

Running head: ONLINE COUNSELING AND COUNSELOR PREPARATION

ONLINE COUNSELING AND ONLINE COUNSELOR PREPARATION: A MIXED  
METHODS INVESTIGATION

A Dissertation

by

SERENA ANN FLORES

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ONLINE COUNSELING AND COUNSELOR PREPARATION

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### Abstract

The purpose of this sequential mixed methods study was to examine the perceptions of counselor educators toward online counseling services, and the training of online counselors. Sixty-four counselor educators affiliated with the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) were asked to complete a survey and demographic questionnaire. Participants' attitudes toward online counseling were measured using the Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS). Data from the survey and a demographic questionnaire were obtained using an online survey program. In addition to obtaining and analyzing quantitative data, the researcher gathered in-depth qualitative data through a brief survey, semi-structured interviews with four purposefully selected subjects, and from the researcher's journal. Four participants interviewed and surveyed were selected based on their familiarity with online counseling and online counselor training. Quantitative and qualitative findings from this study provided insight of the status of online counseling and online counselor preparation as seen by counselor educators. Significant results were found using a quantitative analysis investigating counselor educators' value of online counseling and discomfort with online counseling. Qualitative findings revealed four major themes using interviews with current counselor educators. Discussion concluding awareness of online counseling, online counselor preparation, online counselor policy, and client accessibility to counseling via the internet as four areas of implications were uncovered.

*Keywords: Online Counseling, Distance Counseling, Distance Counselor Preparation.*

## DEDICATION

To my parents, Edward and Diane Flores, for being two people that I can forever admire. You both have instilled education, logical thinking, and hard work in your daughters. I am where I am on this day because of the both of you.

*Gracias por todo los amo mucho*

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From the beginning of this journey, there were a number of family and friends that were proud, encouraging, and supportive. I am eternally grateful for the support my family, friends, and colleagues have provided through the highs and lows of this journey, from the late nights to all-nighters, and the encouraging words when it was tough to move forward. To my family- you are my foundation, from when I fall to when I grow I will always begin at my foundation. To my friends and colleagues- there were so many hurdles each of you made a little easier to overcome. Thank you to everyone- all of my hopes and dreams have come true because of you.

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The use of computer technology in counseling with clients first appeared in the literature during the 1960s with a trial computer program called “Eliza” (Binik, Cantor Ochs, & Meana, 1997). Eliza was a software program acting as a person-centered counselor and would respond to the clients’ statements by choosing among the various responses that were stored in its memory (Sekerler, 2008). This primitive program was not widely used.

Current usage of technology in counseling has become more refined since the 1960s. Distance counseling, according to the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC), is an asynchronous and synchronous distance interaction among counselors and clients using e-mail, chat, and videoconferencing features of the internet to communicate (NBCC, 2007, p. 3). The usage of online counseling by clients can come in the form of internet-based counseling such as e-therapy, cyber-therapy, and any form that denotes the usage of the internet in order to access counseling services.

With all of the technological advancements since the 1960s the debate on the use of computer technology in direct counseling has been growing. Adding to the ongoing debate are the ethical considerations of online counseling. Bloom (1998) asserts that ethics alone gets strong reactions from members within the counseling profession. Counselors and counselor educators have presented mixed attitudes with regard to this modality of counseling (Mallen & Vogel, 2005). Despite the growing interest in the topic, there are very few empirical studies found within the counseling literature.

Moreover, counseling via the internet has changed counseling services

accessibility, assumptions of society, and societal norms. Distance counseling allows individuals who may have never sought counseling to seek professional mental health services in the comfort of their own home. This movement has allowed society to broaden mental health counseling accessibility. Counselors can use their specific training as a scientist-practitioner to determine the course of distance counseling. They can perhaps extend their reach to an underserved population of clients. As more counselors become involved in providing online services, the knowledge related to the practical aspects of treatment will become more vast, and perhaps the understanding of how to best implement online counseling training will increase (Mallen & Vogel, 2005; Caspar & Berger, 2005).

Within most clinical mental health programs, counseling is taught and emphasized utilizing face-to-face training components. Unfortunately, many clients' lead hectic lives, and must sacrifice their counseling visits due to a lack of time and availability. Distance counseling reaches clients who may not have the time or the capability to seek mental health counseling. Meeting the client where they are is one of the first concepts discussed in entry-level graduate courses. Meeting the client physically as well as emotionally is also considered important; however, meeting the client face to face is not always possible. Therefore online counseling can become a viable option.

There is a lack of online counselor training occurring in clinical mental health programs (Mallen & Vogel, 2005). Empirical research investigating distance counselor training programs could perhaps accelerate the preparation of counselors practicing via the Internet. This study explored counselor educators' attitudes and perceptions of online counseling and the status of online counselor training programs preparing counselors to

provide online counseling services.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The literature discussing online counseling has increased, yet little is known about the status of training counselors to offer distance counseling services. Nevertheless, the internet has become a gateway to access counseling for many individuals, especially in rural areas. If counselors are to use this mode of counseling effectively, there is a need for graduate and postgraduate training programs to prepare counselors in training with the knowledge and skills necessary to be competent counselors via the internet (Mallen & Vogel, 2005). There is a dearth of research published on the perceptions of counselor educators toward online counseling and the training counselors to provide distance counseling services.

### **Purpose of the Study**

According to Mallen and Vogel (2005) there is a need to create graduate and postgraduate distance counseling training programs to offer and ensure competent and ethical online counseling services. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of counselor educators toward online counseling and determine the status of preparation of online counselors in graduate counseling programs. Specifically, the value and discomfort toward online counseling and of preparing counselors to practice via the internet were explored. The researcher also explored counselor educators' experience as related to online counseling and counselor training. The counselor educators' experience as an instructor was captured in efforts to provide further insight towards the training of counselors to provide distance counseling services. The American Counseling Association, Code of Ethics (2005) has addressed technological applications, including

technology-assisted distance counseling, stating that online counseling appears in the form of e-mail based counseling, chat based counseling, and video based counseling.

### **Research Questions**

This study investigated the attitudes and perceptions of counselor educators regarding online counseling and the status of programs preparing counselors to provide services online. The overall research questions of this study included: What are the attitudes and opinions among counselor educators regarding online counseling and the training of online counselors? Are counselor educator-specific characteristics associated with the attitudes and opinions as related to online counseling and the training of online counselors?

### **Quantitative Research Questions**

Specific research questions included the following:

1. What are the faculty values and level of discomfort regarding online counseling?
2. What is the relationship between participants' number of years as a counselor educator and their attitude (value level) toward online counseling?
3. What is the relationship between participants' current experience at a university offering counselor training using the internet and their attitude (value level) toward online counseling?
4. What is the relationship between participants' age and their attitude (value level) toward online counseling?

### **Qualitative Research Questions**

Three qualitative questions were used in this study:

1. What are counselor educators' perceptions of online counseling?
2. What are counselor educators' perceptions of training online counselors?
3. How do counselor educators prepare counselors to conduct online counseling?

The above research questions were explored with a select group of counselor educators and were the focus of the brief survey, interviews, and of the researcher's journal.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study included the following points: (1) The study of counselor educators' attitudes and perceptions regarding online counseling can perhaps explain the reasons why only a few counselor education programs offer online counselor training. Understandably, there is not only a digital divide (Hoffman, Novak, & Schlosser, 2000; Lee, 2000) that currently hampers many counselor preparation programs from implementing online counselor skill training, but also a lack of guidelines for developing online counselor skill training courses (CACREP, 2009). Counseling via the Internet has the potential to reach populations in rural and underdeveloped areas across the nation (Mallen & Vogel, 2005; Lee, 2000). Findings can provide additional information regarding preparation of online counselor skill training to better ensure the effectiveness of service provided to clients; (2) Counseling via the Internet is steadily growing, offering opportunities for both counselors and clients (Mallen, 2005; Lee, 2000). However in order to help ensure the effectiveness of service via the Internet, counselor educators need to include course work and specific training within their curriculum. The goal of specialized training is to make counseling via the Internet a safe and beneficial experience for those utilizing this modality. The current study utilized the Online Counselor Attitudes Scale (OCAS) to measure the value of and discomfort with

online counseling among counselor education faculty in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited universities; (3) From these participants a purposively selected sample provided a more in depth perspective adding to the dearth of knowledge regarding how counselor educators approach and perceive teaching online counselor skill training; (4) The study perhaps makes transparent the measureable value of and discomfort with online counseling among counselor educator faculty in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). By examining and sharing individual counselor educators' perspectives or obstacles related to online counseling there perhaps there could be a breakthrough in the preparation of online counselor training.

### **Population and Sample**

The sample consisted of counselor educators employed in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). A sample based on an *a priori* analysis indicated that approximately sixty-four counselor educators were needed to participate in the study in order to have sufficient power and significance based on a moderate effect size, an alpha level of .05, and statistical power of .80. The researcher electronically presented the survey to counselor educators across the United States by email. A second sample of four counselor educators that integrate distance counseling within their respective counseling curriculum were selected. They participated by completing a brief survey, and semi-structured interview via telephone.

### **Methodology**

A mixed method research approach was used in this study. According to Creswell (2009) mixing methods allows for convergence to actually integrate or connect the

quantitative and qualitative data. The results from one method can help identify participants in the study and both methods can be used side by side to reinforce each other (p. 14). The mixed method approach broadened the understanding of online counselor skill training and the role counselor educators assume in the preparation of distance counselors.

The quantitative phase of the study involved the collection of data using a survey instrument. The Online Counselor Attitudes Scale (OCAS) was used to measure the value of, and discomfort with online counseling among counselor education faculty. A paired *t* test analysis was used to assess whether the means of the two subscales, discomfort level and value level, were statistically different from each other. A Cohen's *d* was calculated to measure the effect size between the two variables.

The qualitative phase involved gathering three sources of data, triangulation. The data were analyzed to provide more in depth knowledge about the methods used to teach online counselor skill training. A brief survey and a semi-structured interview protocol were used to obtain data from the purposive sample. The interview protocol was comprised of five questions that guided the process. During the investigation, the researcher also kept a journal, thus adding a third source of data collection. The selection of subjects was based on the counselor educator's involvement with online counselor preparation activities.

The overall strategy of the study was sequential explanatory with the quantitative investigation taking place in phase one and the qualitative in phase two (Creswell, 2009). "Weight typically is given to the quantitative data, and the mixing of the data occurs when the quantitative results inform the secondary qualitative data collection" (pp. 211).

### **Measures**

Quantitative data were gathered from a Demographic Questionnaire and the Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS). An open ended brief survey, semi-structured interviews, and the researcher's observation journal, produced the qualitative data.

#### **Demographic Questionnaire**

The Demographic Questionnaire included eleven sections requesting background information from participants. Participants were asked to report gender, age, ethnicity, number of students enrolled in their respective university, number of graduate students enrolled in their counseling program, preferred counseling modality, whether the counselor educator is teaching at an online counselor skill training institution, and how many years they have taught. A request was sent out for participation in phase two of the study. Participants were given the option to decline participating in phase two.

#### **Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS)**

The OCAS was used to collect data concerning online counseling attitudes. The rationale for including the OCAS is that it provides a measurable value of online counseling and a measurement of discomfort with online counseling (Rochlen, Beretvas, & Zack, 2004).

Rochlen et al. (2004) conducted several studies utilizing the OCAS. The results of these studies provided 'preliminary validity and reliability evidence of scores' (p.106).

The OCAS measures the value of online counseling and one's discomfort with online counseling. For each subscale there are five items. The OCAS utilizes a Likert-type scale of 1 to 6. As an example, one item states, "I would feel uneasy discussing emotional problems with an online counselor." The participant is asked to rate statements

as this on a 1-6 scale: 1= *strongly disagree*, 2= *slightly disagree*, 3= *disagree*, 4= *agree*, 5= *slightly agree*, and 6= *strongly agree*. Based on participant responses, the average mean between the value and discomfort levels are computed and compared.

### **Open Ended Brief Survey**

The open ended brief survey was posed to the selected four counselor educators who had indicated an involvement with online counseling or online counselor training. Three brief questions were used to gain information on the preparation of online counselors.

### **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol**

A Semi-Structured Interview Protocol was used to guide the interview process with participants. Five semi-structured questions were used in a conversational style interview. Interviews were conducted at the counselor educators' convenience over a 30-minute time span via telephone.

### **The Researcher's Journal**

The researcher kept a journal of thoughts and ideas during this investigation. This involved a review of survey data, interviews with counselor educators, and observations throughout the data collection and analysis process.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

### **Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS)**

Approval from the university's institutional review board, IRB, was obtained prior to the collection of data. The population of the study consisted of counselor education faculty in CACREP accredited universities. The researcher obtained a listing of counselor educators' email addresses from the CACREP website. A sample based on an *a*

*priori* analysis indicated that approximately sixty-four counselor educators needed to participate in the study in order to have sufficient power and significance based on a moderate effect size, an alpha level of .05, and statistical power of .80. Informed consent was sent via email explaining that participation was voluntary. By completing the survey participants agreed to be part of the study. Informed consent included: no foreseeable risks were associated with their participation, all responses were confidential, no compensation was available for their participation, and they could withdraw participation at any time. Those who agreed to participate completed the demographic questionnaire and the OCAS via a Survey Monkey link attached to the email. Once participants opened the attached link they were asked to fill out the demographic questionnaire along with the OCAS, which took 10-15 minutes.

Data were entered into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0 program. This non-experimental design employed a paired *t* test analysis to assess whether the average means of the two subscales were statistically different from each other. The researcher compared the average means of the value of online counseling responses versus the discomfort with online counseling responses. The researcher explored the differences between the two subscale scores while judging the differences between the means relative to the spread or variability of the scores.

### **The Brief Survey, Semi-Structured Interviews, and the Researcher's Journal**

Five semi-structured, conversational style interview questions were used to guide a phone conversation with a subsample of four counselor educators who integrated distance counseling within their counseling programs. Participants were first asked to respond to open-ended questions concerning online counseling and online counselor

preparation. Participants then took part in semi-structured interviews. A series of open ended, guiding questions focused on technology integration in the classroom, perceptions regarding distance counseling, curricula preparation in terms of distance counseling, and influences affecting one's awareness of distance counseling. The third source of data included the researcher's journal, recording thoughts and ideas obtained during the investigation.

The researcher reviewed all data obtained from the brief survey, interviews, and researcher's journal. The researcher set aside time after each interview to review and reflect on the interview and observations during the interview. Recordings were made in the researcher's journal. According to Patton (2002) a naturalistic inquiry may convey a sense of getting as close as possible to convey the setting being studied. A constant comparison data analysis method was used to evaluate and analyze the participants' interviews (Patton, 2002). Data collection and data analysis proceeded simultaneously as this study was being conducted. The first step in analyzing the data was to take interview notes of each interview session with each participant. Reading and rereading of each interview note allowed the researcher to discover and identify categories and themes. Data from the brief survey and the researcher's journal were analyzed and integrated with interview findings.

The qualitative questions the researcher focused on included:

- What are counselor educators' perceptions of online counseling?
- What are counselor educators' perceptions of training online counselors?
- How do counselor educators prepare counselors to conduct online counseling?

The researcher's ability to monitor the work conducted was portrayed through the reflexive journal. The researcher set aside time after each interview to log personal thoughts. The internal validity of the study was depicted through interpretive validity. The interpretive validity was obtained to the degree that participants' viewpoints, thoughts, intentions, and experiences were accurately understood and reported by the researcher (Johnson, 1997). The researcher assessed how far the findings and/or conclusions could be transferred to other contexts and how they would help to derive useful theories (Johnson, 1997). Because of the human variations within this study, replication may not be possible. Triangulation was utilized in order to verify complete sets of data collection. The researcher used several sources to collect the data: a) personal thoughts logged in the researcher's journal, b) interview notes, and c) brief survey findings. Member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) occurred during and directly after the interviews to affirm accuracy of data collected from participants. Member checking in this study involved checking the accuracy of what participants stated in the brief survey and during the interviews. Key points within the data were marked with a series of codes (Patton, 2002), which were extracted from the data. The codes were grouped based on similarities. From the similarities, categories were formulated thus creating themes. Once data were analyzed the researcher presented the categories and/ or themes back to the participants for verification. An auditor was used in the study (Givens, 2008). In light of the relevant research discovered in the data collection process the researcher subjected the conclusions to analysis by determining the meaning of the statements while identifying categories and/ or themes. The final report of the study was presented in narrative form utilizing impressions collected from the participants.

### **Basic Assumptions**

For the purposes of this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. Participants had sufficient knowledge and understanding of distance counseling to provide informative responses.
2. The sample of counselor educators adequately represented counselor educator's perceptions.
3. The OCAS accurately measured counselor educators' perceptions of online counseling skill training and online counselor preparation.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of this study included but were not limited to the following:

1. Participants that have already provided a form of online counselor education or counseling may be biased towards its use or potential.
2. The OCAS has limited data regarding its validity and reliability.
3. Extraneous variables including university setting and availability of technology were not controlled.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions applicable to the nature of this study are provided. The researcher developed definitions not accompanied by a citation.

1. Blog: A web log is a publicly accessible web page, updated regularly and often, that serves as a personal journal of the site owner (Lee, 2000).
2. Chat-based Internet counseling: Involves synchronous distance interaction between counselor and client using what is read via text to communicate (NBCC, 2007, p.3).

3. Chat room: A virtual environment in which numerous Internet users may join and converse with one another in synchronous communication through typed text (Lee, 2000).
4. Online counseling competence: A certain degree of mental competence towards mentally and/or physically utilizing and employing the technological applications and/or equipment necessary to conduct an online counseling session.
5. E-mail-based Internet counseling: Involves asynchronous distance interaction between counselor and client using what is read via text to communicate (NBCC, 2007, p.3).
6. Emoticon: A cluster of punctuation or a small graphical sign or picture that may be used in online communication to compensate for the lack of nonverbal cues to indicate a facial expression or gesture (Lee, 2000).
7. Face-to-face counseling: According to the NBCC face-to-face counseling is defined as “synchronous interaction between and among counselors and clients using what is seen and heard in person to communicate” (NBCC, 2007, p. 3).
8. Forum: A message board or discussion board; a web site designated to allow asynchronous group communication (Lee, 2000).
9. Learning Management System: An online learning, course design tool facilitated by instructors for students (Gautreau, 2011).
10. Online counseling: According to the NBCC Internet counseling is defined as an “asynchronous and synchronous distance interaction among counselors and clients using e-mail, chat, and videoconferencing features of the Internet to communicate” (NBCC, 2007, p. 3). For the purpose of this study, the term *online*

*counseling* was used to represent all forms of communication between mental health professionals and clients using the Internet as a means of communication.

The term *online counseling* was used to represent terms such as internet-based counseling, e-therapy, cyber-therapy, and any other term that denotes the use of the Internet for providing counseling services.

11. Post: To publish a message on the Internet, including sending a message to an e-mail list or publishing a message in a forum (Lee, 2000).
12. Professional organizations or associations: A number of acronyms for professional organizations are used in this paper. The list below gives the name of the organization for each acronym.
  - ACA: American Counseling Association
  - CACREP: The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs
  - NBCC: National Board of Certified Counselors
13. Synchronous: Coinciding in time of communication that is carried out with all parties present at the same time (e.g., chat) (NBCC, 2007, p.3).
14. Technological issues: An individual experiencing difficulties towards the technological applications and/or equipment necessary to conduct an online counseling session (NBCC, 2007, p.3).
15. Technology-assisted distance counseling: For individuals, couples, and groups involving the use of the computer to enable counselors and clients to communicate at a distance when circumstances make this approach necessary or convenient (NBCC, 2007, p.3).

16. Thread: A multiple-part virtual conversation on a given topic in an e-mail list or a forum composed by a leading message and responses (Lee, 2000).
17. Video-based Internet counseling: Involves synchronous distance interaction between counselor and client using what is seen and heard via video to communicate (NBCC, 2007, p.3).

### **Organization of Remaining Chapters**

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature and research related to the problem investigated. The research approach and methodology used to gather data for the study are outlined in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the results and analysis that emerged from this mixed methods investigation. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the study, conclusions, implications for practice, and the researcher's recommendations for future investigations.

## CHAPTER 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Interactivity is a term referring to the interaction we have with each other in a classroom setting. Interactivity can be achieved through the integration of technology in course design and course content. In education there is a myth that teachers generally teach the way they were traditionally taught. In accordance, Matzen and Edmunds (2007) investigated this myth. Results of their investigation indicated, that teachers were more likely to integrate technology in their lectures if they received training through professional development opportunities.

The integration of technology has been debated among educators in higher education for a number of years. How to implement and infuse technology in course design and content has become a major research topic (Neiderhauser & Lindstrom, 2006). As student demand for distance learning increases in the United States (Allen & Seaman, 2007), the need for professional development and distance education training will increase. During this process it is expected that educators will become more familiar and have to interact with this method of teaching. Both counselor educators and clinicians are seeking methods to integrate technology involving personal interaction (Lundberg, 2000). A number of counselors and counselor educators have stressed that in order for clinicians to better serve their clients they must present an awareness of online counseling (Anthony, Jung, Rosenauer, Nagel, & Goss, 2010).

**Technology Integration in Higher Education**

Research on technology integration implemented in higher education has been a popular topic. A review of the current literature revealed a trend toward usage and

implementation of technology in higher education curriculum (Javeri & Persichitte, 2004; Foulger, Amrein-Beardsley, & Toth, 2011; Moran, Hawkes, & El Gayar, 2010; Eberwein, 2011; Koehler, 2006). Yet, in order for higher education programs to meet student demand MacKeogh & Fox (2009) state that instructors should accelerate the use of technology in instruction. According to the International Society for Technology in Education (2007) the National Educational Technology Standards were established in several disciplines. Current integration of technology includes university management systems (Roberts, 2008) such as WebCT or Blackboard. Management systems allow student access to course material outside of the traditional classroom. The Enhancing of Education Through Technology (EETT) program, of the United States federal government, encourages the integration of technology in all classrooms. The EETT program is funded through the federal government in support of management systems and professional development ([www2.ed.gov](http://www2.ed.gov)) in higher education.

Too often the instructor's outlook towards the integration of technology is characterized by 'cynicism and derision' (Eberwein, 2011 p.61). Unfortunately, instructor attitudes and faculty readiness influence the implementation of technology in the classroom, affecting instructional delivery (Roberts, 2008; Cowan, 2012). Perhaps instructor unfamiliarity using technology creates this uneasiness among faculty minimizing the use of technology integration in higher education (Javeri & Persichitte, 2004; Eberwein, 2011). Several universities appoint their Instructional Technology (IT) departments with the task of providing professional development opportunities for instructors. Peterson (2011) and Mishra and Koehler (2006) strongly support IT training for faculty, stating in order for instructors to provide students with the option of distance

learning, professional development opportunities need to focus on technology knowledge, content knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge. Peterson (2011) states, "...instructors who learn how to integrate technology and pedagogy can improve the way they teach providing a student-centered approach that instructs and develops higher order thinking skills." (p. 4). Peterson's statement emphasizes the benefits of incorporating technology in higher education. Instructors utilizing technology in their teaching effectively change their course design, course content, and the overall curriculum. Professional development activities that focus on design and pedagogical strategies (Peterson, 2011) integrate knowledge and technology (Moran, Hawkes & El Gayar, 2010, p. 80). Surry, Ensminger, and Haab (2005) reported, "... a college's technology infrastructure is the single most important factor in integrating technology within the curriculum." (p. 328). Surry and Land (2000) expanded on the Awareness, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction model (ARCS). This instructional model provides a methodological framework to increase instructor attitudes toward adopting technology integration in course design.

According to Foulger et. al (2011) students are more apt to enroll in courses infused with technology due to the increased flexibility in obtaining course material. Roberts (2008) described students as "key stakeholders" (p. 4) as universities shift toward the integration of technology. Instructors infusing technology in course design offer greater flexibility among the student population. Students experiencing financial, transportation, or health constraints are more likely to utilize hybrid or online instructional design methods. Hybrid and online instructional design methods allow students to overcome these constraints that otherwise would hinder their educational

opportunities. Student attitudes toward the integration of technology, specifically distance learning, have recently been positive according to a study conducted by Foulger, Amrein-Beardsley, and Toth (2011). Results indicated the infusion of student and instructor communication and technology accessibility on campus generally receded student hindrances. In addition, the authors found traditional instructional delivery least desirable in comparison to hybrid or online instructional delivery. Long term support of technology integration occurs at the university level, where infrastructure changes permit technology infusion, promote professional development for instructors, and increase the number of technology courses for students (Surry, et. al, 2005; Neiderhauser and Lindstrom, 2006; MacKeogh & Fox, 2009; Kopcha, 2010).

According to Keeler (2008), instructors are ‘rarely versed in instructional technology’ (p.23). As a result technology integration and adoption has been a daunting task (Moran et.al, 2010). Keeler noted the strong need for educators to increase their familiarity with technology to improve instruction. Thus, attitudes toward technology in course content and course design becomes a more comfortable activity rather than an intimidating experience (Kopcha, 2010; Moran et.al, 2010).

### **Distance Learning in Higher Education**

There are indicators that institutions accustom to traditional instructional methods are moving towards distance educational delivery (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Roberts, 2008; Conole, Galley, & Culver, 2011; Serwatka, 2002) due to student demand.

University administration and instructors are more involved in transforming higher education to meet the needs of the technological age. However, barriers such as funding,

administrative support, mixed agendas, and minimal instructor utilization still remain (Mayadas, Bourne, & Bacsich, 2009; MacKeogh & Fox, 2009).

Roberts (2008) acknowledged the transition of many higher education institutions moving from traditional instruction to a more differentiated approach to instructional delivery. A differentiated approach to teaching includes distance learning through hybrid or online instruction. Socially educational interactions were explored among higher education students using a networking community described as Cloudworks (Conole, Galley, & Culver, 2011). The authors were able to research interactions by drawing on a virtual medium used by students and instructors to deliver and complete course assignments. University programs offering distance instructional delivery to students have reported an improved student access rate and higher degree completion rates (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). Bolliger & Wasilik (2009) attribute the improved student success rate to the appeal of distance delivery to nontraditional students. Unfortunately, in accordance with funding dilemmas distance learning comes with high expenditures in regards to development and delivery to students (Allen & Seaman, 2007). Program development and program maintenance costs often deter university administrators in the implementation of technology and technological access among instructors and students (Chen, 2009).

Serwatka (2002) addressed the challenges facing university administrators and instructors along with student hurdles. Nontraditional instructional delivery in distance learning exposes students to foreign technology and terminology. However, the separation between campus-based students and distance learning students is becoming non-existent through distance learning awareness, instructional technology training for

students and instructors, funding programs at the local and state levels, and universities adopting mandatory online courses in most programs (Conole, Galley, & Culver, 2011; Kopcha, 2010; Roberts, 2008; MacKeogh & Fox, 2009; Venable, 2010). Online universities, such as Capella and Walden, offer degree programs aimed at a population that would otherwise not have access to higher education. Distance learning outlets are becoming more available to nontraditional student populations (Roberts, 2008). The greatest draw for students towards distance learning is educational access to course material from the comforts of home (MacKeogh & Fox, 2009). This is greatly beneficial to those students who have a long commute or have personal constraints. Although there has been university resistance towards distance learning in recent years due to a strong student demand and an underserved population of students seeking higher education in rural areas; distance learning programs have increased (Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009). Research findings supporting distance education are reasons higher education institutions have considered offering distance learning. Institutions reputations were enhanced through improved curriculum flexibility and the reduction of costs (Roberts, 2008; Cowan, 2012; MacKeogh & Fox, 2009; Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). According to some, Albrecht & Jones (2004) there are minimal differences between the quality of learning in distance learning and traditional learning environments. However, through distance learning opportunities students are graduating from higher education programs with increased technological skills. Distance learning institutions are generating more and more graduates entering and competing in the job market (Cowan, 2012; Chen, 2009).

The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEA) 2008 [16] includes provisions noting the significance of online education as a method for delivering educational

instructional (Mayadas, Bourne, & Bacsich, 2009). Bolliger & Wasilik (2009) found that student-related, instructor-related, and institution-related factors affect faculty satisfaction with distance learning. According to a study by Rockwell, Schauer, Fritz, and Marx (1999), the primary incentive found for faculty to adopt technology in their teachings was the intrinsic or the personal reward of learning new teaching techniques and improving their practice; in essence, improving their teaching traits or job techniques. An educator's intrinsic motivation may perhaps support their learning agenda. Faculty engagement with technology has been a slow process. To assist educators with the transition in education methods, Roberts (2008) suggested offering at least one online course per semester to ease into the progression of using distance learning. Rockwell et al. (1999) indicated that intellectual reluctance was a hindrance leading to poor staff attitudes and a general disdain towards educating students using distance education programming. Attitudes were generally mixed (MacKeogh & Fox, 2009) ranging from skepticism to support of distance education. Empirical findings have supported faculty participation in distance learning adoption. Faculty collaboration, and workload reductions were cited as facilitating the movement toward distance education (Chen, 2009).

Student and faculty satisfaction are critical areas in distance education (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). For change to occur, Roberts (2008) identified a four step process. Steps include: a) strategic analysis, b) strategy making, c) strategic plan design, and d) strategic plan implementation. Instructors are required to develop a clear plan in course design (Cowan, 2012). In summary, higher education institutions are in a transition period of providing students with new ways of learning.

**Distance Learning in Counselor Preparation**

The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) identified twelve technology competencies indicating technological proficiency among counseling professionals and students in counselor education programs (Coursol & Lewis, 2004). In 1999, ACES identified online instruction in counselor education to promote distance learning courses. ACES and other organizations emphasized that safeguards must be in place for students that are being taught through a distance setting. Distance education programs require accountability of course content, with objectives designed to meet the specific needs of students.

As in the traditional face-to-face setting of an on campus course, it is imperative that quality is emphasized in the distance learning setting. Instructional support must also be available for students in the distance environment including library resources, and access to faculty in a timely manner. It is important that each student be evaluated and meet student learning objectives. A syllabus with specific course outcomes, along with distance delivery methods, must be explained prior to beginning the course. Students and faculty should be oriented on policies regarding performance and attendance. There must be a sound structure to which the instructor and student will be held accountable. Support resources must be available at all times for the distance course. A grievance procedure should be available for students, and faculty course evaluations should be in place.

According to Baltimore (2004) a comprehensive program included establishing content, having knowledge of the technology required, and providing training for all participants. Although technology changes almost on a daily basis, the content of the program remains the centerpiece. The technology will advance so that the counselor

education and training will be molded to fit the new technology as it develops and improves over time. The Internet is integrated into one's daily routine. "Distance learning is creating alternative models of teaching and learning, new job descriptions for faculty, and new types of higher education providers" (Eaton, 2002, p.3). According to Venable (2010), the integration of technology must account for client confidentiality and financial considerations. Confidentiality and breach of privacy is a concern of all health and mental health care providers (Fink, 1999). Technological skills are a necessary component for counselors and counselor education programs when communicating with clients.

Although learning management systems are common, online teaching requires the instructor to develop new skills (Gautreau, 2011). One must demonstrate the ability to form an analysis for understanding patterns of behavior in networked learning contexts using the learning management system as a framework to house the information (Conole, Galley, & Culver, 2011). Using the learning management system can lead the way into the twenty-first century and must be considered by counselors and supervisors (Layne & Hohenshil, 2005).

A master's degree is a prerequisite for becoming a licensed counselor. An accredited master's degree in counseling prepares students for licensure. There are numerous formats and several modes of online clinical supervision used by counselor educators which includes email, computer based teleconferencing, electronic mailing lists, chat rooms, and computer-assisted live supervision, and Skype (Harvey & Carlson, 2003; Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007).

There are several ethical considerations involving distance supervision including: emergency situations, informed consent, confidentiality, jurisdiction and technical

competence (Lundberg, 2000; Venable, 2010; Fink, 1999; Harvey & Carlson, 2003). There are many instances when face-to-face supervision is not conducive due to time constraints. Supervision could be provided to multiple trainees online through computerized technology. Instruction and supervision of counselors in training presents both positives and negatives. It is the ethical responsibility of the supervisor and instructor to monitor the quality of care being provided to clients. A procedure must be in place to ensure that supervision is appropriate and comprehensive for both the trainee and the supervisor. A caution of online supervision is the lack of ability to draw conclusions often present in face-to-face sessions (Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007).

According to Lundberg, (2000), computers were introduced into the home and workplace in the 1980s at the same time it was introduced into the counselor's workplace. Much like outside the education field, computerized learning was received with varying degrees of success both in the home and in the clinical counseling and counseling educator's realm. By the 1990s, computer usage had a much higher success rate in the workplace due to the rapid advancement of technology. Usage of the computer was implemented into the home and workplace and became more user-friendly.

Currently, there are limited online therapy education options available. However, as with other cutting edge educational tools, online therapy education will flourish with proper procedures in place (Derrig-Palumbo & Zeine, 2005). There are various tools available for online offerings, according to Venable (2010). Issues that must be addressed are: student needs, funding and ethical concerns. Technologies utilized must be accompanied by proper training and support to ensure success (Venable, 2010). Complete online counseling degree programs in counseling are increasing. Prospective students are

being offered a wider variety of degree programs due to the increased numbers of educational institutions offering online programs. Quality, name recognition, and value are the important variables when selecting an online degree program (Albrecht & Jones, 2004). Programs will be evaluated based on the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program (CACREP) standards. Introductory graduate courses are now incorporating studies in their curricula on learning styles and human development (Lundberg, 2000). These courses increase student's online competency by covering ways to integrate counseling curricula into a distance education format. Five areas of communication include: spreadsheet use, e-mail use, word processing, programs such as PowerPoint to develop presentations, and Internet based searches. Learning exercises (Lundberg, 2000) benefited each student in the use of computers. A study conducted by Wantz, Tromski, Mortsoff, Yoxheimer, Brill and Cole (2004) stated that distance learning literature has focused on two variables: a) computer-assisted training and b) distance education. Both are encompassed by computer mediation and online communication. Distance learning encompasses online and hybrid courses. Blackboard and WebCT are perhaps the most utilized management system programs offered for distance learners. According to Coursol and Lewis (2004) counselor professional growth has been made easier due to Internet opportunities. The American Counseling Association (ACA) and the National Board for Certified Counselor (NBCC) have emphasized the use of online delivery of counseling services, and have developed ethical regulations for online counseling. As technology continues to improve, online counseling will continue to keep pace. CACREP and ACES have also cited the importance of the

technological competencies necessary for online counseling is to be instilled into the graduate curriculum.

### **Distance Counseling Practices**

Distance counseling began with initial programming such as 'Eliza' in the 1960s. Within several decades distance counseling evolved into computer mediated technology with 'Ask Uncle Ezra', one of the first online advice columns. 'Ask Uncle Ezra', established by Cornell University in 1986 as a support facility for their student population, was the earliest recorded computer-mediated client resource program.

The infusion of technology in counselor training is becoming the norm, with the increasing popularity of distance counseling. Technology and Internet programming are used to enhance testing in counseling (Barros-Bailey & Saunders, 2010) including electronic forms of professional consultation such as social networks, online courses, supervision, listservers, blogs and interdisciplinary teams. In 1984, Herr and Best posed a need for the counseling profession to establish ethical guidelines for technology usage. In years past a graduate students primary setback was computer accessibility and lack of technological support. With advances in Internet technology individuals are able to overcome personal barriers and access mental health services that were otherwise not available (Derrig-Palumbo & Zeine, 2005).

According to the Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE) distance counseling is an approach that takes traditional counseling online, delivered through electronic means. The CCE established a Distance Credentialed Counselor (DCC) certification in 2006. Distance Credentialed Counselor's are governed under the National Board for Certified Counselor (NBCC) ethical adherence. Requirements for licensure as a

DCC include: masters in counseling or related mental health field, LPC or NCC in current and good standing, and a two day-15 hour DCC training program. After initial training, continuing education hours are required every five years. Ethical adherence follows the guidelines of the NBCC code of ethics that includes the ethical requirements for the Practice of Internet Counseling. The provider of the DCC training is the CCE. In addition, the International Society for Mental Health Online (ISMHO) is a professional resource guide specifically designed to help counselors and clients with mental health counseling online. The ISMHO is one organization offering tools for the counselor and the client (Gillispie, 2007).

Fink (1999) emphasized that distance counselor “netiquette” requires the use of fundamental traditional counseling skills. Evans (2009) supports the use of fundamental counseling skills in online counseling, as well as, face-to-face counseling. Distance counseling clients include: teenagers, individuals living in rural areas, executives, domestic violence victims , individuals with disabilities, and others (Derrig-Palumbo & Zeine, 2005). Commonly addressed issues presented in distance counseling sessions range from personal addictions to couple relationship problems (Bloom, 1998).

The difference between the counselors and patients preferences in the modality used in counseling has been and will continue to be a critical topic of discussion (Caspar & Berger, 2005). According to Suler (2004) non-verbal gestures are missing when using online counseling. This creates an ambiguous relationship between client and counselor. Furthermore, Internet counseling has been subjected to a number of questions about the therapeutic process, and eventual outcome of the counseling sessions. Yet, the growth of Internet counseling is substantial, as well as the demand for knowledge regarding

advantages and disadvantages (Rochlen, Zack, & Speyer, 2004). Leibert, Archer, Jr., Munson, and York (2006) compared clients who used traditional face-to-face counseling settings as opposed to clients who used the online counseling. There seems to be the thought that clients are generally satisfied with their online counselors but not as satisfied as those clients in face-to-face settings. King, Bambling, Lloyd, Gomurra, Smith, Reid, and Wegner (2006) researched online counseling with younger clients. The adolescent's motives and experiences seemed to be relevant in these investigations. Skinner and Latchford (2006) studied self disclosure style towards e-therapy in three groups: current e-therapy clients, users of Internet support groups, and current traditional face-to-face counseling clients. Findings indicated that the users of Internet support groups were significantly positive about communicating with a therapist over a computer. Information system researchers Belanger and Crossler (2011) conducted a literature review finding that privacy was a multilevel concept but rarely studied. Finn and Barak (2010) examined process, outcomes and ethical backgrounds of the therapists who provide online counseling. Findings indicated that those who practice online counseling were comfortable with their craft and believe it is more effective than face-to-face sessions. Many of the online therapists were part-time counselors. Chester and Glass (2006) investigated backgrounds, fees, services, and technological communication tools used by therapists offering online counseling. Findings have shown that online based counseling is being conducted by experienced counselors, practicing in the western states. Haberstroh, Duffey, Evans, Gee, and Trepal (2007) studied individuals that have used online counseling. The research findings indicated that participants had concerns related to: technological barriers, connecting with their therapist, interacting without non-verbal

feedback, and the pacing of sessions. Cautions related to online counseling were endorsed by many professional organizations, such as the American Psychological Association (APA). However, other professional organizations have endorsed provisions monitoring of online counseling, such as the American Counseling Association (ACA). Ethical codes of conduct related to online counseling has informed professionals of appropriate methods of conduct with clients (Fink, 1999).

According to the CCE, DCC applicants and DCC providers are responsible for knowing and adhering to the standards set forth by the NBCC code of ethics and the ethical requirements for Internet counselors. According to the NBCC and CCE many statutes dictate that professional certifying bodies, professional membership organizations, and states licensing board need to be readily available for checking on consumer safeguards. The NBCC has developed its own ethical practice for members of the DCC. The document includes a statement that guides how to use the ethical code, along with the technology usage. According to Sampson, Jr. (2000) the main cause for concern regarding online counseling is compromising patient confidentiality. In summary, ethical codes and guidelines are now in place for Internet based counseling (Evans, 2009). Examples of codes to protect clients as well as counselors were developed by: ACA, NBCC, and ISMHO (Sampson, Jr., Kolodinsky, & Greeno, 1997). Sampson, Jr. et. al have recommend methods of securing data and preventing others from viewing data. Rummell and Joyce (2010) provided an overview of ethical models used to address concerns to those who wish to pursue online counseling. According to Barnett (2005) crossing state and/or legal boundaries to pursue an online counseling relationship with a client not only breaks ethical code, but could also present legal challenges. Until

licensure portability is fully resolved, a licensed counselor may only practice in his/her state of licensure. Shaw and Shaw (2006) reviewed approximately eighty-eight online practices and found many were not adhering to ACA's ethical code of conduct for online counseling. Zack (2008), however, came to the defense of online counseling by emphasizing challenges brought about by jurisdiction and state licensure laws. Additional issues associated with online counseling include: verifying the identity of the client and counselor, forming an alliance (Derrig-Palumbo & Zeine, 2005), and technological setbacks (Evans, 2009).

### **Distance Counselor Preparation**

There is a limited amount of the research regarding the preparation of online counselors. The majority of online counselors were trained through CCE as a DCC after being LPC trained and licensed through a traditional counselor education program. Because of the biases associated with computer associated interactions students may be weary of the practice of online counseling (Trepal, Haberstroh, Duffey, & Evans, 2007). According to Trepal et.al (2007) it could be helpful for counselor educators to discuss with students at the beginning of their studies the issues related to online counseling. Counselor educators may want to focus on teaching counselor trainees basic skills for establishing and maintaining a counseling relationship in an online environment. Oravec (2000) suggested counselors in training should be exposed to online counseling and therefore become aware of strengths and weakness of this counseling approach. As more counselors in training desire to practice online counseling as graduates they could assist in the future guidance, teaching, and preparation of online counselors (Mallen, Vogel, &

Rochlen, 2005). Although not completely different, there are unique skills that need to be shared with future online counselors (Mallen et al, 2005; Patrick, 2005).

Contrary to the scarcity of literature on preparing online counselors, there is a moderate amount written about online clinical supervision (Baltimore, 2004; Evans, 2009; Sampson, Jr., 2000). Usage of current technology (e.g. Skype or a moderated encrypted website) has enhanced the clinical training and supervision capabilities of counselor educators (Baltimore, 2004; Sampson, Jr., 2000). Although traditional supervision of counselors in training has been primarily based on the face-to-face format, the online format has been emphasized in the last two decades (Evans, 2009).

There were limited training opportunities in relation to using computer-mediated technology in counselor training (Evans, 2009). The ACES Technology Interest Network (2007) has developed Technical Competencies for Counselor Education and recommended Guidelines for Program Development. This document provides an outline for counselor education faculty to follow when infusing technology into their programs. Competencies are suggested for Masters and Doctoral level programs.

### **Summary**

Chapter two focused on the literature discussing the evolution of distance learning, with an emphasis on online counseling. The chapter reviewed the integration of technology in higher education. The researcher discussed how higher education has integrated technology and presented a literature review of online counseling and counselor training.

## CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY

**Purpose of the Study**

Counselor educators have perhaps the most influential impact on the future of counseling. Traditionally, counselors in training are well versed in conventional methods of counseling, including the face-to-face model. A more nontraditional method recently utilized is online counseling. Online counseling is a computer-based method of providing mental health services. However, counselor educators have debated issues related to online counseling and its effectiveness (Barros-Bailey & Saunders, 2010; Fink, 1999; Evans, 2009; Caspar & Berger, 2005; Mallen, Vogel, & Rochlen, 2005). Online counseling guidelines, including ethical standards, were infused in ACA and NBCC ethical codes. Also legal guidelines such as jurisdiction laws are factors to consider when providing online mental health services. In addition, counseling via the Internet has been debated regarding methods of training counselors. This investigation explored counselor educators' attitudes toward online counseling and their lived experiences in training online counselors.

This sequential mixed methods study adds to the literature on distance counseling practices by exploring counselor educators' perspectives toward online counseling and online counselor training. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of counselor educators toward online counseling including the preparation of counselors who will provide counseling services online.

In order to explore counselor educators' attitudes the researcher utilized the Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS) that measured the value level and discomfort

level of counselor educators. In addition to the OCAS, the researcher utilized a demographic questionnaire to explore the relationship of specific variables toward counselor educators' value of online counseling (as measured through the OCAS). The specific variables explored were (a) age, (b) years as a counselor educator, and (c) setting experience with counselor training using the internet.

In addition to a quantitative measure of counselor educators towards online counseling, the researcher interviewed four counselor educators' to obtain their lived experiences as instructors in a counselor preparation program that prepares online counselors. To gain further insight the researcher interviewed counselor educators regarding online counseling, and their thoughts about preparing counselors to provide counseling services online. The researcher sought to gain an academic view through the experiences of counselor educators. The focus of interviewing counselor educators was to capture the essence of their experiences in preparing counselors to practice via the internet.

### **Research Questions**

The overall research questions related to this study included the following:

- What are the attitudes and opinions among counselor educators regarding online counseling and the training of online counselors?
- Are there counselor educator-specific characteristics that are related to the attitudes and opinions of online counseling and the training of online counselors?

### **Quantitative Research Questions**

Specific research questions included the following:

1. What are the faculty values and level of discomfort regarding online counseling?

2. What is the relationship between participants' number of years as a counselor educator and their attitude (value level) toward online counseling?
3. What is the relationship between participants' current experience at a university offering counselor training using the internet and their attitude (value level) toward online counseling?
4. What is the relationship between participants' age and their attitude (value level) toward online counseling?

### **Qualitative Research Questions**

The qualitative questions of this study included:

1. What are counselor educators' perceptions of online counseling?
2. What are counselor educators' perceptions of training online counselors?
3. How do counselor educators prepare counselors to practice online counseling?

### **Research Design**

A sequential mixed method research design was used in this investigation. The mixed method approach was used to broaden the understanding of online counselor skill training and the role of counselor educators in preparing online counselors. The researcher began by gathering quantitative data in the first phase of the study, including surveying counselor educators. Phase two, or the qualitative phase, involved interviewing four counselor educators who had experience and knowledge of counseling online. According to Creswell (2009) a sequential mixed method design allows for a two-phased study that enhances findings. Findings from phase one provides inquiring methods used in phase two.

## Sample

### Quantitative

Participants in this investigation included counselor educators employed in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program (CACREP) accredited programs. Participants were listed as CACREP liaisons for their respective departments. Participants were informed as to the purpose of the study through an electronic format. Consent was derived via email. An *a priori* power analysis indicated that approximately sixty-four counselor educators were needed in the study to have sufficient power and significance, based on running a *t* test and estimating a moderate effect size with an alpha level of .05, and statistical power of .80. The researcher electronically delivered the survey to counselor educators across the United States using email addresses from the CACREP database. The sample selected has remained anonymous.

### Qualitative

A second sample included four counselor educators who voluntarily participated. Voluntary participation information was provided upon the counselor educator completion of the phase two, optional, section on the demographic questionnaire gathered in phase one. Participants were labeled as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4. Selection criteria included all participants integrated a form of online counseling skill preparation within their counseling curricula.

## **Measures**

### **Demographic Questionnaire**

The Demographic Questionnaire included background information and was administered prior to the Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS). The Demographic Questionnaire and the OCAS were completed with the use of SurveyMonkey.

Demographic information included gender, age, ethnicity, number of students enrolled in their university, the number of graduate students enrolled in their respective counseling program, preferred counseling modality, whether they currently were teaching future online counselors, and how many years they have served as a counselor educator.

Specific for this study the counselor educators' age, years as a counselor educator, and their experience in a university setting with counselor training using the internet were investigated. Participants indicated whether they would like to participate in phase two of this study by including their first and last name along with their email address.

Completion of the phase two request for participation was optional for participants.

### **Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS)**

The Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS) was developed by Rochlen, Beretvas, and Zack (2004) to explore participant attitudes towards online counseling. For the purposes of this study the OCAS was used to collect data on counselor educator attitudes towards online counseling. This instrument compared the average means of the two subscales: discomfort level, and value level. The rationale for utilizing the OCAS were (a) online counseling specific scaling inquiry, (b) its focus on attitudes towards online counseling, and (c) its ability to measure discomfort and value levels of participants using online counseling. Although the OCAS provides many advantages

included in the rationale, a major disadvantage is the scarcity of evidence supporting its reliability and validity. The test-retest reliability of the OCAS is  $OC-V=.88$  and  $OC-D=.77$  and Cronbach's alpha level was  $.77$  for scores in the normative sample.

The OCAS measures the value of online counseling and the discomfort with online counseling using the two subscale measures. For each subscale there are five measurable items and 10 questions in total. The 10-item questionnaire measured attitudes of counselor educators toward online counseling using two subscales: (a) value level and (b) discomfort level. The OCAS utilizes a Likert-type scale of 1 to 6. As an example, item 1 states, "Using online counseling would help me learn about myself." The participant is then asked to rate each statement between 1 and 6, with 1= *strongly disagree*, 2= *slightly disagree*, 3= *disagree*, 4= *agree*, 5= *slightly agree*, and 6= *strongly agree*. Gathered from the participants' response to each question, the average mean between the value level and discomfort level was computed and compared.

### **Open Ended Brief Survey**

Participants, with experiences preparing online counselors completed a 30-45 minute interview with the researcher. As part of the interview volunteer participants completed a brief survey. The purpose of the open ended survey was to gather data capturing their written perception toward online counseling in general, in addition to their ideas on preparing future online counselors.

### **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol**

The interviews facilitated by the researcher followed a set protocol. A semi-structured interview was used. Five semi-structured open-ended questions were asked of

each participant. The interviews were conducted at the counselor educators' convenience and lasted 30-45 minutes via telephone.

### **The Researcher's Journal**

The researcher kept a journal of thoughts and ideas throughout the data collection and analysis process. The value the researcher's journal is that it provides a third source of data from someone working closely with the investigation.

## **Data Collection**

### **Quantitative**

Counselor educators employed in a university accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program (CACREP) were contacted by the researcher via email requesting their participation in completing a demographic questionnaire and the Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS). By agreeing to complete the online survey participants gave consent to become part of the investigation. The survey was formulated by the researcher using SurveyMonkey with a link created specifically for the online survey. The researcher then added the link to an online consent form. Each counselor educator liaison from the CACREP website was contacted, requesting their participation to complete the Demographic Questionnaire and the OCAS. Within the demographic questionnaire, the researcher sought the participants' interest in phase two of the study. Phase one and two participation was optional. The quantitative data of the study was collected and analyzed in phase one. The Online Counselor Attitudes Scale (OCAS) was used to measure the value of and discomfort with online counseling among the CACREP affiliated counselor educator faculty. Attitudes were analyzed using the Online Counseling Perception Questionnaire for Counselor

Educators. Demographic variables were collected using the demographic questionnaire. Phase one focused on gaining counselor educators attitudes towards online counseling and its relationship to counselor educators' demographic variables.

### **Qualitative**

In addition to examining the measurable perspectives of counselor educators, the researcher obtained insight from counselor educators as related to the preparation of counselors to provide counseling services online. Interviews lasting 30-45 minutes were conducted. The purpose of the qualitative portion of the study was to gain greater in depth or first hand experiences from four counselor educators training online counselors. The researcher explored the attitudes of counselor educators toward preparing online counselors. The focus was to gain counselor educators perspectives of distance counseling student preparation programs. The four topics explored were (a) perceived level of technological integration in higher education, (b) perceived value of distance counseling as a therapeutic modality, (c) perceived utility of program preparation in distance counseling for students, and (d) perceived distance counseling awareness. If participants from phase one chose to participate in phase two of the study they completed an optional section of the demographic questionnaire. The researcher contacted volunteering participants via email. Once contact was established an appointment was set to complete a 30-45 minute telephone interview. Participants were purposively selected based on their association to an institution in which counseling students were involved in curricular experiences preparing them for online counseling. Phase two focused on the education of students with regard to counseling via the Internet while broadening the spectrum of the knowledge regarding counselor educators' attitudes towards online

counseling. The qualitative phase provided a more in depth perspective adding to the dearth of knowledge about preparing online counselors. The telephone interviews used a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview protocol was comprised of the following five questions:

1. How is technology-based assistance integrated in your counselor preparation program?
2. What are the perceptions of counselor educators on distance counseling as a therapeutic modality?
3. How are counselor preparation programs preparing graduate level counseling students to perform distance counseling?
4. What influence has distance counseling had on counselor educators and their programs?
5. Is there anything else you would like me to know about distance counseling preparation?

The qualitative research questions captured the participants lived experiences as a counselor educator in a technologically infused academic environment. Responses were explored noting categories and themes verified by the researchers qualitative research team, experts in the utilization of qualitative research methods. Responses were integrated with findings from the brief survey and the researcher's journal.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Creswell (2009), "Data analysis in mixed methods research relates to the type of research strategy chosen for the procedures" (p.218). Data collected using the OCAS were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

(SPSS) for analysis. Descriptive statistics were generated to define the data. Descriptive, inferential, and thematic text analysis were used to validate data collected (Creswell, 2009). Statistical results and thematic text addressed the research questions.

### **Quantitative**

The researcher utilized a non-experimental design to examine the relationship between two subscales, discomfort level and value level. In addition, the researcher investigated the relationship of the value level, retrieved from the OCAS, in accordance with the counselor educators' age, their number of years as a counselor educator, and their setting experience training counselors using the internet, retrieved from the demographic questionnaire.

Attitudes of counselor educators were measured using the Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS). Counselor educators' age, the number of years each participant has been a counselor educator, and whether counselor educators' have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet as opposed to counselor educators' who do not have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet were investigated using the demographic questionnaire. The researcher employed sequential sampling in which the sampling from the first phase was utilized to select participants for phase two (Creswell, 2009).

Counselor educators responded to the demographic questionnaire answering various questions posed by the researcher. For the purpose of this study the researcher specifically analyzed the following independent variables: (a) counselor educators' age, (b) the number of years each participant has been employed as a counselor educator, and (c) whether counselor educators' have current experience at a university with counselor

training using the internet as opposed to counselor educators' who do not have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet.

The researcher was interested in determining counselor educators' attitudes towards the value of online counseling or discomfort of online counseling. The researcher gained the cooperation of sixty-four counselor educators who teach in CACREP accredited universities. The researcher requested participation from each counselor educator to rate his or her attitude toward the value of online counseling and their discomfort level with online counseling on a scale from 1 to 6 (1 = a lower attitude toward online counseling and 6= a greater attitude toward online counseling) illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

*Variables of the OCAS*

Variables	Definition
value of online counseling	1 to 6 rating, with lower scores indicating lower value of online counseling
discomfort with online counseling	1 to 6 rating, with lower scores indicating greater discomfort with online counseling

Counselor educators answered the demographic questionnaire and the OCAS scaling questions that measured their attitudes towards online counseling. The researcher gathered the data, compiled participant responses, and coded the findings. Data were imported from the excel data sheet and coded into SPSS 16.0. Average means of the five question items in each of the two subscales were used to compare differences among value and discomfort levels of counselor educators. The average mean from the subscale value of online counseling was used to investigate the relationship between three

variables collected using the demographic questionnaire. Four analyses were performed: (1) a paired-samples  $t$  test analysis, (2) a bivariate linear regression analysis, (3) a multiple regression analysis, and (4) an independent  $t$  test analysis.

A paired-samples  $t$  test included a repeated-measures design with no intervention. The paired  $t$  test was used to assess whether the means of the two subscales were statistically different. The researcher reviewed differences between scores of the two subscales. Differences between the means relative to the spread or variability of their scores were analyzed.

The researcher conducted a bivariate linear regression analysis to evaluate the significance of whether counselor educators' value of online counseling average means was useful in predicting counselor educators' discomfort with online counseling average means.

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate the possible relationship between counselor educators' attitude, by means of value, towards online counseling based on counselor educators' age and the number of years counselor educator's were instructors.

An independent  $t$  test analysis was used to examine the possible relationship between counselor educators' attitude, by means of value, towards online counseling and whether counselor educators' have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet as opposed to counselor educators' who do not have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet.

**Qualitative**

Analysis of qualitative data differed from the quantitative analysis. The researcher selected naturalistic inquiry to analyze the data collected from each of the four participants in their natural setting. Patton (2002) explains, "Naturalistic inquiry as contrasted to experimental research is where the investigator attempts to completely control the condition of the study" (p. 42). The researcher utilized a phenomenological approach employing naturalistic inquiry. The liberty of naturalistic inquiry allows the researcher a level of awareness of differentiating points of view (Patton, 2002). With respect to the insight derived from a purposively selected sample of counselor educators, the researcher's phenomenological design drew upon the qualitative data discovered. During the 30-45 minute interviews the researcher was searching for how participants' perceived online counseling as a profession and how they academically prepared online counselors. In order to respect ethical issues the researcher read the informed consent statement prior to beginning the interviews.

Data analysis of the qualitative phase of the study included uncovering themes gained from the four participants. Interviews were not audio recorded, instead the researcher recorded thoughts and statements in a written format. Before transcribing, each interview was read and re-read by the researcher and was then transcribed. After transcription each participant was contacted via telephone and were requested to review the information recorded to ensure accuracy and allowing an opportunity for member checking validation.

Once information was verified by participants the researcher used a qualitative research team comprised of individuals knowledgeable in qualitative research design and

analysis. Interview transcriptions were sent electronically to the members for review. The researcher then read and re-read interview responses and proceeded with a content analysis revealing major themes. After judging initial findings the researcher met with the qualitative research team to discuss comments and resulting phrases. The qualitative research team met to reveal categories, with themes emerging from the interview transcriptions. A content analysis was used during this process. The team revealed similarities found in responses unveiling major categories. From those categories the qualitative research team identified major themes.

**Trustworthiness.** Interview questions were self-formulated and were approved by the qualitative research experts. Each interview was guided by a select set of interview questions. The researcher used a brief open-ended survey, structured interview questions, and the researchers journal in efforts to employ triangulation validation. In an effort to enhance credibility of the interview information the researcher contacted each participant to verify the interview content. Member checking was employed through the validation of responses recorded. Patton (2002) describes triangulation of data and analytical perspectives as an approach “to increase the accuracy and credibility of findings” (p.93).

Once the interviews were validated through member checking the researcher’s findings were reviewed by the qualitative research team. The purpose of reviewing the qualitative data with a group of knowledgeable qualitative researchers was to search for common phrases and themes that might emerge from the transcribed interview data. Data gathered from each interview was diverse with participants presenting a myriad of teaching experiences and views regarding online counseling. Patton (2002) views open-

ended interviews as “free to go where the data and respondents lead” (p.343). This was essential in order to convey information from participants. Adding to the richness of data collected was the fact that each participant was unique in background, teaching experience, and disposition toward online counseling. A weakness Patton (2002) mentions in conversational interviewing is time and collection of systematic information. This is a limitation of the present study. The rationale for using a small number of participants is that only a small number of counselor preparation programs incorporate distance counseling into their curriculum.

Triangulation was established through the use of the brief open ended survey, a structured interviews, and the researchers journal. Three forms of validation allowed for creditability of qualitative data. According to Patton (2002) the validation of the data occurs in four areas: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. During and after each interview the researcher recorded in the researchers journal: statements, observations, and an environmental scan of the participants and the researcher. Validation and creditability were obtained through member checking, triangulation, and the qualitative research teams competence in data analysis.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to measure counselor educators’ attitudes towards online counseling and to capture the lived experience of counselor educators’ views toward preparing online counselors. This chapter addressed the methodological procedures used in this study. An overview of the study was presented by discussing the sample, instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

In previous chapters the researcher provided a brief review of current literature related to online counseling, and the preparation of online counselors. The methodology used in this study was discussed. This chapter includes findings produced by the data analysis of the quantitative and qualitative phases of the investigation. The primary purpose for choosing a mixed methods design was to add breath and depth to the investigation of counselor educators' attitudes towards online counseling and the preparation of online counselors. In an effort to add to the literature of online counseling, the researcher obtained counselor educators' perceptions of online counseling and the training of online counselors. This investigation obtained counselor educators lived experiences of preparing future counselors to utilize this mental health medium when working with problems facing clients.

#### **Quantitative**

Quantitative data were collected in phase one of the study. The researcher measured attitudes of counselor educators from universities across the nation using the Online Counselor Attitudes Scale (OCAS). The OCAS was electronically distributed to Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) contact liaisons, listed on the CACREP website.

Data were collected, coded, and imported into SPSS 16.0. The average means of the five question items in each of the two subscales, (1) value of online counseling and (2) discomfort with online counseling, were used to compare differences among each

other. The average mean of value of online counseling was used to investigate the relationship between three variables (1) counselor educators' age, (2) the number of years they were employed as a counselor educator, and (3) the setting experience whether counselor educators have current experience training counselors using the internet, using the demographic questionnaire. Four analyses were performed: (1) a paired-samples *t* test analysis, (2) a bivariate linear regression analysis, (3) a multiple regression analysis, and (4) an independent *t* test analysis. A complete analysis of data was discussed as it pertains to the research questions of the study.

### **Qualitative**

Qualitative data was collected during phase two of the study. Four participants volunteered for phase two of the study by completing the optional name and email address request included on the demographic questionnaire in phase one data collection. The researcher attained the existing experiences described by counselor educators in the form of participant interviews. In addition, survey and journaling data were obtained.

## **Results and Analysis of Quantitative Data**

### **Profile of Participants**

The non-probability sample consisted of counselor educators employed by a CACREP accredited university counselor preparation programs. The researcher chose this population because of their first hand knowledge about the preparation of counselors, including online counseling, and online counselor training. Sixty-four counselor educators completed the demographic questionnaire and the OCAS (n=64). The criteria used in the selection process were (a) must be a current counselor educator and (b) must be employed in a CACREP accredited counselor education program.

Within the sixty-four participant sample, 33% were males ( $n=21$ ) and 67% were females ( $n=43$ ). Continuous variables that were investigated include: (a) ages of participants' which ranged from 27 years of age to 68 years of age and (b) the number of years each participant has been employed as a counselor educator which ranged from 1 year to 68 years. A dichotomous variable with two levels explored whether counselor educators have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet, eleven counselor educators answered yes ( $n=11$ ) while fifty-three counselor educators answered no ( $n=53$ ). Ethnicities to which counselor educators' identified included the following: 91% ( $N=57$ ) Caucasian, 1% ( $N=1$ ) Hispanic, 1% ( $N=1$ ) Asian American, 1% ( $N=1$ ) Native American, and 6% ( $N=4$ ) African American.

#### **Analysis of the Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS) Data**

The researcher analyzed data from the demographic questionnaire and the OCAS using four separate analyses. A paired-samples  $t$  test analysis and a bivariate linear regression analysis were used to analyze data between the two subscales: (1) value of online counseling and (2) discomfort with online counseling. While a multiple regression analysis and an independent  $t$  test analysis were used to analyze data between the subscale, value with online counseling, mean with three variables collected from the demographic questionnaire. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0 to determine the descriptive statistics for each subscale and analysis, as shown in Table 2 and Table 3, and the inferential statistics used to answer the research questions.

Reliability coefficients with regard to the normative sample ranged from .77 to .88. Respectively, there was a .88 overall reliability coefficient for the value of online

counseling subscale and .77 overall reliability coefficient for the discomfort with the online counseling subscale. In terms for the current study the overall Cronbach's alpha reliability score ranged from .88 to .93. Respectively, there was a .93 overall reliability coefficient for the value of online counseling subscale and .88 overall reliability coefficient for the discomfort with the online counseling subscale.

In order to determine if statistically significant differences existed between counselor educators' value of online counseling and discomfort with online counseling, participants' responses were analyzed. A dependent paired samples *t*-test was conducted to investigate whether counselor educators who valued online counseling had lower levels of discomfort with online counseling. The results indicated no statistical difference between the discomfort with online counseling score for the counselor educators ( $M=3.32$ ,  $SD=1.22$ ) and the value of online counseling score for counselor educators ( $M=3.50$ ,  $SD=1.35$ ),  $t(63) = .591$ ,  $p = .556$ . In essence, the differences between the counselor educators' value level of online counseling and their discomfort level with online counseling was very minimal, as measured by the OCAS. Means and standard deviations from the paired samples *t* test are shown in Table 2. The standardized effect size index, *d*, was .07, which indicated a small effect. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two ratings ranged from -.42 to .77. The means, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients are summarized in Table 2.

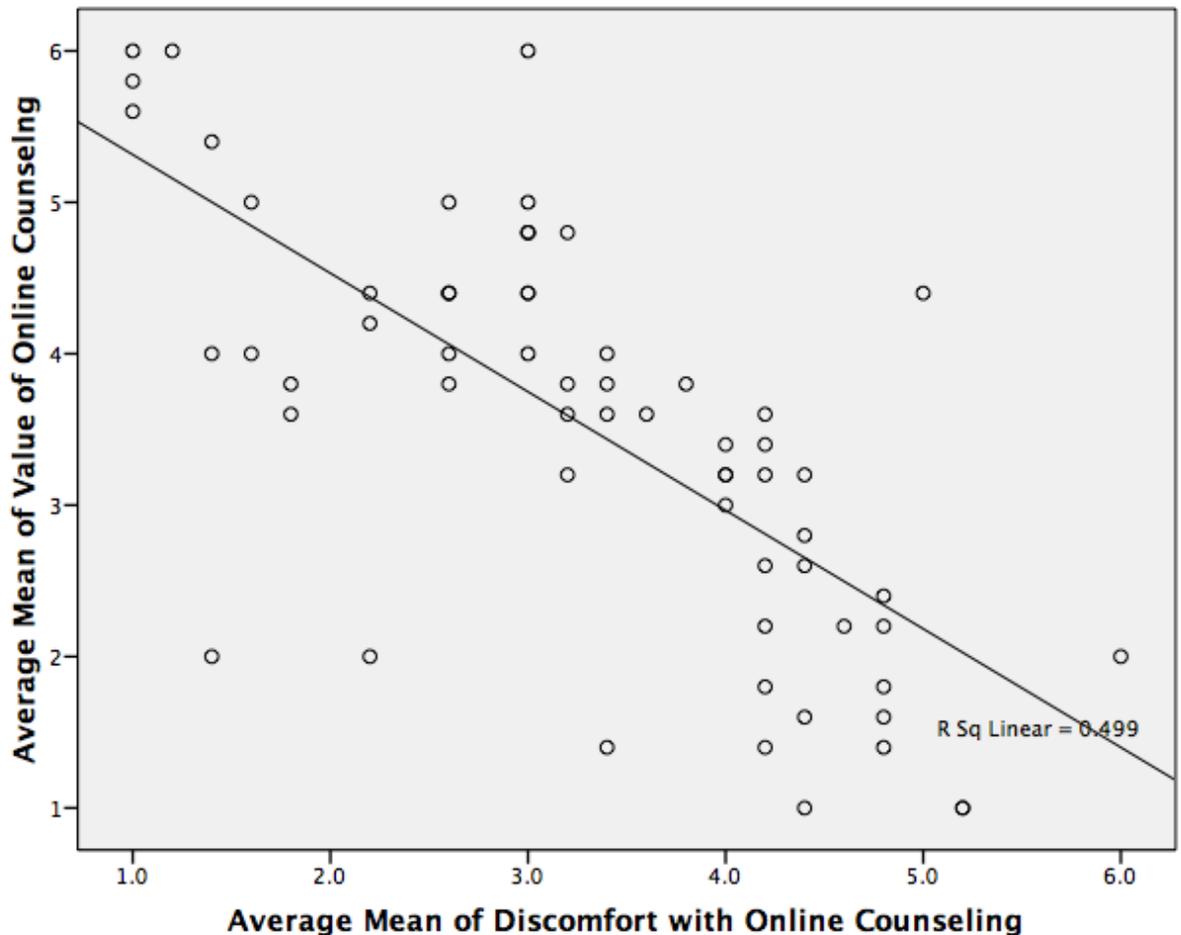
Table 2

*Descriptive statistics for attitude measured subscales*

Subscales	N	M	SD	# items	$\alpha$
value of online counseling	64	3.50	1.35	5	.93
discomfort with online counseling	64	3.32	1.22	5	.88

In order to determine the significance of whether the value counselor educators place on online counseling is useful in predicting their discomfort with online counseling a bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted. This analysis was employed to evaluate the prediction of the value placed on online counselors and their discomfort with online counseling among counselor educators. The scatterplot for the two variables, as shown in Figure 1, indicated that the two variables are linearly related such that as overall counselor educators' value of online counseling increased their overall discomfort with online counseling decreased. As hypothesized, counselor educators placing a higher value toward online counseling tended to have lower discomfort with online counseling. Accuracy in predicting the counselor educators' overall attitude toward online counseling was high. The linear combination of the value of online counseling and discomfort with online counseling was significantly related to the overall attitude of counselor educators towards online counseling,  $F(1, 62) = 61.77, p < .01$ . The correlation coefficient between counselor educators' value towards online counseling and their discomfort with online counseling was  $-.71$ , indicating that approximately 50% of the variance of counselor educators' value towards online counseling was accounted for by its linear relationship

with their discomfort with online counseling. A review of the scatterplot graph (Figure 1) indicates the predictability of the two subscale variables.



*Figure 1.* Scatterplot depicting the relationship between average means of the value of online counseling and the average means of discomfort with online counseling scores.

### **Analysis of the Demographic Questionnaire Data**

In addition to the paired-sample *t* test analysis and the bivariate linear regression analysis, a multiple regression analysis and an independent *t* test analysis were employed to explore data between the subscale, value with online counseling, mean with three variables collected from the demographic questionnaire. The researcher analyzed specific

data gathered from the demographic questionnaire. For the purpose of this study variables examined from the demographic questionnaire were (a) counselor educators' age, (b) the number of years each participant has been a counselor educator, and (c) whether counselor educators' have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet as opposed to counselor educators' who do not have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet.

Specifically, a multiple regression analysis was used to investigate the relationship between the counselor educators' attitudes, by means of value, towards online counseling based on the counselor educators' ages and the number of years the counselor educators were instructors. In addition, an independent *t* test analysis was performed to investigate the relationship between the counselor educators' attitude, by means of value, towards online counseling, and whether the counselor educators' have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet, as opposed to the counselor educators' who do not have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet. Data was coded and analyzed using SPSS 16.0 to determine the descriptive statistics, as shown in Table 3.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted on counselor educators' attitude by means of value towards online counseling based on counselor educators' age and the number of years counselor educator's were instructors. Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 3. The number of years counselor educators were instructors were normally distributed. There was not a statistically significant relationship between a counselor educators age, the number of years as a counselor educator, and a counselor educators value towards online counseling as measured by the OCAS,  $F(2, 61) = 1.27, p = .29$ . A

small effect size was noted with approximately 4% of the variance accounted for in the model,  $R^2 = .04$ .

Table 3

*Multiple regression descriptive statistics*

	M	SD	N	Value towards Online Counseling	Counselor Educators' Age	Number of Years as a Counselor Educator
Value towards Online Counseling	3.50	1.35	64	----	-.18	-.18
Counselor Educators' Age	46.92	11.87	64		----	.59
Number of Years as a Counselor Educator	10.08	1.57	64			----

\* $p < .05$

Table 4

*Multiple regression results for counselor educators' value towards online counseling*

Predictor	B	SE B	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Counselor Educators' Age	-.01	.02	-.11	-.68	.50
Number of Years as a Counselor Educator	-.02	.03	-.12	-.77	.44

\* $p < .05$

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate if a relationship existed between counselor educators' attitude, by means of value, towards online counseling and whether counselor educators' have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet as opposed to counselor educators' who do not have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet. Based on the findings the independent *t* test was not significant,  $t(61) = 1.11, p = .27, d = .35$ . The standardized effect size index, *d*, was .35, indicating a small effect. Counselor educators' who reported to have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet ( $M = 3.93, SD = 1.51$ ) seem on average to have no differences with counselor educators who do not have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet ( $M = 3.43, SD = 1.31$ ). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from -.40 to 1.39.

### **Results and Analysis of Qualitative Data**

In phase two of this mixed methods investigation a purposive sample of four counselor educators participated in a brief open-ended survey and semi-structured interviews. The focus of this phase was to explore how counselor educators felt toward online counseling and how they are preparing future counselors to employ this medium. The aim was to capture an understanding of the counselor educators lived experiences and perspectives toward online counseling and the preparation of online counselors.

The researcher analyzed the data in search of common themes. The analysis included: searching for key phrases, formulating categories, and a listing of major themes (Patton, 2002). The researcher employed two qualitative experts who served as the research team for this study. The team met as a group, employing a similar analysis

process and searching for common phrases among the data. In an effort to synthesize the data the team uncovered major themes among the participant responses. The conceptual framework, of phase two of the study is illustrated in figure 2.

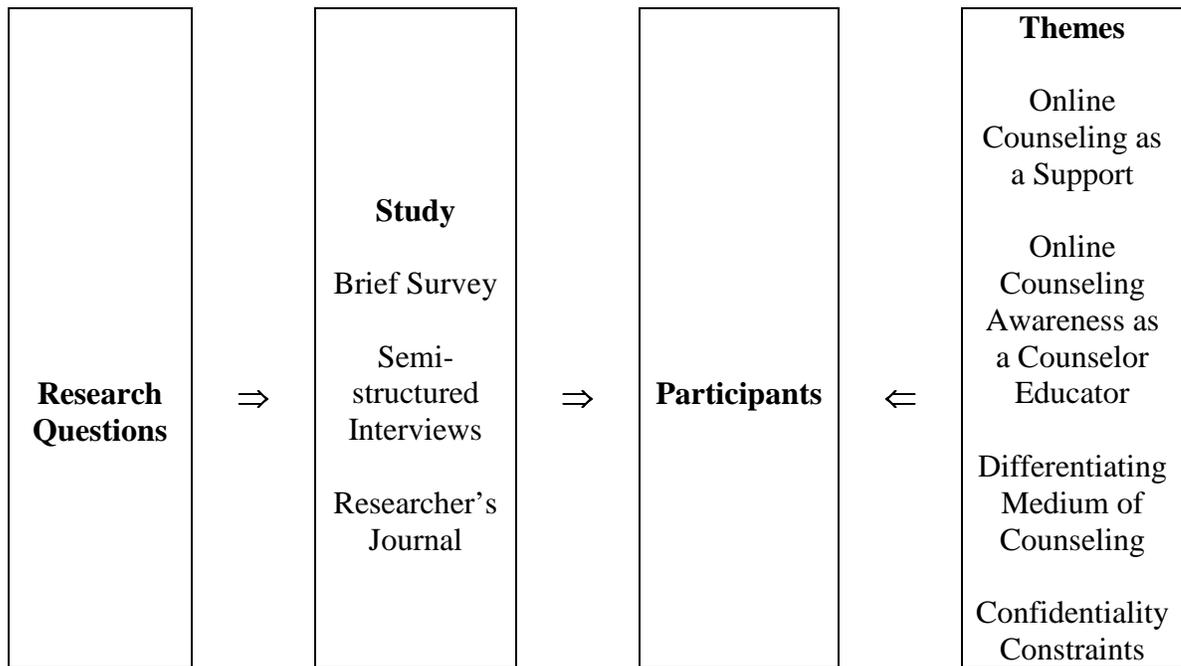


Figure 2. *Phase Two Conceptual Framework*

Four major themes affirmed by the qualitative research team surfaced. The themes provided a general understanding of how counselors feel toward online counseling and how counselor educators are preparing future online counselors. The phenomenological qualitative phase followed traditional data collection and data analysis procedures to identify themes (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2009). Themes discovered are described in the words of the counselor educators.

**Profile of Participants**

Participant demographics were obtained through a survey administered prior to the beginning of the interviews. Demographics included: gender, preferred counseling modality, whether the counselor educator is training online counselors, is the educator involved in distance learning, and the number of years they were a counselor educator (Table 5).

Purposive sampling was employed in this study. The sample included counselor educators with knowledge of distance learning and online counseling. Participant interviews and survey responses were analyzed by the research team. Participant identification was kept confidential as they were identified as: Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4. Descriptive information include the following:

**Participant #1.** The first counselor educator was a counselor educator for eleven years. She practiced and was an instructor in a CACREP accredited counselor preparation program on the west coast of the United States. She preferred face-to-face counseling as the primary counseling medium using a humanistic theoretical approach.

**Participant #2.** The second counselor educator was a counselor educator for five years. He practiced and was an instructor in a CACREP accredited counselor preparation program in the southern region of the United States. He preferred face-to-face counseling as the primary counseling medium.

**Participant #3.** The third counselor educator was a counselor educator for twelve years. She practiced and was an instructor in a CACREP accredited counselor preparation program on the east coast of the United States. She preferred face-to-face counseling as the primary counseling medium.

**Participant #4.** The fourth counselor educator was a counselor educator for two years. She practiced in the southern region of the United States. She was an instructor in an online university CACREP accredited counselor preparation program. She preferred face-to-face counseling, followed by telephone conferencing, and online counseling.

Table 5

*Demographic information of counselor educators*

Participant	Gender	Preferred Counseling Modality	Training Future Online Counselors	Years as a Counselor Educator
1	Female	Face-to-Face	Yes	11
2	Male	Face-to-Face	Yes	5
3	Female	Face-to-Face	Yes	12
4	Female	Face-to-Face Telephone Online	Yes	2

**Data Analysis**

Following the data collection, the findings were analyzed. As part of phase two of the mixed methods study, biases concerning online counseling were reported by the qualitative research team (Table 6). Some of the biases included: online counseling viewed as a new modality and online counseling being seen as unique and different from other mental health help mediums. The team members analyzed data transcribed by the researcher. Before final transcription of the data the researcher contracted each participant to affirm their responses and obtain clarity of what they were conveying. Member checking ensured accuracy and creditability of the data. The researcher distributed transcriptions to team members who read and re-read the data in search for

key phrases and similarities. Major themes were eventually discovered after several meetings with the qualitative research team. Major themes were based on significant statements from participants. Common responses were categorized based on the research teams analysis (Table 7). Based on the five significant statements four domains were formulated (Table 8).

Table 6

*Biases among team members in regards to online counseling*

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- o Online counseling is in its infancy
- o Online counseling is very different than other mental health mediums
- o Online counseling can be risky
- o Confidentiality can be breached
- o Online counseling can be challenging to develop a rapport with the client
- o The relationship would be difficult to obtain
- o There would be a lack of non-verbal body language which could take away from seeing the clients reaction or the manner in which they express themselves

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Table 7

*Counselor educators' common responses*

Themes	Common Responses	Counselor Educators
Online Counseling as a Support	- necessity only	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3
	- rural area accessibility	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3, CE 4
	- its own place in counseling	CE 2, CE 3 CE 2, CE 4
	- positive experience	CE 1, CE 3
	- occasional tool	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3, CE 4
	- physical ailments	CE 2, CE 3
	- market demand	

	- technological awareness	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3, CE 4
	- pressure as an instructor	CE 3
Online Counseling	- educate faculty	CE 2, CE 3
Awareness as a Counselor	- online counseling growth	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3, CE 4
Educator	- preparedness	CE 2
	- lack of knowledge	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3
	- come of age	CE 3
	- its own theory	CE 2
	- its own process of	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3, CE 4
Differentiating Medium of	counseling	
Counseling	- large gap from face-to-	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3, CE 4
	face counseling	
	- parallel process	CE 3, CE 4
	- higher liability	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3, CE 4
	- jurisdiction	CE 1, CE 3, CE 4
Legal and Ethical Issues	- ethics is a part of the	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3, CE 4
	profession	
	- lack of technological	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3, CE 4
	sophistication	
Confidentiality Constraints	- tarnished	CE 1, CE 2
	- huge risk	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3
	- not able to guarantee	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3, CE 4
	- no clear definition	CE 1, CE 2, CE 3, CE 4

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Table 8

*Counselor educators' theme domains*


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 Themes Domains
 

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 Online Counseling as a Support
 

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Online Counseling Awareness as a Counselor Educator

Differentiating Medium of Counseling

 Confidentiality Constraints
 

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**Primary Themes from the Counselor Educators Brief Survey and Interviews**

Formulated from the data analysis the four themes (Online Counseling as a Support, Online Counseling Awareness as a Counselor Educator, Differentiating Medium of Counseling, and Confidentiality Constraints) were uncovered from the participant interviews. The themes are discussed below with supporting participant statements from the transcribed data.

**Online counseling as a support.** All four counselor educators stated that face-to-face counseling should occur in conjunction with online counseling. Participants' agreed that online counseling should occur out of necessity due to the lack of accessibility, illness, or absolute emergency, and that "online counseling has its place in counseling" (Participant #3- female, 12 years of experience). Participant #1 (female, 11 years of experience) expressed, "Online counseling should be used as an occasional tool when the counselor cannot be reached. I do not think it should be utilized as a primary modality. There are exceptions, such as clients located in rural areas but I suggest they must be in the same state and perhaps only for the indigent. Perhaps individuals who have AIDS,

cancer, or are in a remote area, or have no transportation”. Similarly, participant #4 (female, 2 years of experience) felt, “if structured appropriately online counseling can be a great outreach to people without the means due to physical problems, schedule conflicts, or living in rural areas”. According to participant #3 (female, 12 years of experience), “there are certain populations that online counseling adheres to” thus creating a “demand or market” with clients. “Online counseling can be effective and can be a very positive experience”, alleged participant #4 (female, 2 years of experience).

**Online counseling awareness as a counselor educator.** All four counselor educators described the need to be aware of online counseling as a viable mental health medium in order to serve their students and the profession. Participant #3 (female, 12 years of experience) expressed “the pressure on teaching online counseling skills in [her] lectures”. Moreover, participant #3 (female, 12 years of experience) stated the need to “properly educate faculty [with] more exposure to this modality in order to give students the best bang for their buck”. Similarly, participant #2 (male, 5 years of experience) believed “we are in an age of distance education, it is progressing at a higher rate with distance counseling coming in second”. As presented in Chapter 2 of this study distance education is becoming more prevalent in higher education. Perhaps if online counseling adheres to the same degree of growth, training will become more common in counselor preparation programs. Participant #3 (female, 12 years of experience) expressed feeling “more pressure on [their] program due to what other programs are offering [with] a certain level of competition occurring when developing [their] curriculum”. Participant #2 (male, 5 years of experience) communicated, “it is possible to train counselors to perform counseling online. We need to be prepared and proficient along with being

competent in using this modality. We must begin to train counselors to utilize online counseling. This is where our field is headed”.

There is an apparent concern with regard to the need for counselor educators to be competent in online counseling in order to proficiently educate counselors in training. However, participant #2 (male, 5 years of experience) believes “there is a lack of knowledge of distance education using online media ” thus fueling the uneasy feelings with online counseling where there is a dependence on technology. In addition to the uneasy sentiment participant #3 (female, 12 years of experience) feels, noting that “within the next few years it [online counseling training] will come of age”. Suggesting, “new students should not use online counseling as a primary tool. It is not appropriate in learning online counseling skills early in their program. I think it is more appropriate to introduce online counseling in one’s practicum or in higher level courses”.

Participant #4 (female, 2 years of experience) ended the interview wanting to convey her unique position using an online medium to educate, counsel, and supervise students. She stated, “My students are unique in the fact that in order to interact with other students and faculty they must be proficient in the technology used in the program. This is a university requirement. As an educator I have to be familiar with the laws covering each state because my students are from all over the United States. But this was a one time extensive preparation and now I just cover the material on laws periodically, and therefore it does not take up as much time as my initial preparation. But just as legal and ethical topics are built into face-to-face programs it also needs to be brought up in online counseling. The counselor instructor must address confidentiality, be aware of legal aspects, and the distance counseling training process. As an instructor I have to

make sure legal, ethical, and confidentiality issues are covered, along with therapeutic skills used online. I gear my whole class in this direction”. With this approach and faculty beginning to incorporate online counselor training we may see an increase in online counseling.

**A differentiating medium of counseling.** All four counselor educators described online counseling as a differentiating medium of counseling. During the analysis of the data the counselor educators conveyed their viewpoints of how the process of online counseling differs from that of traditional methods such as face-to-face counseling. In addition, participant #2 (male, 5 years of experience) not only expressed his differentiating standpoint he also stated, “it is important to note that there is a large gap between online counseling and face to face counseling. Counselor educators need a programmer who is familiar with online counseling, thus creating a program specialized in our field” in order to develop programs groomed especially for the counseling profession. Significant challenges revealed by participant #3 (female, 12 years of experience) are that “verbal and nonverbal skills are not concrete in training [future] online counselors”. Thus a different process to counsel via the Internet needs to be developed. According to participant #2 (male, 5 years of experience), “just as in other modalities such as family counseling there are theorists, but there is not an online theorist per say. My suggestion would be to develop a framework for online therapy and online mediated counseling”. Describing her experience with online supervision, participant #4 (female, 2 years of experience) believes online supervision has “created a parallel process for acquiring online counseling skills. My students are supervised via the internet using the telephone and the usage of specific encrypted sites enabling visual conferencing”.

Within the parallel process, as noted by participant #4 (female, 2 years of experience), participant #2 (male, 5 years of experience) described the “drawbacks to online counseling are increased liability, not being able to respond to crisis as in face to face counseling, and the inability to immediately handle a crises”.

**Confidentiality constraints.** All four counselor educators expressed concerns about confidentiality when using online counseling. Confidentiality not only affects the client but also the counselor as a licensed professional. Participant #3 (female, 12 years of experience) attributes the primary reason for her uncomfortable feeling with online counseling are the “confidentiality issues”. During the interviews the participants explained their apprehensiveness with online counseling due to the confidentiality concerns and constraints within the mental health medium. They indicated confidentiality is not as safe as it is in face-to-face counseling. “There are just too many ethical and confidentiality issues” due to the lack of “technological sophistication, the lack of experience, with the technology, and the possibilities of breaching the technology”, stated participant #3 (female, 12 years of experience). Participant #1 (female, 11 years of experience) notably stated that “not being able to guarantee privacy is a huge risk” for clients and counselors alike. This presents an issue when the foundation of counseling is based on confidentiality. Participant #2 (male, 5 years of experience) expressed his concern with the confidentiality of online counseling by stating, “confidentiality is tarnished when using an online format” however perhaps “with future refinement with safety nets in place online counseling may work”.

### **Summary and Researcher's Reflection**

While conducting this study, it became clear that only a few investigations have examined online counselor training. The need for online counselor preparation seemed evident. It is the researchers belief that through this investigation perhaps additional studies will focus on online counselor preparation.

The design chosen was a sequential mixed methods. This design offered the opportunity to gather quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher gained a greater respect of the complexity involved in the data collection and data analysis process. Despite the anxiety felt by counselor educators towards online counseling the online counseling medium is growing. Results from phase one indicated that those who were more comfortable with online counseling seemed to value online counseling as a viable medium. I believe that more empirically based studies will emerge concerning online counseling and that more counselors will transition to using this modality.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY

#### **Introduction**

The field of distance counseling has dramatically expanded since the introduction of 'Eliza' in the 1960s. Traditionally counselor preparation programs have taught future counselors conventional counseling techniques. As evidenced through the literature distance counseling is being introduced as a viable form of mental health services.

Distance counseling has emerged as the result of technological changes. Having the knowledge of distance counseling as a counselor educator may perhaps offer future counselors technological opportunities to use online counseling. Recent literature has stressed the need for online counselor training in counselor preparation programs (Mallen, Vogel, & Rochlen, 2005). Research findings indicated that counselor educators should utilize a variety of technological tools with student accessible technology (Trepal, Haberstroh, Duffey, & Evans, 2007).

Due to student demand, the need for innovation in higher education, and the demand for professional development, technology integration in academia has grown at a rapid pace. This in turn has allowed for an increase of technology in counselor education. Counselor preparation programs have generally trained counselors using a face-to-face medium. However, with technological sophistication, distance education through online mediums has become more accessible for counseling students.

The purpose of this study was to explore attitudes toward online counseling specific to counselor educators and investigate counselor preparation programs with

regard to online counseling and online counselor preparation. This sequential mixed methods study was guided by the following research questions:

### **Quantitative**

1. What are the faculty values and level of discomfort regarding online counseling?
2. What is the relationship between participants' number of years as a counselor educator and their attitude (value level) toward online counseling?
3. What is the relationship between participants' current experience at a university offering counselor training using the internet and their attitude (value level) toward online counseling?
4. What is the relationship between participants' age and their attitude (value level) toward online counseling?

### **Qualitative**

1. What are the perceptions of counselor educators toward online counseling?
2. What are the perceptions of counselor educators toward training online counselors?
3. How do counselor educators prepare counselors to conduct online counseling?

Using the guiding research questions the researcher was able to collect study-specific quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitatively, the researcher investigated attitudes towards online counseling specific to counselor educator's using the OCAS. In addition to investigating counselor educator attitudes toward online counseling the researcher was able to analyze specific variables that may have affected a counselor educators' value toward online counseling, using the demographic questionnaire.

Qualitatively, the researcher captured the lived experiences of counselor educators. The

researcher gathered the essence of counselor educators' personal viewpoint regarding online counseling and the training of online counselors, expanding insight of the quantitative data. This chapter presents conclusions, discusses implications of the study, summarizes the findings, and offers recommendations for further research.

### **Conclusions**

Conclusions based on the collective data of this mixed methods study have a greater impact than either the quantitative or qualitative data alone. The quantitative and qualitative data presented collectively identify counselor educators' attitudes and perceptions of online counseling and online counselor preparation. The findings from the quantitative data supported the two subscales, value and discomfort, and accurately measured two different virtues of attitude toward online counseling. The data also provided evidence toward a strong relationship between value and discomfort with online counseling.

Based upon the findings, the researcher concluded that the greater counselor educator's valued online counseling the less discomfort they felt with regard to its infusion. Three variables were investigated to explore whether they influenced counselor educators attitude, based on value of online counseling. Based on the quantitative findings of this study no statistical significance was concluded on counselor educators' attitude, as measured by value of online counseling, in relation to their age, the number of years as a counselor educator, or whether or not counselor educators are teaching in a university that trains future counselors to practice counseling via the internet.

In addition, based upon the qualitative findings of this study four major themes were uncovered adding insight to the initially collected quantitative data. The purpose of

conducting a mixed methods study was to collect the measurable quantitative data in phase one supported by qualitative data in phase two (Creswell, 2009). In this study the four major themes revealed possible constraints counselor educators perhaps encounter in online counseling and online counselor training. The four major themes uncovered were (a) online counseling as a support with face-to-face counseling, (b) online counseling awareness by counselor educators is necessary in counselor preparation programs, (c) online counseling is a differentiating medium of counseling, and (d) there are an alarming number of confidentiality constraints associated with online counseling.

### **Discussion**

The researcher employed a sequential mixed methods design in which sequential sampling was utilized. In using a sequential mixed methods research design the researcher was able to provide measurable quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitatively using a non-experimental approach, the researcher collected data using the OCAS and the demographic questionnaire. Qualitatively using a phenomenological approach, the researcher captured counselor educators' experiences with and attitude toward online counselor preparation. Four major themes were found. The quantitative and qualitative phases uncovered counselor educators' attitudes toward online counseling and online counselor preparation.

### **Quantitative**

The non-probability quantitative sample consisted of sixty-four counselor educators from across the United States employed at CACREP accredited universities. The participants contact information, specifically their electronic mail address, was retrieved from the CACREP website. Participants were listed as contact liaisons for their

respective university. To date each university listed on the CACREP was in accredited standing.

The researcher electronically requested their participation in the study through a survey program. In using SurveyMonkey the researcher provided a website link specific for completion of the demographic questionnaire and the OCAS. The researcher then used the SurveyMonkey link to collect quantitative data among counselor educators. Approximately one hundred-fifty counselor educators were contacted with a resulting sample of sixty-four completing the demographic questionnaire and the OCAS.

With respect to the participant sample of sixty-four, reliability coefficients of the measurable ten items indicated the ten items within the OCAS accurately measure attitudes towards online counseling. Similar reliability coefficients of the two subscales were reported with the normative sample. Due to the reliability being above the acceptable rate the accuracy of the OCAS scores was supported.

The demographic questionnaire and the OCAS provided quantitative data used to answer the quantitative research questions. For the purpose of this study the four quantitative analyses were (1) a paired-samples *t* test analysis, (2) a bivariate linear regression analysis, (3) a multiple regression analysis, and (4) an independent *t* test analysis. Of the four quantitative analyses employed three were found to provide no statistical significance (a paired-samples *t* test analysis, a multiple regression analysis, and an independent *t* test analysis) leaving one statistically significant analysis (a bivariate linear regression analysis). Specific research questions guided phase one of this study. Participant responses were used to answer the guiding research questions.

Using the OCAS data the researcher was able to answer research question one. As mentioned in previous chapters the OCAS measured attitudes towards online counseling using two subscales (1) value of online counseling and (2) discomfort with online counseling. For the purpose of this study the OCAS was used to measure attitudes specific to counselor educators. Using a paired-sample *t* test analysis the researcher was able to answer counselor educator values and level of discomfort regarding online counseling. Findings indicate for this population there was no statistical significance among differences between counselor educators' value of online counseling and discomfort with online counseling. In essence, the differences measured between the counselor educators' value level of online counseling and their discomfort level with online counseling was minimal.

However, in conducting a bivariate linear regression analysis statistically significant findings indicated that the greater value one has of online counseling the less discomfort one feels of using online counseling and vice versa; the greater discomfort one feels toward online counseling the less value one may consider of online counseling. This finding is pertinent to the counselor education field due to the significance of the data. The significance of the greater value one has of online counseling the less discomfort one feels supported Mallen et al. (2005) belief toward online counselor preparation as a necessity. As mentioned in prior chapters, online counseling preparation is not common in counselor training programs. With this finding adding to the lack of supportive literature, online counselor preparation may become more widespread. In relation to the distance medium distance clinical supervision training is growing at a rapid pace, as supported through a growing number of empirical research (Baltimore &

Brown, 2004; Evans, 2009; Sampson, Jr., 2000). Due to distance clinical supervision training growing as a result of the increased supportive research, online counselor preparation may become established in counselor training programs in the United States with supportive empirical findings such as those found within the significance of the data in this study.

Using the OCAS data and the demographic questionnaire data the researcher was able to answer research question two and four. A multiple regression analysis was used to answer research questions two and four. By employing a multiple regression analysis, the researcher investigated the relationship between three variables. The dependent variable utilized was the subscale mean of value toward online counseling, as measured using the OCAS. The two independent variables derived from the demographic questionnaire were (1) the counselor educators' age and (2) the number of years counselor educators were employed as instructors. In conducting a multiple regression analysis no statistical significance was found. The counselor educators' age and years as a counselor educator appear to not have an influence on their value towards online counseling. Based on the findings, there seems to be no relationship between the participants' attitude, as measured by their value toward online counseling, and the number of years as a counselor educator. Moreover, based on the findings, there seems to be no relationship between the participants' attitude, as measured by their value, toward online counseling and their age. Neither age nor tenure as a counselor educator affects counselor educators' value toward online counseling.

Using the OCAS data and the demographic questionnaire data the researcher was able to answer research question three. Using an independent *t* test analysis, the

researcher compared the relationship between counselor educators' value towards online counseling and whether a counselor educators' had current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet. By utilizing an independent *t* test analysis the researcher investigated the dependent variable, counselor educators' value toward online counseling derived from the OCAS, in relation to an independent variable with two levels, whether counselor educators have experience at a university with counselor training using the internet or whether counselor educators do not have experience at a university with counselor training using the internet. Based on the findings this independent, two level variable proved to have no significance in regards to a counselor educators' value toward online counseling. There was a non-significant relationship between the participants' current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet and their value toward online counseling.

Although no statistical significance was found in any of the three analyzed variables derived from the demographic questionnaire that were hypothesized to have had an effect on the value of online counseling specific to counselor educators, a greater understanding was provided based on the quantitative results of the study in conjunction with the literature reviewed.

Based upon the literature reviewed, several contributing factors were found to affect the overall acceptance of online counseling as a viable mental health medium. The quantitative results found in the current study are perhaps influenced by literature based factors and/or the overall infancy of online counseling. Confidentiality issues, lack of online counseling professional development opportunities, lack of awareness in technology usage, and the varied general interest in online counseling as a profession

seems to be more prevalent upon counselor educators' attitude toward online counseling (Caspar & Berger, 2005; Fink, 1999; Evans, 2009). Mallen et al. (2005) stressed the need for professional development and a general awareness of online counseling in order to develop this medium for use in the mental health field. Based on the literature, confidentiality appears to hold numerous constraints in online counseling. Numerous authors have stated concerns with confidentiality and online counseling (Lundberg, 2000; Venable, 2010; Fink, 1999; Harvey & Carlson, 2003). However, Fink (1999) noted that confidentiality appeared to be a concern in all health and mental health care, not only citing online counseling. In addition to confidentiality concerns in online counseling, Suler (2004) described the lack of nonverbal communication in online counseling sessions is a concern due to the fact that a primary component of the counseling profession is based on nonverbal communication. According to the Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE) a licensed Distance Credentialed Counselor (DCC) is certified to practice counseling via the internet. This specific certification has been established for the past six years as it was developed in 2006. The nuance of this certification has prompted agencies such as the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) to develop specific requirements for licensure and ethical adherence guidelines for distance counselors. Although the NBCC and the CCE have developed guidelines in licensure and ethics, trustworthiness for clients of counselors via the internet and vice versa is obscured by falsities. Heinlen, Welfel, and Richmond (2003) explored the backgrounds of one hundred-thirty six online counselor websites finding less than half of the sites' online counselors adhering to the ethical standards for WebCounseling

developed by the NBCC. Trustworthiness in terms of the lack of technological monitoring and sophistication has become a concern for counselors and clients.

### **Qualitative**

Creditability of the study was enhanced through the use of triangulation. A brief survey, interviews with four counselor educators, and the researcher's journal were used to obtain data. After interviews were transcribed the researcher reviewed data with each participant, ensuring that the researcher conveyed what was expressed during the interviews. The researcher along with the qualitative research team explored the transcribed data and uncovered key phrases in the participants' responses. Categories were formulated using the key phrases. Resulting from each of the categories formulated by the researcher, along with the qualitative research team, were specific theme domains. The themes discovered from the data may assist counselor preparation programs interested in training online counselors. The themes were (a) online counseling as a support with face-to-face counseling, (b) online counseling awareness by counselor educators is necessary in counselor preparation programs, (c) online counseling is a differentiating medium of counseling, and (d) there are an alarming number of confidentiality constraints associated with online counseling.

The research questions were the foundation of the study and were the focus of the data collected. The researcher observed that counselor educators appeared to perceive online counseling with an understanding of this mental health medium, but expressed concerns in teaching online counseling to their students. Throughout the interviews there appeared to be an expressed need for the development of an online counseling process similar to face-to-face counseling. For example, counselors in training are taught

techniques on how to approach clients in face-to-face counseling sessions. Participant #2 stressed in the interview that the online counseling process is different due to the lack of nonverbal cues and the use of technology. Counselor educators have incorporated online counselor preparation discussions within their courses. According to participant #3 there is a need to incorporate online counseling discussions with all future counselors in several courses. Data supported facilitating online counseling discussions in counselor preparation courses because of the shift the profession has taken regarding distance learning. Counselor preparation programs have “full course loads” within their degree plans according to participant #2. This in turn may make it difficult to add online counselor preparation courses. Participant #2 mentioned using several courses already offered in counselor preparation programs such as: ethics, multicultural counseling, and internship. These courses that were mentioned should include online counselor training. Despite concerns with online counseling, counselor educators recognized the need to incorporate online counselor training in their courses.

### **Implications**

Based on the findings from this study were a number of implications for future practice. The following implications resulted from the findings:

- Awareness of Online Counseling
- Counselor Preparation
- Online Counseling Policy
- Online Counseling Accessibility

There is a recognized need for counselor educators to be aware of online counseling. Mallen and Vogel (2005) stated online counselor preparation is needed in

counselor preparation programs. The study findings supported counselor educator awareness of online counselor preparation. Based on the quantitative findings the more experience counselor educators had with technology the lower discomfort levels they had with the online medium.

The quantitative and qualitative findings suggest implications that may lead to specific courses of action in the development of online counseling and online counselor preparation. An implication of the findings from the OCAS is that, counselor educators' values regarding online counseling and discomfort level with online counseling should be taken into account when considering offering online counselor training. Efforts to lower counselor educators' discomfort with online counseling include professional development opportunities in the technological applications of counseling. More professional development should be made available to counselors within the academic setting and the clinical setting.

A reasonable approach to address this issue is to extend one's awareness of online counseling through (a) required continuing credits in online counseling and (b) professional development specific to online counseling training and technology. These two approaches may assist in the adoption of online counselor training in counselor preparation programs. Professional organizations such as ACA and the NBCC have developed guidelines in online counseling training and certification; thus improving policy definitions and developing awareness towards the preparation of online counseling. This information should be used to develop an online counseling curriculum within counselor preparation programs.

Online counseling provides accessibility to mental health services for clients who may live in rural areas, have physical or financial constraints, or other disabilities (Derrig-Palumbo & Zeine, 2005; Evans, 2009; Bloom, 1998). Implications found in this study support online counseling accessibility of mental health services for clients as a positive reach.

### **Limitations**

The final limitations exceeded the initial limitations the researcher took into account. Initial limitations were (a) participants may be biased towards online counseling and/or online counseling preparation, (b) the OCAS has limited data regarding its validity and reliability, and (c) extraneous variables including university setting and availability of technology were not controlled. Based on the process of the study and the findings, there were a number of limitations resulting from this study.

Quantitative limitations were (a) the sample size and (b) data of normative OCAS data measures. Although the sample size was met to have sufficient power and significance based on a moderate effect size, the breakdown of the sample was a limitation. The independent *t* test analysis used the sixty-four sample data with a breakdown of eleven counselor educators who engaged in online counselor preparation with fifty-three counselor educators who did not engage in online counselor preparation. As initially anticipated there was limited data available regarding the validity and reliability of the OCAS. The quantitative findings supported the utilization of the OCAS for this study.

Qualitative limitations were (a) qualitative data saturation, (b) the participants' biases toward online counseling and/or online counseling preparation, and (c) extraneous

variables including university setting and technological availability. In using a phenomenological approach, the saturation of data is customary. Although member checking was utilized as a verification technique, the saturation of the qualitative data among participants added to the limitations of this study. Anticipated biases regarding online counseling and online counselor preparation were accounted as a limitation for this study. Through sequential sampling the researcher was unable to control for specific university settings and differences in technological availability of each counselor educator, adding to the limitations of this study.

### **Summary of Results**

#### **Quantitative**

Findings from this study produced varied statistical difference between counselor educators' value towards online counseling and their discomfort towards online counseling. From the four analyses conducted using the OCAS and the demographic questionnaire, three of the four produced no statistical significance with one, the bivariate linear regression analysis, producing statistical significance. The significance indicated there was a relationship between the discomfort level and the value level for counselor educators. The higher their discomfort level was the lower counselor educators seem to value online counseling. The OCAS was used to measure their overall attitudes towards online counseling. Based on the findings the researcher concluded that the greater counselor educators value online counseling the lower their discomfort level is with online counseling. In addition, the findings produced no statistical findings supporting relationships between the level of value a counselor educator has towards online counseling, their current age, and the number of years each participant has been

employed as a counselor educator. Due to the non-significant findings, the researcher was able to conclude there was not a relationship among the three variables and counselor educators' value towards online counseling. When examining counselor educators' value of online counseling and whether or not counselor educators' have current experience at a university with counselor training using the internet, the results were clearly non-significant. Counselor educators value towards online counseling holds no bearing on whether or not they have current experience in a university setting employing counselor training using the internet.

### **Qualitative**

The researcher identified four major themes obtained from personal interviews with counselor educators in CACREP accredited higher education institutions. The four major themes included: (a) online counseling being used as a support to face-to-face counseling sessions, (b) online counseling awareness is necessary as a counselor educator, (c) online counseling is viewed as a differentiating medium of counseling, and (d) there are numerous confidentiality constraints associated with online counseling. These major themes support concepts to consider when training online counselors.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The limitations found in this study provide potential opportunities for further research. Limitations include the following: (a) there is a minimal amount of research utilizing the OCAS on its reliability and validity, (b) the study consisted of a non-probability sample of counselor educators from CACREP accredited universities and therefore external validity was limited to the study participants, (c) attitude assessment was dependent on ten items from the OCAS scale, (d) the demographic questionnaire and

the OCAS potentially could have affected phase one participants decision to voluntarily participate in phase two of the study, and (e) the small sample size of counselor educators currently engaging in online counselor training using the internet within their respective university setting.

The researcher recommends the following areas to study: (a) investigate similar research questions with a different population sample, such as clients taking part in counseling; (b) conduct interviews with a larger sample of counselor educators engaging in online counselor training using the internet; (c) examine the administrative impact on counselor preparation program development and expansion using online counselor training; and (d) research online counseling professional development opportunities offered to counselor educators and clinicians.

### **Closing**

The overall investigation explored online counseling and online counselor preparation in counselor training programs across the United States. This study adds to the knowledge base of online counseling from the perspective of counselor educators. The researcher not only addresses counselor educators' attitude towards online counseling but also their apprehensions and goals for the future of online counseling.

The quantitative results indicated overall attitudes of counselor educators using the OCAS. The researcher interpreted the data to indicate the less discomfort the counselor educators felt with online counseling the higher they valued online counseling. Perhaps with additional professional development (Roberts, 2008; MacKeogh & Fox, 2009; Moran, Hawkes, & El Gayar, 2010) in academia and clinically, counselor

educators discomfort with online counseling would decrease and the overall online counseling profession would progress as a mental health medium.

The qualitative results captured the lived experiences of counselor educators. The interview data provided an in-depth investigation towards what counselor educators' encounter professionally and academically. There is a growing amount of literature supporting the shift the profession has made toward online counseling and how much more prevalent it has become within the past decade (Rochlen, Zack, & Speyer, 2004; Derrig-Palumbo & Zeine, 2005; Fink, 1999; Evans, 2009). Currently, online counseling is in a stage of infancy. Based on the findings counselor awareness along with technological sophistication is necessary in order for online counseling to progress.

This study provided insight on counselor educator attitudes towards online counseling and online counselor preparation. As the number of online counselors increase perhaps so will the number of online counselor preparation programs.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter



ERIN L. SHERMAN, MAcc, CRA, CIP  
Research Compliance Officer

6300 OCEAN DRIVE, UNIT 5844  
CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS 78412  
O 361.825.2497 • F 361.825.2755

April 11, 2012

Ms. Serena Flores  
5540 Oso Parkway  
Corpus Christi, TX 78413

Dear Ms. Flores,

The research project entitled "Online Counseling and Online Counselor Preparation: A Mixed Method Investigation" (IRB# 22-12) has been granted approval through an expedited review under category 7.2.1(9) by the Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board (IRB). You are authorized to conduct the project as outlined in the IRB protocol application.

IRB approval is granted for one year from the date approval is granted. You must submit an IRB Continuing Review Application for IRB committee review and approval should the project continue beyond April 11, 2013. Please submit the IRB Continuing Review Application at least one month prior to the approval expiration date to allow time for IRB review.

Please submit an IRB Amendment Application for ANY modifications to the approved study protocol. Changes to the study may not be initiated before the amendment is approved. Please submit an IRB Completion Report to the Compliance Office upon the conclusion of the project. Both report formats can be downloaded from IRB website.

All study records must be maintained by the researcher for three years after the completion of the study. Please contact me if you will no longer be affiliated with Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi before the conclusion of the records retention timeframe to discuss retention requirements.

We wish you the best on the project. Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Erin L. Sherman".

Erin L. Sherman

THE ISLAND UNIVERSITY

Appendix B

Informed Consent- Email

Hello All,

My name is Serena Flores, CSC and I am completing my doctoral dissertation entitled “Online Counseling and Online Counselor Preparation: A Mixed Methods Investigation” in Counselor Education and Supervision from Texas A&M University- Corpus Christi. I am seeking participants for my dissertation study so I hope you will consider participating. The survey will only take 10-15 minutes to complete. This will hopefully allow you to take a small break from your busy schedule to help a doctoral candidate.

Eligible participants for this study include:

- Counselor Educators currently teaching graduate and/or postgraduate counselor education courses.
- Counselor Educators affiliated with the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), a division of the American Counseling Association (ACA).

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of counselor educators toward online counseling and the preparation of counselors that may provide counseling services online.

The data received through Survey Monkey by the principal investigator will be kept confidential. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University- Corpus Christi.

This link <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GGWVDR7> will take you to the survey if you are interested in participating. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete and your participation is greatly appreciated. I invite you to contact me directly at [sflores3@islander.tamucc.edu](mailto:sflores3@islander.tamucc.edu), or contact my chair, Dr. Robert L. Smith, [robert.smith@tamucc.edu](mailto:robert.smith@tamucc.edu), if you have any questions regarding this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, at (361) 825-2497 or [erin.sherman@tamucc.edu](mailto:erin.sherman@tamucc.edu).

Thank you in advance,

Serena Flores

Doctoral Candidate

Counselor Education and Supervision

Texas A&M University- Corpus Christi

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

**Demographic Questionnaire**

Gender:

Male Female

Age:

\_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity:

Caucasian Hispanic African American Asian Native American Other

Number of Students Enrolled in University:

\_\_\_\_\_

Number of Graduate Students Enrolled in Counseling Program:

\_\_\_\_\_

Preferred Counseling Modality:

Online

Telephone

Face to Face

Are you currently teaching at a university that trains future counselors to practice counseling via the Internet:

Yes No

How many years have you taught counselor education courses at the graduate and/or postgraduate level?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Phase 2**

Participants in this study may be contacted for the second phase of the present research. A purposively selected sample will be asked to participate in completing a brief survey and participate in a semi-structured interview via telephone. A second sample of approximately four counselor educators that integrate online counseling within their counseling curricula will be selected.

If you would like to participate in phase two of this study please provide your name and email address below.

First &amp; Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix D

Online Counseling Attitudes Scale

**Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS)**

This questionnaire will ask about your attitudes toward seeking online counseling (where you would interact with a counselor using the Internet). With most online counseling services, clients can choose among several options. For the purpose of this study, consider having your choice of corresponding with a counselor through e-mails or through an online “real time” text chat arrangement. A client using e-mail counseling services would typically submit questions or comments to a counselor and would receive a response within a short period of time (typically 1-2 days). With online "real time" chat, you would have a set time each week when you would meet in a private and secure "chat room" to discuss concerns. Please read the questions carefully because the sets of questions are similar. There are no "wrong" answers, and the only right ones are the ones you honestly feel or believe. Read each item carefully and indicate your agreement using the following scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Using Online Counseling would help me learn about myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. If a friend had personal problems, I might encourage him or her to consider online counseling.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I would confide my personal problems in an online counselor.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. It could be worthwhile to discuss my personal problems with an online counselor.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. If online counseling were available at no charge, I would consider trying it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. If I were having a personal problem, seeking help with an online counselor would be the last option I consider.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I would feel uneasy discussing emotional problems with an online counselor.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I would dread explaining my problems to an online counselor.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. I think it would take a major effort for me to schedule an appointment with an online counselor.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I would be afraid to discuss stressful events with an online counselor.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix E

Information Sheet- Interview

## INFORMATION SHEET

Online Counseling and Online Counselor Preparation: A Mixed Methods Investigation

*\*This should be read aloud, and a copy should be given to each participant.*

***(INFORMATION SHEET ONLY TO BE USED FOR EXEMPT STUDIES.)***

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. By filling out the Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS) survey and providing responses to the demographic questionnaire you are consenting to participate in the study. By participating in this study, you are also certifying that you are 18 years of age or older. Please do not complete the Online Counseling Attitudes Scale (OCAS) survey or provide responses to the demographic questionnaire if you do not consent to participate in the study.

You have been asked to participate in a research project studying the perceptions of counselor educators toward online counseling services, and the training of online counselors. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of counselor educators toward online counseling and the preparation of counselors that might provide counseling services online. You were selected to be a possible participant because you are affiliated with the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), a division of the American Counseling Association (ACA).

### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the demographic questionnaire and the Online Counselor Attitudes Scale (OCAS) via a Survey Monkey link attached to the delivered email. Once participants open the attached link they will then fill out the demographic questionnaire along with the OCAS, which is estimated to take 10-15 minutes.

### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, this research will contribute to the minimally existing literature base of online counseling therapy training of skills and practices at the graduate and postgraduate level.

### **Do I have to participate?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi being affected.

### **Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

This study is confidential. Surveys will be delivered through Survey Monkey. The data received through Survey Monkey by the principal investigator will be kept confidential. When surveys are retrieved the principal investigator will know the first and last name of

the participant and email address. This information will not be divulged. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only the principal investigator, Serena Flores, and the faculty advisor, Robert Smith, will have access to the records.

**Is there anything else I should consider?**

Participants in this study may be contacted for the second phase of the present research. A purposively selected sample will be asked to participate in completing a brief survey and participate in a semi-structured interview via telephone. A second sample of approximately four counselor educators, that integrate online counseling within their counseling curricula, will be selected.

**Whom do I contact with questions about the research?**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Serena Flores, (361) 549-9657, [sflores3@islander.tamucc.edu](mailto:sflores3@islander.tamucc.edu) or Dr. Robert Smith, (361) 825-2307, [robert.smith@tamucc.edu](mailto:robert.smith@tamucc.edu).

**Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?**

This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, at (361) 825-2497 or [erin.sherman@tamucc.edu](mailto:erin.sherman@tamucc.edu).

Appendix F

Open Ended Brief Survey

### **Open Ended Brief Survey**

These questions are the focus of the brief survey. They will be posed to the purposively selected four participants.

The questions the researcher focused on included the following:

1. What are your perceptions toward online counseling?
2. What are your perceptions toward training online counselors?
3. How do you a counselor educator prepare counselors to conduct online counseling?

Appendix G

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

### **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol**

In addition to examining the measurable perspectives of counselor educators, the researcher expanded insight among previously surveyed subjects by skillfully administering interviews with counselor educators. Subjects were purposefully selected for a semi-structured interview. Subject selection was based on association to institutions in which the preparation of graduate level counseling students in online counselor skill training was established in curricula. The researcher will use the following questions to guide the interview process:

1. How is technology-based assistance integrated in your counselor preparation program?
2. What are the perceptions of counselor educators on distance counseling as a therapeutic modality?
3. How are counselor preparation programs preparing graduate level counseling students to perform distance counseling?
4. What influence does distance counseling awareness have on counselor educators?
5. Is there anything else you would like me to know about distance counseling preparation?