minutes.

Compensation: Individuals who elect to participate may choose to be entered into a raffle drawing for a $25 gift certificate at a local bookseller by completing a separate entry form requesting their contact information.
**Description of the Foreseeable Risks:** There is no risk of physical injury from participation in this study. However, participants may become more aware of their own personal feelings and beliefs by answering survey questions or completing the sentence stems. If you decide that you do not wish to participate in the study after observing the test or survey, please simply return the materials to the research assistant. There is no penalty imposed if you decide to end your participation early.

**Benefits to the Subjects or Others:** There are no foreseeable benefits directly to the participants in the study. It is expected that the knowledge gained from this study may contribute to understanding factors that affect counseling students’ selection of a guiding theory.

**Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records:** All of the forms that you complete are completely confidential. You are asked not to write your name on any of the test or survey forms. The entry form for the raffle drawing will be kept separate from the test and survey forms. You will not be identified by name on any of the test or survey forms, only by a special number code. Your records will be kept locked in a filing cabinet. Your results will be combined with those of other participants and they will be studied only in this fashion. Results will only be reported in group form and can be made available to you upon request by contacting me with your identification number.

**Review for the Protection of Participants:** This research project has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB) 940-565-3940. Please contact the UNT IRB with any questions regarding your rights as a research subject.

**Questions About the Study:** If you have any questions about the study, you may contact E. Scott Warren at telephone number (xxx) xxx-xxxx or the faculty advisor, Dr. Jan Holden, UNT Department of Counseling, Human Development, and Higher Education, at telephone number 940-565-2910.

**Research Subject's Rights:** I have read or have had read to me all of the above. E. Scott Warren has explained the study to me and answered all of my questions. I have been told the risks and/or discomforts as well as the possible benefits of the study. I understand that I do not have to take part in this study and my refusal to participate or to withdraw will involve no penalty, loss of rights, loss of benefits, or legal recourse to which I am entitled. The study personnel may choose to stop my participation at any time.
Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

For the Investigator or Designee:
I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the known benefits and risks of the research. It is my opinion that the subject understood the explanation.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date
REFERENCE LIST


McIntyre, T. J. (1985). Ego development and counseling: The effects of counselors’ and clients’ ego development levels upon the expressed empathy and preferences of counselors. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 46*(05), 1230A.


