FACTORS THAT MAY INFLUENCE MASTER'S

LEVEL COUNSELOR TRAINEE'S ABILITY

TO DISCERN ELEMENTS OF AN

ETHICAL DILLEMA.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview of The Study

With the exception of counseling theory, professional ethics is probably the area

of study most related to the everyday practice of counseling (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003).

The topic of ethics has become increasingly visible in the literature of mental health

professionals (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). A trend noted over the past two decades has

been the development of ethical guidelines for a wide range of health care services for

providers. (Reed, 2002). National organizations such as the American Psychological

Association and the American Counseling Association continually assess and

periodically revise their ethical guidelines, principals, and standards. As a part of this

trend, ethics education is a requirement of some accreditation programs such as American

Psychological Association for doctoral level clinical, counseling, and school psychology;

and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs

(CACREP) an accreditation of master's level programs. Several states require continuing

education in ethics as a condition to maintain licensure at the master's level (Van Creek,

2003, August). The importance of ethics, ethical development, and ethics training and

decision making will be introduced in this chapter. Various models of ethical

development and ethical decision making will be discussed in this paper. These models

have some common elements; one element that is common to the different models of

ethical decision making is the need to identify the ethical problem. That is, before a decision making model can be implemented it must first be determined that a problem or the potential for a problem exists. Without this first step there would be no reason to make a decision on a course of action. A second element of commonality between different models is to determine all aspects or elements of the ethical dilemma. Once it has been determined that a problem exists it becomes necessary to assess all possible elements of the problem in order to accurately utilize the decision making model. Failure to discern an element of an ethical dilemma could result in making less than the best ethical choice (Garcia, 2003).

Finally, the fact that various ethical decision making models have in common the need to identify the problem and recognize all elements of the dilemma indicates the importance of ethical discernment. Ethical discernment refers to the ability to assess the intricate elements of a complex ethical situation and discriminate out the subtle components, enabling the counselor to consider all possible choices and the foreseeable consequences of various courses of action. Obviously it would be of benefit to counselor training programs if we could identify the factors that might influence a trainee's ability to ethically discern.

The Importance of Ethical Discernment

Although not extensively, the counseling literature has addressed the issue of ethical discernment. Assouline (1989) suggested that the ability to discern various aspects of a problem is not only critical to the student's learning process but is also a prerequisite to justifying their personal positions on counseling issues. Assouline's argument is that the use of discernment is necessary when considering the different

possibilities and choices available in an ethical dilemma. Discernment is used to evaluate

the possible consequences of a decision and proceed through the decision making process

to determine and justify the course of action. In a similar vein, Merea (1996) emphasized

the need for counselors to exercise their own ethical judgment or discernment because

there is no all-encompassing ethical theory that can completely guide all responses to

ethical dilemmas. Neukring (1996) not only identified discernment as a critical

beginning stage of ethical decision-making but also identified misinterpretation, or failure

to discern accurately, as a potential problem area for the counselor trainee.

Ethical Decision Making Models and Discernment

In the section that follows, five ethical decision making models that highlight the

importance of discernment will be introduced. These models are commonly taught to

counselor trainees in ethics or other beginning level courses.

The rational model is primarily based on principle ethics. The focus is on

resolving a conflict between more than one ethical principle, using a seven-step decision

making process. The rational model utilizes a systematic critical-evaluative format,

analyzing the dilemma on the basis of the specific principles, standards and or laws that

are involved. Specific steps are followed which include identifying the problem and the

nature and dimensions of the dilemma (Garcia, 2003). This implies the use of abstract

reasoning to discern the pros and cons of the elements of the dilemma that may represent

conflicting ethics principles and require a rationale evaluation of the choices available

while determining the best course of action.   Abstract reasoning ability has been found

to be related to ethical decision-making ability (Sadowski, 1997). The ability to think in

abstractions allows a person to explore alternatives and arrive at a solution to a problem

deemed to be right or correct. Abstract thinkers are able to recognize that there may be

more than one correct solution to a problem or that there may be no correct solution.

They are able to realize that the "correct" solution may vary depending on varying

circumstances of a situation and the viewpoint of those involved (Morris, 1993).

Neukring (1996) suggests that cognitive development is hierarchal. That is, it follows a

progression from lower levels of complexity to higher levels of complexity. Since

abstract reasoning is a function of cognitive ability, this suggests that persons in the lower

or beginning levels of abstract reasoning ability would have more difficulty recognizing

multiple elements of an ethical dilemma than would a person further along in his/her

abstract thinking level. Consequently they would also have more difficulty identifying

multiple choices and foreseeable consequences.

The virtue ethics model focuses on the personal characteristics, or virtue, of the

counselor and his/her understanding of virtue. Meara (1996) describes a virtuous agent as

"one who possess vision and discernment." (p. 18). Rather than focusing on ethical

principles, this model focuses on the character traits of the counselor. Proponents of

virtue ethics argue that no set of ethical guidelines can fully encompass all aspects of all

ethical dilemmas and that the counselor's personal traits, morals, or beliefs will influence

decision making (Garcia, 2003). This model includes integrity, prudence, discretion,

perseverance, courage, benevolence, humility, and hope as central virtues. The virtue

ethics model suggests that counselors need to know their character and that this self-

understanding is accomplished by being honest, open, and willing to accept responsibility

for one's self. This self-understanding enables the counselor to determine who they ought

to be and through prudent judgment allows them to change to be the person they ought to

be. Virtue ethics appraises the person doing the acting rather than the act. That is, an action would be right when it is based on what a virtuous person, one with virtuous traits, would do (Garcia, 2003). This implies that a person's character or personality traits influences decision making and therefore would also influence discernment. Personality factors have also been shown to be related to ethical decision-making (Larson, 2002). Persons with certain personality characteristics or traits seem to be able to identify multiple components of ethical dilemmas whereas persons with other personality characteristics seem more limited in their ability to identify multiple elements of such ethical dilemmas (Sadowski, 1997). Those ethical decision making models, such as virtue ethics and integrative, that incorporate character traits as a vital influence in the decision making process imply the importance of studying the relationship personality factors may have with the initial stage of decision making, the stage of discerning the existence of a problem and its' specific elements.

Social constructivism is an ethical decision making model based on social interpretation of the situation. It "crosses both the psychological and systemic-relational paradigms of mental health services" (Garcia, 2003 p. 270). Rooted in social psychology and based on the biology of cognition theory which argues that all that is known is known through biological and social relationships, the social constructivism model moves decision making out of the intrapsychic process into an interpersonal arena. This model contends that decision making is based on a relational view of reality, and places the decision in the social context. Rather than a decision being made alone, in the mind of the decision maker, it is made through an interpersonal process of "negotiating, consensualizing, and arbitrating" (Cottone, 2001 p. 40).   While the social constructivism

model does not support a systemic, critical-evaluative step process, it offers several

interactive steps for decision making. These steps include 1) obtaining information from

all involved, 2) asses nature of relationships, 3) consult with colleagues, 4) negotiate, and

respond allowing for reasonable consensus (Cottone, 2001).   The use of discernment is

implied in this model because of the model's focus in the initial stage on the need to

"obtain information from all involved" (Cottone, 2001**,** p. 44).

   A fourth model is the collaborative model, based on values of cooperation and

inclusion. This is a relational approach based on a group perspective. Proponents of this

model contend that decisions made from a group format would be superior to decisions

made from an individual perspective. The collaborative model follows a four step linear

progression. These include 1) identify all parties involved, 2) define each parties

worldview, 3) based on group goals and expectations, reach a solution that is mutually

satisfying to all, and 4) identify and implement each individual contribution that is part of

the solution (Garcia, 2003).   Similar to the social constructivism model, the first steps

include identifying all parties involved and defining the worldviews of each. The

collaborative model is another example of the implied discernment as the problem is

identified as it exists from the viewpoint of each person or party that could potentially be

affected by the outcome or final decision.

   A fifth model, the integrative model, blends aspects of both principle and virtue

ethics decision making models. It has a four-stage structure that combines an analysis of

individual counselor's virtues, morals, beliefs, and experiences along with a rational

analyses of the competing ethical principles embedded in the ethical dilemma. (Cottone

& Tarvydas, 2003). This model calls upon the counselor to use reflection, balance,

collaboration, and to pay attention to the context (Garcia, 2003). The four stages of the integrative model include 1) interpreting the situation through awareness and fact finding, 2) formulating an ethical decision, 3) selecting an action by weighing competing nonmoral values, and 4) planning and executing the selected course of action (Garcia, 2003). The first step in this model suggests the importance of discernment in ethical decision making through awareness and fact finding.

These five models of ethical decision making are examples of what is currently both taught and practiced in the counseling field. Each of these either directly or indirectly imply the relevance of the ability to discern, that is, to recognize the intricate elements comprising ethical dilemmas, as a critical initial stage in the ethical decision making process. The importance of analytical thinking and personality are also implied in these models.

Research in the areas of abstract reasoning, personality factors, ethics education and experience, as relates to discernment, will be discussed in more detail in chapter two. Assuming that discernment is a critical, initial stage in the decision making process, studies suggest that the possible influence of abstract reasoning ability, personality, ethics education and experience on ethical discernment could be of value to further examine. Unfortunately, there is little empirical research on factors influencing ethical discernment. Considering the significance of professional ethics on the everyday practice of counseling and the fact that ethical discernment is recognized as an initial step in ethical decision making (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003), it is reasonable to establish ethical discernment as a vital component in ethical behavior. This suggests the need to

empirically examine some of the factors that may influence a counselor trainees' ability to discern the elements of an ethical dilemma.

Statement of the Problem

The ability to take a situation and identify or discern what the ethical issues are is an important ability needed prior to pursuing the ethical decision making process. The decision making models do not address the variables of assessment or discernment. Since recognizing an ethical dilemma and discernment of the ethical elements has to be done prior to using any decision making tree or model, the understanding of the importance of discernment is a limitation of current decision-making models.

Review of the literature has revealed little empirical research investigating variables that may have a relationship with master's level counselor trainees' ability to discern the elements of an ethical dilemma. Given the paucity of research in the area of discernment, there is not enough information to predict outcomes. Therefore, research questions are being used in this study.

Significance of This Study

One of the major concerns of the counseling profession has been the area of professional ethics (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003). Ethical guidelines by nature of the fact that they are aspirational in intent are statements or declarations that suggest or support certain types of conduct rather than mandates for specific action (Reed, 2002) and they "strongly emphasize professional judgment in individual patient encounters" (p. 1042). Therefore, professional judgment is necessary in individual encounters of ethical dilemmas. Ethical decision making models were developed to help counselors faced with

complex ethical dilemmas to identify how to exercise ethical judgment (Neukrug, 1996).

These models offer sequential steps, stages, or processes (Robinson, 2000) to guide the

person making the best ethical judgment once an ethical dilemma has been recognized. A

common first step of ethical models is the recognition that a problem or ethical dilemma

exists (Cottone, 2000). The ability to take a situation and identify or discern what the

ethical issues are is an important ability needed prior to pursuing the ethical decision

making process. While the existing decision making models imply the importance of

discernment, they do not specify what contributes to one's ability to discern. The

purpose of this study is to identify what variables may be influencing the counselor

trainees' ability to discern the elements of an ethical dilemma. The decision making

models tend to focus on the use of decision rules. Recognizing an ethical dilemma and

discernment of the ethical elements has to be done prior to using any decision making

tree or rules. This is a flaw of the decision making models as they do not address

discernment. This study will seek to provide new information regarding factors that may

relate to a master's level counselor trainees' ability to discern the elements of an ethical

dilemma. This information could be useful in future consideration of admissions to

master's level counselor training programs and/or the curriculum selection in these

programs.

Research Questions

1. Is abstract reasoning ability related to the ability of master's level counseling

    trainees to ethically discern elements of ethical dilemmas?

2. Are the personality traits of neuroticism, openness and conscientiousness related to the ability of master's level counseling trainees to ethically discern elements of ethical dilemmas?

3. Does the completion of a graduate level ethics class relate to a master's level counselor trainees ability to ethically discern elements of ethical dilemmas?

4. Does the completion of a practicum experience relate to a master's level counselor trainees ability to ethically discern elements of ethical dilemmas?

Definitions

The following section offers definitions of terms that will be used throughout this study.

Abstract Reasoning: The ability to use a wide range of concepts, both verbal, non-verbal and numerical symbols (Phares & Troll, 1997).

Counselor Trainee: This term refers to master's level students enrolled in counseling psychology, community counseling or counselor education programs.

Discernment: The ability to assess and identify intricate elements of an ethical situation or dilemma (Stein, 1978).

Ethical Decision-Making: The process of ethical deliberation usually utilizing various models considering such elements as the ethical problem, guidelines, choices, and consequences, and continued evaluation of the process (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003).

Ethical Development: The process of growing into a mature advanced state of dealing with morals or the principles of morality (Costello, R., 1990).

Ethical Dilemma: A situation that confuses or perplexes the counselor due to competing ethical standards, conflicting moral and ethical standards and/or complexities making applications of standards unclear (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003).

Ethics and Morals: These terms are used interchangeably in this proposal, as suggested by Cottone & Tarvydas, "In general the terms ethics and ethical are often used in place of morals and morality." (p. 5). For example, use of "ethical reasoning" and "ethical development" are used here synonymously with "moral reasoning" and "moral development" (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003).

Ethics (Professional): Standards or rules established by a professional group to define the "right" or "good" practice of their discipline (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003).

Ethics of Care: Ethics based on relational perspective or human connectedness (Gilligan, 1982).

Intuitive Level: Immediate perception or judgment with some emotional coloring, without any conscious mental steps in preparation (Robson, 2000).

Big Five-Personality Model: Represents a broad range of structure of personality traits. Comprised of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness; these domains subsume more distinct and specific characteristics (Larson, 2001).

Principle Ethics: Application of ethical rules and principles to determine the right decision for an ethical dilemma. Focuses on rational and cognitive aspects of the decision making process (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003).

Virtue Ethics: The characteristics of the counselor him/her self is considered the critical element to determine the right decision for an ethical dilemma (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003).

Assumptions

This study is based on several assumptions, which include the following:

1) Discernment is a critical initial stage in the decision making process.

2) Participants in this study are expected to complete the instruments honestly, openly and with equal motivation.

3) Instruments in this study are adequate valid measures of the constructs they are intended to measure and will capture a true representation of abstract reasoning and personality factors.

4) Participants will be representative of masters' level counselor trainees.

5) The ability to ethically discern elements of an ethical dilemma is a vital, initial stage in the ethical decision making process.

6) Ethical decision making is a standard component of ethics training,

Limitations

This study contains certain limitations, which include the following:

1) This study is limited to a non-random sample of participants necessitating a quasi-experimental design.

2) Self-report measures are used in this study.

3) Data will be collected from existing classrooms, the researcher cannot control for diversity within the sample. This is a common limitation when collecting data in a field setting.

Summary and Overview of Remaining Chapters

This study investigates the relationship between, abstract reasoning, certain personality factors; neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness, completion of an ethics class and completion of a practicum experience and the discernment ability of masters' level counselor trainees.

Chapter II is a literature review beginning with various theories and models of ethical reasoning development and followed by research findings. Next theories and studies concerning abstract reasoning influence on discernment ability are reviewed. Personality factors as an influence on discernment ability is reviewed via presentation of theory and research studies. Finally, ethics training and practicum experience influence on discernment ability will also be reviewed.

Chapter III delineates the methodology and describes the participants to be recruited and the procedure to be followed. It also describes the instruments to be used in this study, selection criteria, and reports validity measures.

Chapter IV presents the findings of this study. It includes information on the selection of participants, demographic data, interater reliability and descriptive statistics as relates to each research questions.

Chapter V offers a discussion with conclusions, professional implications, limitations and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study will investigate the relationship between abstract reasoning ability, personality traits, ethics training, and level of practicum experience of master's level trainees and their ethical discernment ability. Topics to be reviewed here include models of ethical development as relates to abstract reasoning and its possible influence on discernment ability. Another topic to be reviewed will be the relationship between personality factors and ethical discernment. Ethics training and the effects of practicum experience on ethical discernment will be reviewed as well.

Abstract Reasoning and Ethical Discernment

This review resulted in the findings of literature primarily of the philosophical, theoretical and thought piece format. Literature presenting empirical results was sparse. The concept of abstract reasoning relating to the ability to discern the elements of an ethical dilemma, has been given less attention in regards to the available literature as compared with that literature focused on philosophy, theory, and presented in thought piece format. There are however some fairly recent study results available that addresses discernment, the results of which will be presented in this review. First models of ethical reasoning will be presented. These models propose that ethical reasoning develops along a developmental progression through cognitive stages. Abstract reasoning ability as related to discernment will be presented. Theory of hierarchal development and the

relationship between the ability to think abstractly and to conceptualize intricacies of complex ethical dilemmas will be addressed as well as examples explored. Empirical research specific to abstract reasoning and ethical discernment will also be presented.

As established in chapter one of this study through the presentation of various ethical decision making models, each of which had the common factor of identifying the existence of a problem and its specific elements, discernment is an important component in the process of ethical reasoning and decision making.

Psychologists have proposed various paradigms of moral development. Two prominent paradigms include models developed by Lawrence Kohlberg and James Rest (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003), which will be addressed here. Researchers in moral development have considered Kohlberg's model the most prominent and influential in moral development. Kohlberg himself was greatly influenced by Jean Piaget (Humphries, 2000). To understand Kohlberg's theory, Piaget's work in developmental psychology needs to also be understood. Piaget observed children in real life situations such as at play (Bergman, 2002). His focus was on the reasoning processes that were underlying children's behavior in their cognitive developmental stages (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003). Piaget theorized that children followed a certain progression to learn to incorporate certain structures such as space, time, and causality into their thinking (Spohn, 2000). Kohlberg followed Piaget's focus on reasoning processes as applied to moral development. Kohlberg's philosophy adopted the assumption that moral claims are based on universal duties (Sophn, 2000). That is, Kohlberg believed that there are core moral values that are universal to all human societies. Kohlberg recognized that

there are moral debates and cultural differences regarding interpretation (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003).

Kohlberg's theory proposed that moral development progresses through specific stages. He further proposed that there are three levels of morality consisting of two stages each. The levels were pre-conventional, based on fear and shame, conventional, based on self interest and peer respect, and post-conventional (autonomy and justice) based on universal moral principals for the good of all (Sophn, 2000). This suggests that in the lower level more values are made based on a desire to please adults and avoid punishment. The middle level is based on pleasing and attaining the respect of their peers and meeting their own needs. The final level goes beyond self and moral values are based on autonomy and what is viewed as fair and just. Kohlberg grounded morality on the concept of justice (Sophn, 2000). Justice is at the core concept of the moral system development (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003). The next model to be reviewed will be the model of James Rest.

James Rest reviewed the work of Kohlberg (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003) and revised it developing a four-component model; each component contained both cognition and affect (Welfel & Kitchener, 1992). Rest's model is theoretically linked to the cognitive theory of Kohlberg's work (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003). The four components of Rest's model were (1) Moral Sensitivity (2) Moral Judgment (3) Moral Motivation and (4) Moral Character. These components were viewed as processes that were part of the development of moral behavior (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003).

Moral Sensitivity, the first component, refers to recognizing and interpreting the situation as a moral one, thus implying a need for the ability of discernment. The second

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component, moral judgment, also called the moral reasoning stage, is the stage of deciding what is just, right, or fair in consideration of all of the conflicting moral obligations. Moral motivation, the third component, is the one in which the counselor decides what he/she intends to do in the particular situation. A decision is made on the best course of action and whether or not to act on it. The fourth and final component, moral character, is the act of actually implementing the chosen moral action or behavior (Welfel & Kitchener, 1992). Rest proposed that the components of his model were interactive rather than a sequential progression. The four components were seen as a logical analysis of what a person needs to do to behave morally and that failure in any one component can result in failure to act morally (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003). While Rest's model was theoretically linked to Kohlberg's cognitive theory, one notable difference was that the components of Rest's model did not follow a temporal order as Kohlberg's had but rather was interactive. That is, Rest suggested that the person faced with a dilemma implemented a process of cognitive analysis developing a particular course of action for that dilemma. The cognitive process requires higher, more complex levels of thinking such as formal operations (Piaget, 1965) or abstract reasoning.

Rest's theory and model have been recognized not only for allowing empirical literature on ethics training but also for providing a model for training ethics (Welfel & Kitchener, 1992) earning it prominence as one of the primary models of ethical decision-making development. Rest's model is relevant to the current study as his theory suggests that cognitive analysis follows an interactive hierarchy. This study proposes to investigate the relationship between a master's level counselor trainee's level of abstract reasoning, a function of higher cognitive ability, and the ability of discernment.

In summary, Lawrence Kohlberg was greatly influenced by Jean Piaget's work, which focused on the reasoning processes underlying children's behavior in their cognitive developmental stages while Kohlberg's own work focused on reasoning processes underlying moral development. Ethical development involves learning, a cognitive process for interpreting data, or discernment. As established in chapter one of this study through the presentation of various ethical decision making models, each of which had the common factor of identifying the existence of a problem and its specific elements, discernment is an important component in the process of ethical reasoning and decision making. Ethical discernment is one component of this cognitive process that is the ability to identify the ethical issues or dilemmas posed by a particular situation. Kohlberg's theory proposed that moral development progresses through specific stages. He identified three levels with two stages in each progressing from pre-conventional to post-conventional. The final stage centered on universal moral principles for the good of humanity. Rest's model is theoretically linked to the cognitive theory of Kohlberg's work (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003). One main difference being that Rest's model was interactive rather than following a temporal model. His work has been recognized as a model for training ethics (Welfel & Kitchener, 1992).

Two prominent paradigms of moral development have thus far been presented proposing that ethical development progresses through stages and involves learning, a cognitive process for interpreting data, discernment. Ethical discernment, the ability to identify the ethical issues or dilemmas posed by a particular situation or set of circumstances, is one component of this cognitive process. This cognitive process

requires higher, more complex levels of thinking such as formal operations (Piaget, 1965) or abstract reasoning.

The ethical models presented in this chapter propose that reasoning ability follows a developmental progression through cognitive stages. The relationship between the level of abstract reasoning and discernment ability will be reviewed here.

Similar to Kohlberg's pre-conventional stage and Rest's moral sensitivity stage in their perspective models of moral reasoning development, cognitive complexity tends to progress from a somewhat concrete level to a more abstract level of thought process. Kohlberg suggested that thoughts about ethical problems have "distinct structural properties" which proceed through specific levels as the person matures (Neukrug, 1996, p. 101). The lowest level thoughts tend to be black and white, right or wrong. A person operating at this level is likely to recognize an ethical dilemma as such, that is to recognize an ethical code concern, yet fail to recognize possible multiple code conflicts or the nunaciaces of a dilemma that require a more abstract and complex cognitive process. Counselors at the lower cognitive developmental level may see ethical guidelines as the singular authority and see any further "soul searching" as needless or a way to complicate matters (Neukring, 1996, p. 102). Neukring presented an illustration of two counselors one at the lower and one at the upper level of thought dealing with the same ethical situation. The situation involved a terminally ill client who had disclosed intent to commit suicide to end his pain and suffering and die with dignity. The counselor operating within the lower thought level identified the guideline stating a counselor must take reasonable action when a client is in clear and imminent danger of harming self and hospitalized the client. Whereas the counselor operating within the

higher level of thought also identified the guideline of autonomy and recognized the two

guidelines of imminent self-harm and autonomy were in conflict with each other. The

second counselor identified various elements of the dilemma and possible consequences

of available choices and relied on introspective reasoning and analysis rather than

external authority (Neukring, 1996). This required more complex cognitive ability or

abstract thinking.

While a novice counselor may appreciate and even need the supportive structure

that ethical codes can provide (Neukring, 1996), more seasoned professionals realize that

ethical understandings and behaviors require ongoing analysis and that ethical dilemmas

are complex (Meara, 1996). In 1984, Karen Kitchner adapted the biomedical model of

ethics developed by Beauchamp and Childress (Meara, 1996). This adapted model is

based on a hierarchical model of ethical justification and it has three levels. The lowest

level is based on everyday situations utilizing common sense and the development of

"rules." The second level is intuitive based and relates the development of "principles."

The third and final level is based on a critical evaluative stance and extends to "theory"

(Meara, 1996). The idea being that as an ethical situation becomes more complex and the

subtle elements of the dilemma become more difficult to discern a counselor may

progress to a higher level of abstract thinking and look beyond the rules to the principles

and theory or theoretical reasoning behind the rules (Meara, 96). This implies that the

counselor needs to have the cognitive ability to utilize and practice abstract reasoning.

That is the ability to think beyond the obvious or the concrete and to discern the various

elements of a complex ethical dilemma, identifying code conflicts, and thinking through

possible consequences as well as grasping the theory behind the rules. Just as students are

expected to understand the nuances of therapy and connections of theory and practice or theory and research, they also need to have the ability of discernment that includes recognizing ambiguity, taking perspective, and an understanding of the connections between current behavior and future consequences (Meara, 1996). The theories presented thus far have suggested a relationship between abstract reasoning and discernment ability. Next three studies that have investigated this theory will be reviewed.

A study conducted at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) on moral decision making and non-toleration of honor code offenses (Roffey, 1992) consisted of a randomly selected control group from the general population of cadet volunteers (n=162) and a group of volunteers who had been convicted of honor code violations (n=24). Two instruments were used, the Defining Issues Test (DIT) to measure moral judgment and the USAFA Issues Survey to measure attitude.   The DIT contains six hypothetical stories involving ethical/moral dilemmas. Each story is followed by 12 statements based on Kohlberg's model of moral reasoning development. The USAFA Issues Survey is a paper and pencil test developed for this study. This test presents four dilemmas regarding toleration of honor code violations, followed by four Honor Code Attitude Questions. One factor examined in this study was the grade point average (GPA) differences between the violators group and the non-violators group. Results indicated that the mean GPA of the violator group was significantly lower than the mean GPA of the control group, a finding consistent with findings from West Point where honor violators had lower academic records than non-violators (Priest, 1987, as cited by Roffey 1992).   This suggests that those individuals operating at the more concrete level of cognitive development are less likely to recognize and pursue more complicated moral questions.

The violators group seemed more inclined to respond "pro-code" to questions specific to the Honor Code whereas those in the control group seemed more likely to consider tolerance due to extenuating circumstances (Roffey, 1992). Those at the lower level of moral development seemed to accept the scenarios at face value while those at the upper level seemed hesitant to make decisions without more information. The indication that those who were less likely to explore beyond the non-toleration rules were also those who had lower GPA's is an interesting finding but one that would need further investigation to consider its significance in moral development. This study suggests a relationship between the level of a person's moral development and level of cognitive functioning. Those operating at a higher level of cognitive "abstract" ability also demonstrated a higher level of moral/ethical reasoning.

Dinger (1997) explored analytical reasoning ability, as measured by the Graduate Record Exam Analytic (GRE-A) reasoning scale, as an individual difference variable in order to evaluate the effect of different decision making models on counselor trainees' responses to the Ethical Discrimination Inventory (EDI) and the Therapeutic Practice Survey (TPS). The EDI is an instrument developed by Baldick (1980) to assess counseling students ability to discern the ethical principles contained in various clinical vignettes. The TPS (Boyers, 1988) is a 20-item instrument that assesses participants' perceptions of the ethical nature of specific clinicians' behaviors working with adults. The results were that the participants' GRE-A scores correlated significantly positively with EDI performance. That is, those participants with higher analytical skill were able to discern more ethical issues on the EDI than participants with lower analytical skill. Dinger (1997) also found that some participants were able to recognize an ethical

dilemma yet were unable to discern the specific elements, a behavior related to the

dualistic vs. realistic thinking level of the participants. Simply put, they were more likely

to be able to recognize an ethical dilemma yet were less able to identify it. This suggests

that the problem participants had with discerning ethical dilemmas may be in their

cognitive complexity and information processing skills (DeBell, 2002).

DeBell (1998) compared the effectiveness of different ethics courses in teaching

ethical discernment to master's level counseling students. Participants were given the

previously described instruments the EDI and the TPS. Results indicated that

participants seemed to have a low level of ability to discern the specific ethical issues

embedded in the EDI scenarios yet they seemed to have a relatively high level of ability

to rate questionable clinician behaviors on the TPS. The researchers suggested this might

be due to these two activities involving different levels of cognitive complexity (DeBell,

2002). That is, the ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma may require more

complex abstract thought process than being able to simply identify that a behavior is

ethical or unethical. Furthermore, responses on the EDI are open-ended, prose type

responses. Upon examination of the actual responses researchers found further support

for the concept that cognitive complexity was a factor in the results. It was observed that

some participants demonstrated a pattern of evaluating the therapist behavior in the

scenarios yet failed to identify the specifics of the ethical dilemma (DeBell, 2002).

In summary, theory suggests that cognitive ability develops along a hierarchical

pattern, progressing from a concrete level to a more abstract level. A person operating

from a more concrete (i.e. lower) level tends to utilize more dualistic thinking and may be

able to recognize an ethical dilemma yet lack the information processing skills needed to

discern specific elements of an ethical dilemma (DeBell, 2002). Kohlberg's theory

suggests this skill requires the cognitive complexity apparent in those with a higher level

of abstract reasoning ability (Neukrig, 1996). While research findings are limited due to

the lack of empirical studies on this issue, they do seem to support the idea that the ability

to discern specific elements of an ethical dilemma seems to require more complex

abstract reasoning ability (DeBell, 2002; Dinger, 1997; Roffey 1992; Dinger, 1997).

Personality and Ethical Discernment

Next a review of the philosophy, theory, and available research on a person's

personality and ability to discern ethical issues will be presented. The debate between

principle and virtue ethics will be addressed as related to personality traits and character

in ethical decisions making and discernment. The previous section suggested a possible

relationship between cognitive complexity or abstract reasoning ability and the ability to

discern the complex components of an ethical dilemma. Based on a review of the

literature, there is no direct research or theoretical support for a relationship between

personality and discernment. However, the literature does suggest that personality traits

have a relationship with ethics, and that personality factors may relate to cognition. For

example, Costa and McCrae (1989) propose that personality traits and character traits are

overlapping constructs. These traits as defined by Costa and McCrae are "a dimension of

psychological functioning that can be used to differentiate and thus characterize

individuals" (Costa & McCrae, 1989, p. 50). In her discussion of principles and virtues,

Meara (1996) defined virtues as, "traits of character that are assigned merit in some

context" (p. 6). Relating to ethics she suggested that ethics based on the guidelines of

principles alone is not sufficient, because a person's virtues influence matters of right or

proper conduct. For example, consider the counselor who is at a social situation making

small talk and sipping on an alcoholic beverage when an acquaintance begins to share

concerns about her son. The counselors' virtue will influence his/her conduct. The

counselor could give intervention suggestions to "help" the woman and or impress others

at the party. Or the counselor could recognize dual relationship, confidentiality and

consent concerns, consider the possible influence of the alcohol on present competency

and privately inform the woman that he/she would be willing to discuss this or provide an

appropriate referral at some time when the counselor has not had a drink. Suppose the

counselor makes the latter choice and the woman begins to cry presenting a suicide note

apparently written by the son quite recently. Now the counselor in this example finds

multiple principles in conflict. Principles of ethics are guidelines for counselors to look

to for guidance and aspirations, but they are not designed to cover every possible

situation, resolution of conflicting principles, or contain "cookbook" answers. Ethical

situations require an understanding of theory behind the principles and an ongoing

analysis of the dilemma. Merea (1996) also suggests that theory sometimes fails to

recognize the importance of personal characteristics in ethics. How might the counselor

from the aforementioned example react differently if his/her character traits include the

traits of openness versus conscientiousness or neuroticism?   Others, such as Sophn

(2000) seem to agree with the value of recognizing the importance of personal

characteristics in ethics as he proposes that character, moral sensitivity, and motivation

must be studied as well as moral development. Bergman (2002) suggests that it is not

enough to reach the developmental stage of knowing right from wrong. A person may

recognize right from wrong yet fail to take action. That is, it seems to be a trait of a person's personality that enables him or her to act ethically. He further suggests, "integration of morality and personality is key" (p. 116). For a person to act morally, the personality traits that promote right conduct are interwoven with moral understanding. Bersoff (1996) concludes that principle and virtue ethics compliment each other and are not separate. He suggests that there are combinations of factors that contributes to ethical conduct such as knowledge, problem-solving approach, understanding philosophy of principles and basic character. Investigating the personality traits as relates to ethical development, specifically as relates to discernment ability, could be useful for to help counselor educators design programs to develop desirable traits.

A study of 85 undergraduates investigated the relationship between need for cognition and the domains of the Big Five Model (Sadowski, 1997). For this study the need for cognition was defined as a personality construct referring to an individual's tendency to both engage in and enjoy effortful thought. The Big Five Model is a basic model of five primary factors that form a potential model for describing the structure of personality. The terms commonly used to label these primary factors are openness, conscientious, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Engler, 2004). According to the NEO-PI-R Manual some dimensions of the Openness scale include active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, intellectual curiosity, and independence of judgment (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Dimensions of the Conscientiousness scale include being purposeful, strong-willed, determined, scrupulous, punctual and reliable (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Dimensions of the Neuroticism scale include a proneness to irrational ideas, being less in control of impulses, and tend to

experience negative affects (Costa & McCrae, 1992). A significant positive relationship

was found between need for cognition and the domains of openness to experience and

conscientiousness (Sadowski, 1993). This suggests that those individuals who engage in

and enjoy effortful thought also exhibit a willingness to consider new ideas and engage in

effortful cognitive activity. There was also a significant negative correlation between the

need for cognition and the domain of neuroticism (Sadowski, 1997). This indicates those

individuals who engage in and enjoy effortful thought would lack the characteristic of

emotional instability. Sadowski suggested that persons high in need for cognition enjoy

cognitive activity, tend to exhibit curiosity, are intrinsically motivated intellectually, and

are more tolerant of different ideas. This study seems to indicate a relationship between

cognitive ability and personality factors.

In summary, Sadowski's (1997) study suggests that personality factors may relate

to cognition. The literature review did not yield any direct relationship between

personality factors and the ability of ethical discernment. However personality traits and

character traits are proposed to be overlapping constructs (Costa & McCrae, 1989).

Principle and virtue ethics compliment each other and there is a combination of factors

contributing to ethical conduct, one of which is basic character (Bersoff, 1996). The

importance of studying the relationship between personality traits and ethical

development, specifically as relates to ethical discernment, could be useful for counselor

educators in designing programs to develop desirable traits.

Ethics Training and Ethical Discernment

Review of the literature was able to yield both research supporting the efficacy of

ethics training and research specific to the effects of ethical training on the ability to

discern elements of an ethical dilemma. Operating under the assumption that the ability to ethically discern elements of an ethical dilemma is a vital, initial stage in the ethical decision making process and further operating under the assumption that ethical decision making is a standard component of ethics training, it would be pertinent to present literature discussing the efficacy of ethics education. This will be presented in the format of the history of ethics training mandates, theory and research studies. Then research investigating the effects of ethics training on the ability to discern elements of and ethical dilemma will be presented.

Ethics has been viewed as important both informally by members of professional organizations and formally as evidenced by the development of professional codes of ethics (Wilson & Ranft, 1993). The American Psychological Association (APA) first mandated that every APA accredited training program include ethics training in their curriculum in 1979 (Bersoff, 1999). They also mandated instructions and developed standards for students at the doctoral level (Wilson & Ranft, 1993). Two other national organizations, Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and the American Counseling Association (ACA), have recognized the need for ethics education and have developed standards for both graduate programs and faculty. CACREP in 1994 and the ACA in 1995 (Downs, 2003). Organizations such as APA and ACA have also developed publications and included more ethics training in their conferences (Wilson & Ranft). These organizations seem to recognize that ethics codes and rules are not sufficient to promote sound ethical decision making and behavior but that ethical decision making and behavior can be taught. The theory that ethical decision making can be taught will be addressed next followed by research results.

As presented in chapter 1, there is a number of differing ethical decision making models being taught to counselor trainees. While there seems to be a lack of agreement on the best teaching model, there does seem to be agreement that ethics training is important and beneficial to counselors (Wilson & Ranft, 1993). Handelsman (1986) suggests that ethical reasoning is a teachable skill that can be taught much the same way that therapeutic theory and techniques can be taught in psychotherapy training. It has been demonstrated through empirical evidence that a learning effect does take place when counselor education programs include ethics courses (Downs, 2003). Various research utilizing surveys and questionnaires have reflected opinions that ethics training is beneficial in dealing with ethical dilemmas. Graduate students themselves expressed, through surveys, a perception that the inclusion of ethics training assisted them in their preparing for ethical issues they may encounter in their professional roles (Wilson & Ranft, 1993). Another survey of 294 practicing counselors, investigating what had helped them to understand, cope with, and prevent ethical dilemmas, rated graduate course work in ethics and collegial discussions as the most helpful (Haas, Malouf, & Mayerson. 1986). In yet another survey of practioners, data suggested that those who had formal ethics courses were more likely to recognize burn-out or impairment in their colleagues and in themselves and were more likely to report a colleague or seek assistance for themselves than those practioners who had no formal ethics course (Wood, Klein, Cross, Lammers, & Elliott, 1985). In addition to the surveys and questionnaires presented here there is research that examines the outcome of learning experiences that have a component of ethics training. These research results will be presented next.

In 1976, Paradise measured master's level counseling students' ethical judgment ability and found that those who had been involved in small group discussions of various ethical dilemmas scored higher on the ethical judgment instrument those who had not been involved in such discussion groups. Also in 1976, Granum and Erickson found that graduate level counseling students who had studied confidentially issues and been given ethical dilemmas to assess were significantly less likely to violate confidential information than those students who had not had the confidentiality training. In another study of graduate students who had taken a psychology course that included discussion of ethical dilemmas scored significantly higher on a questionnaire measuring ethical conflict awareness that those students who had not had such discussions in their classes (Morrison & Teta, 1979). The next study to be presented was designed to investigate a certain training model on ethical decision making. It divided undergraduate students into three groups using random selection. One group had a three-hour workshop using case vignettes with ethical dilemmas. The second group had workshop handouts and instructions and the third group had instructions only. All three groups were tested for their decision making quality and the treatment group, the one whose participants had the three-hour workshop, scored significantly higher than the two control groups (Gawthrop & Uhlemann, 1992). Research specific to the effects of ethical training on the ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma will be presented next.

In a study of 234 psychology interns investigating the difference in ethical discernment ability between interns who had completed a formal training course in ethics and those who had not completed such a course, there was significant difference found. They were given the Ethical Discrimination Inventory and the ability to discriminate the

elements of ethical dilemmas was significantly higher in the interns who had completed

the ethics course than those who had not (Baldick, 1980). In a another study

investigating the outcomes of differing decision making models, Dinger (1997), found

that the counseling interns participating in his study were significantly better at

discerning elements of an ethical dilemma if they had completed an ethics course than

those who had not completed formal ethics training. Similarly, in another study

comparing pre-test and post-test measures investigating differing teaching methods for

ethics courses, it was found that irregardless of the teaching method used, the master's

level counseling students were significantly improved in two areas, ethical knowledge

and ethical discernment, implying that ethics training has a positive effect on ability to

discern elements of an ethical dilemma (DeBell, Montgmery, Waid & Wood, 2002).

In summary, professional organizations have advocated for ethics training for

decades and research has supported the efficacy of ethics training. Ethics training has

been found to be important and beneficial to counselors (Wilson & Ranft, 1993). Ethical

reasoning is a teachable skill that can be taught and there is empirical evidence that a

learning effect does take place when counselor education programs include ethics courses

(Downs, 2003). Furthermore, research also supports that ethics training significantly

improves graduate students ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma. Research

seems to support the theory that ethics training does improve ethical knowledge, behavior

and the ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma.

Practicum Experience and Ethical Discernment

The final area to be reviewed will be the relationship between practicum

experience and the ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma. Based on a review

of the literature, direct research or theoretical support for a relationship between

practicum experience and discernment is sparse. One thought piece by Handelsman

(1986) suggests that while it may be an accepted assumption that learning occurs when

one experiences ethical situations and issues are encountered in practice, he cautions that

it could be a dangerous way to develop ethical decision making skills. In one study

investigating responses to ten vignettes containing ethical problems, it was found that the

responses of the 294 randomly selected practicing psychologist differed in relation to

number of years of experience. The implication being, experience may be a factor in

ethical decision making (Haas, Malouf, and Mayerson, 1988). This same study found that

psychologist believed that what was most helpful in dealing with ethical situations was

their training in ethics education that incorporated coursework and collegial discussion.

It is considered common practice for practicum students to address both clinical and

ethical issues in the form of collegial discussion with their peers and instructors (Dinger,

1997).

This review yields only one study directly related to practicum experience and

ethical discernment ability. In his study investigating the outcomes of differing decision

making models, Dinger (1997) also investigated the effect of having a practicum class

experience may have on participants ability to discern. Dinger found no significant

difference in ethical discernment ability between those who had completed a practicum

class and those who had not.

In summary, while practioners identify experience with ethical situations as

promoting learning (Handelsman, 1986) and research shows that practioners with more

experience differ in their responses to ethical dilemmas (Hass, Malouf, and Mayerson,

1988) there seems to be a lack of evidence that experience leads to improved decision making or ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma (Dinger, 1997).

Summary of Literature Review

This review explored literature focused on ethical development and the possible influence of abstract reasoning, personality, ethics training, and practicum experience may have on a person's ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma.

Two prominent models of ethical reasoning development were presented. First Lawrence Kohlberg's theory that there are core values, universal to all human societies (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003) and that moral development progresses through specific stages (Sophn, 2000) was explored. His three levels, two stages per level, model was defined and presented. Kohlberg concluded that justice is the core concept of morality. Next, James Rest's model of moral development was presented. Rest's model is theoretically linked to the cognitive theory of Kohlberg's work (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003). One major difference in their work was that Rest's model was interactive while Kohlberg's followed a temporal order. Rest developed a four-component model; each component contained both cognition and affect (Welfel & Kitchner, 1992). The first component of Rest's model, moral sensitivity, implied a need for the ability of discernment as it refers to recognizing and interpreting a situation as a moral one (Welfel & Kitchner, 1992). These models propose that ethical development involves learning, a cognitive process for interpreting data. This interpretation of data, or discernment, is one component of this cognitive process, which requires higher, more complex levels of thinking such as abstract thinking.

The relationship between abstract reasoning and the ability to discern specific elements of an ethical dilemma has been presented in this review. Theory suggests that cognitive ability progresses along a hierarchal line, progressing from a concrete level to a more abstract level (Piaget, 1965). Furthermore, Kohlberg's theory suggests that the information processing skills needed to discern specific elements of an ethical dilemma requires the cognitive complexity found within a higher level of abstract reasoning ability (Neukrig, 1996). While research findings are sparse, due to lack of empirical studies, available findings do seem to support the idea that the ability to discern specific elements of an ethical dilemma requires more complex abstract reasoning ability (DeBell, 2002; Dinger, 1997; Roffey, 1992).

The literature suggests that personality traits have a relationship with ethics and that personality factors may relate to cognition. It was proposed that personality and character traits are overlapping constructs (Costa & McCrae, 1989). Principle ethics and virtue ethics were defined and it was suggested that they compliment each other. In essence, a person's virtues influences matters of right or proper conduct, that principles alone are not sufficient (Merea, 1996). The value of recognizing the importance of personal characteristics in ethics must be studied as well as moral development (Sophn, 2000); in order to understand the relationship personality factors may have with ethical behavior. The Big Five Model was defined and research presented that suggested that persons who engage in and enjoy effortful thought also exhibit a willingness to consider new ideas and engage in effortful cognitive activity. Findings also suggested that persons who engage in and enjoy effortful thought would lack the characteristic of emotional

instability. These research findings suggested a relation between cognitive level and personality factors (Sadowski, 1997).

The importance of ethics training in the view of major organizations such as APA and ACA was established as the history of mandates was presented in this review. The review of the literature found ethics training to be important and beneficial to counselors (Wilson & Ranft, 1993) and research has supported the efficacy of ethics training. Research was presented supporting the theory that ethics training improves ethical knowledge and behavior. As well as research presenting support that ethics training significantly improves graduate students ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma (Baldick, 1980; DeBell, et al., 2002; Dinger, 1997).

Review of the literature investigating the effects of practicum experience on ethical knowledge, behavior or discernment ability yielded minimal results. While surveys and questionnaires showed that practioners identify experience with ethical situations as promoting learning (Handelsman, 1986) and research shows that practioners with more experience differ in their responses to ethical dilemmas (Hass, Malouf, and Mayerson, 1988) there was a lack of evidence that experience leads to improved decision making or ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma (Dinger, 1997).

The literature review offers philosophy, theory, thought pieces and research pertaining to abstract reasoning, personality factors, ethics training and practicum experience in relation to ethical behavior. Actual empirical research supporting or refuting the possible relationship between abstract reasoning, personality factors, ethics training and practicum experience on ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma were minimal.

The next chapter of this study will inform of the method proposed to further investigate these possible relationships.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Ethics and ethical decision making are part of the everyday aspects of counseling. The ability to ethically discern the multiple potential components of an ethical dilemma is commonly recognized as a part of the various models of ethical decision making (Garcia, 2003). With the establishment of ethical discernment as an element of these differing decision making models, it would seem advantageous to recognize factors that may relate to the ability to discern the elements of an ethical dilemma. Researchers have explored abstract reasoning, personality traits, ethics training, and experience in relation to ethical discernment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate counselor trainees at the master's level to consider how abstract reasoning, selected personality traits, completion of an ethics course, and level of practicum experience contribute to the variance in their ability to discern the elements of an ethical dilemma.

Participants

The participants in this study were 123 master's level counselor trainees who were currently enrolled in counselor education programs in different universities in the Midwestern United States. As these will be extant classrooms, students not in counselor

programs were not analyzed. One university was a large Midwestern state university,

with 12,000 + students. Data was collected from two different campus locations at that

university. The other was a small, Regional state university, with under 8,000 students.

Both universities were considered rural rather than urban.

Instrumentation

Certain criteria were used to select instruments for this study. Instruments were

selected based on cost, time required for administration, group testing capability, ability

to assess the factors of interest, and reliability and validity. Four instruments were used

for this study. Each instrument is reviewed below and a rationale for the use of each will

be presented next. The instruments are included in Appendix A, B, C and D.

Demographic Questionnaire

The following demographic information was collected from participants: (a)

gender, (b) age, (c) ethnicity, (d) current level of education, (e) name of educational

institution, (f) track, e.g., community counseling, school counseling, student personnel

counseling, other, (g) completion of master's level ethics class, e.g., yes, no, or currently

enrolled (h) practicum experience, e.g., none, currently enrolled, or completed and (i)

number of hours completed in master's degree program. See Appendix A.

Ethical Discrimination Inventory (EDI)

The Ethical Discrimination Inventory (EDI; Baldick, 1980), found in Appendix B,

assesses the ability to discern ethical principles embedded in various clinical situations. It

consists of 12 counseling scenarios with one to four different ethical issues embedded in

each. A total of 44 ethical issues are embedded in each of the 12 scenarios. Participants

identify ethical issues found in each scenario. The EDI requires that the participants read

each case scenario and list each relevant ethical issue as opposed to simply recognizing

their existence (Lindsey, 1986). One point is received for each correctly identified

ethical issue. A total score is determined by summing the correct responses across all

twelve scenarios. The more ethical issues correctly identified by the participant the

higher the score. The maximum score possible is 44. Lipsitz (1985) provides scoring

instructions requiring that two different raters score the participants' responses and that

the raters agree that the number of points earned by participants on each scenario not vary

by more than one point. Averaging the two raters' scores derives the final score.

One example of a scenario from the EDI is: "A client informs his therapist that he

plans to murder his girlfriend due to her unfaithfulness to him. He is extremely angry.

The therapist later contacts both the girl and authorities explaining the situation"

(Baldick, 1980). This particular scenario contains three ethical issues, with a possible

maximum score of 3. The three ethical issues are moral and legal standards,

confidentiality, and welfare of the consumer.

Various journal articles, books and actual clinical experiences were considered for

use in the development of the EDI scenarios in an effort to establish content validity

(Anastasi, 1982, as cited by Dinger, 1997). Originally, the EDI contained 20 clinical

scenarios, each containing several ethical issues, dilemmas, or considerations dealing

with counseling and psychotherapy. Three licensed psychologists who had taught or

written about ethics made up an expert panel to independently review and outline the

ethical issues, dilemmas, and considerations of each clinical scenario. Each panel

member's evaluation was used to develop a key, which was then submitted to each

member for consideration and reevaluation. The final key was unanimously agreed upon

by the panel members as containing the ethical consideration for each scenario. Eight of the original twenty scenarios were eliminated due to ambiguity or redundancy of ethical principles (Baldick, 1980).

Baldick (1980) used a one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to evaluate differences in counseling psychology students' ability to discriminate ethical issues as related to their ethics education level. The results were that students who had formal education in ethics scored significantly higher in their ability to discriminate ethical issues than those who had not received formal ethics education.

In an effort to further establish the reliability and validity of the EDI, Lipsitz (1985) conducted a pilot study, which led to some changes in the directions of the EDI. The EDI score key had been established using the American Psychology Association (APA) code of ethics from 1977. Lipsitz (1985) questioned what effect, if any, the use of the outdated code might have on the scoring key. Using an expert panel, he expanded and clarified the scoring rules and directions for the EDI. He assessed for interrater reliability of the EDI between scores of each rater by calculating a Pearson's Product Moment Correlation coefficient. The reliability coefficient was found to be high and positive ($r=. 95$). Lipsitz's (1985) pilot study offers support to the reliability and validity of the EDI. Lipsitz's updated scoring rules and directions were used for this study.

Discernment has been found to be an important step in the ethical decision making process (Garcia, 2003). Assouline (1989) identified discernment as not only critical to a student's learning process, but also a prerequisite to justifying their positions in counseling. Merea (1996) emphasized the need for discernment, as there is no ethical theory that can completely guide all responses. The EDI was chosen as the instrument to

measure discernment ability in this study because it has been used with graduate level counseling and clinical students and because it has demonstrated adequate reliability and validity (Dinger, 1997).

Culture Fair Intelligence Tests

The Cultural Fair Intelligence Test (CFIT; Measuring Intelligence, 1973), found in Appendix C, is a paper and pencil test. The CFIT adult version, consist of four subtests: Series, requires completion of four drawings by choosing one of five choices; Classification, which requires the participant to choose one of a set of five drawings that is different from the others; Matrices, which requires the participant select a drawing to complete a matrix; and Conditions, which requires the participant to select from five drawings of overlapping geometric figures the one or two dots that could be placed to fit the specifications of a model **(**Mental Measurements Yearbook p**.** 453). The CFIT is a timed test, administered following specific instructions and may be administered in an individual or group format. The examiner presents the given examples prior to each subtest allowing for questions and clarification to ensure an understanding of the instructions. The examiner also encourages the test participant(s) to try and respond to as many items as they can, and guesses are okay as points are not lost for wrong guesses. Raw scores are obtained by using a scoring key and are converted into a normalized, standard IQ score using tables found in the CFIT manual. This IQ score has a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 16 (Measuring Intelligence, 1973). The CFIT was constructed to more equally assess intelligence or the natural ability of persons from differing cultures by use of nonverbal stimuli (Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 2004).   The manual states that the CFIT is somewhat free of such influences as

specific learning, educational achievement, social or environmental privileges. It also

claims have a high saturation on general ability, *g* (Mental Measurements Yearbook, p.

453), which refers to a property of cognitive processing. This property is a reflection of

individual differences in information processing as evidenced in such functions as

"attending, selecting, searching, internalizing, deciding, discriminating, generalizing,

learning, remembering, and using incoming and past acquired information to solve

problems and cope with exigencies of the environment" (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2002, p.

77). The CFIT manual reports a reliability of .85 for the scale designed to assess adults

(Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 2004).

Preliminary research suggests that the ability to discern elements of an ethical

dilemma may require complex abstract reasoning ability (DeBell 2002; Dinger 1997;

Roffey1992). The CFIT was chosen to assess participants abstract reasoning ability based

on its properties of cultural fairness and ability to assess cognitive processing. This

instrument can also be administered in a group format.

Neuroticism Extraversion Openness-Five Factor Inventory

The Neuroticism Extraversion Openness-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa

& McCrae, 1992), contained in Appendix D, is a shortened version of the Neuroticism

Extraversion Openness-Personality Inventory- Revised (NEO-PI-R). The NEO-PI-R is a

comprehensive measure of five domains of personality which include neuroticism,

extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientious. Based on the trait tendencies

described for neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness being most theoretically

related to the research questions in this study, only these three domains were investigated.

Persons scoring high in the Neuroticism (N) domain exhibit tendencies to experience

such negative affects as fear, sadness, guilt, embarrassment, anger and disgust. They also

tend to have irrational ideas, difficulty controlling impulses, and cope poorly with stress.

An item example for the N domain is: "I am not a worrier." Persons scoring high on the

Openness (O) domain display tendencies toward an active imagination, attentiveness to

inner feelings, aesthetic sensitivity, intellectual curiosity, prefer variety, and are

independent in their judgments. They consider novel ideas and are willing to entertain

unconventional values, be flexible. Those who score low on the O domain tend to be

conservative and conventional in their outlook and behavior, prefer the familiar, and have

a narrower scope and interest level. An item example for the O domain is: "I don't like

to waste my time daydreaming." Persons who score high on the Conscientiousness (C)

domain show tendencies to be purposeful, strong-willed, determined, scrupulous,

punctual, and reliable. Persons who score low on the C domain tend to be less exacting in

applying moral principles than those who score high. An item example for the C domain

is: "I keep my belongs neat and clean." (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

The NEO-FFI is designed to provide a brief, quick assessment of the five domains

of adult personality (Sigma Assessment System, 2001). It was developed using the five

personality domains extracted from factor analysis of the 180-item NEO-PI-R. The

validimax method was used to select 12 items having the highest positive or negative

loading on the corresponding factor. The NEO-FFI is a self-report inventory; it consists

of 60 items, 12 in each domain. It is a paper and pencil test and may be administered in a

group setting. It is hand scored, converting raw scores into a T-score profile (Costa &

McCrae, 1992). The NEO-FFI utilizes a 5-point likert scale ranging from strongly

disagree to strongly agree for participant responses. Scores are determined by summing

the responses to the 12 items in each domain. Each domain score can range from 0 to 48. The higher scores indicate a stronger presence of the traits associated with that personality domain while the lower scores indicate a weaker presence of the personality domain traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

The NEO-FFI includes three items for validity check. Participants were asked if they had responded to all of the statements, had entered responses in correct spaces, and had responded accurately and honestly (Costa & McCrae, 1992).   "The NEO-FFI scales show correlations of .75 to .89 with the NEO-PI-R validimax factors. Internal consistency values range from .74 to .89" (Sigma Assessment Systems, 2001).

Personality traits have been regarded as a factor contributing to ethical conduct (Bersoff, 1996) and are thought to influence matters of right or proper conduct (Meara, 1996). The NEO-FFI has been chosen as a measure of personality traits because of its psychometric properties, length of administration time and ability to be administered in a group setting. Only the NEO-FFI scales of neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness were used in this study because the traits measured by the scales were believed to be the most theoretically related to the research questions being investigated.

Procedure

The program director of each university was contacted to inquire about the institutional approval procedure and to determine the proper procedure for setting an appointment to collect data. The procedure recommended by the training director for each university was followed.

The appropriate faculty member was contacted and a time negotiated to attend designated classrooms and collect data. The primary investigator or her designee

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collected the data. A designee collected data from one classroom; she was an instructor

who received instruction from the primary investigator regarding the data gathering

procedure. The primary investigator collected all other data. The classroom instructor

would introduce this researcher and explain the intent to collect data for a research

project on ethics. The instructor explained the voluntary nature of participating in order

to minimize any feelings on the part of the students that they were required to participate.

The instructor would then leave the room. This researcher or designee re-emphasized the

voluntary nature of participating in the research and also assured the students that

confidentiality would be maintained. Benefits of participating were presented including

learning about ethics from a participant stance and being eligible to receive a candy bar in

appreciation for their participation.

Students who volunteered were asked to sign an informed consent and complete a

packet of questionnaires. The packet included the demographic questionnaire, EDI,

CFIT, and NEO-FFI. Participants were instructed to not write their names on the forms

or the packet. The informed consent forms were collected separately to insure anonymity

and respondent confidentiality. The time required to complete the packets varied from

approximately 40 to 50 minutes. Participants were identified by the use of a research

code to assure anonymity. Those who choose to not participate were given a choice to

leave the room or remain and work quietly while the participating students completed the

research instruments.

Research Design and Data Analyses

Data analyses were done based on each individual research question. In general,

the relationship between six independent variables (IV) and one dependent variable (DV),

were examined through correlation analysis. The six independent variables were: an abstract reasoning score (continuous variable), three personality trait scores: neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness (continuous variable), completion of an ethics class dichotomous variable), and completion of practicum experience (dichotomous variable). According to Tabachnick and Fidell (1983), the number of minimum cases required for this sample would be 4-5 times more cases than IVs or at least 20-25 participants.

Where appropriate, independent samples *t* tests were conducted to compare the mean scores among various study variables.

The raters for the EDI were the primary researcher and two volunteer doctoral level counseling psychology students. The primary researcher trained the raters on how to score the EDI. The three raters jointly rated two examples for practice then independently rated ten of the instruments from the sample. The raters compared ratings on the ten instruments and discussed their reasoning for their scoring to insure that all the raters were consistent in the protocol being used to evaluate responses. The two volunteer raters each scored approximately half of the EDI's and the primary researcher was the second rater on all of the EDI's.

The entire study results will be presented in chapter 4.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate counselor trainees at the master's level to consider how abstract reasoning, personality traits, ethics education and practicum experience (the independent variables) may contribute to the variance in their ability to discern the elements of an ethical dilemma (the dependent variable). The relationships between the trainees' abstract reasoning ability, three different personality variables, which were neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness, completion of an ethics course, and completion of a practicum experience, were examined.

Selection of participants, demographic information and interater reliability are presented in this chapter. Results are organized according to research questions presented in this study and descriptive statistics are presented as well.

Selection of Participants

The participants of this study were 123 master's level counselor trainees who were enrolled in counselor education programs in two different Midwestern universities. One university was a large Midwestern state university, with 12,000 + students. Data were collected from two different campus locations at that university. The other was a small, Regional state university, with under 8,000 students. Training directors and classroom instructors in the community counseling or counseling psychology departments were contacted for permission to come to existing classrooms to collect data

from master's level counselor trainees enrolled in their courses .The researcher went into the classrooms and explained the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of participation. Data were collected during the Summer semester 2005 and Fall semester 2005. One hundred and twenty-five students consented to participate in the study, two of those failed to complete the instruments and their data was not used in the analysis, resulting in a final study sample of 123 participants.

Demographic Data

The demographic data were gathered from a total of 123 subjects. Twenty of the participants were men (16.3%) and 103 were women (83.7%). The mean age of the sample was 31.3 years with a standard deviation of 9.4 years. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 62 years of age.

Ninety-three (75.6%) of the participants self identified their ethnicity to be White/Caucasian; one person (.8%) identified as Asian; six (4.9%) identified as American Indian; one (.8%) identified as Hispanic/Latino; three identified (2.4%) as Black/African American. and nineteen (15.4%) as other. One identified as South Pacific Islander (.8%), and eighteen (14.6%) identified as Bi-Racial: American Indian and Caucasian.

Seventy-seven (62.6%) of the participants were attending a large university (12,000 + students) and 46 (37.4 %) of the participants were attending a small university (under 8,000).

Sixty-four (52%) participants identified themselves as being in a CACREP approved program while 59 (48%) identified themselves as being in a program that was not CACREP approved.

Eighty-two (66.7%) participants identified themselves as majoring in community counseling, and 28 (22.8%) participants identified themselves as majoring in school counseling. Of the other 13 (10.6%) participants, 11 (10.6%) self identified as majoring in both community counseling and school counseling, one identified as an education major and one identified as seeking school counseling certification.

Twenty-six (21.1%) of the participants had completed a master's level ethics class while 97 (78.9%) of the participants had not completed a master's level ethics class. The demographic questionnaire asked participants to identify if they were currently enrolled in a master's level ethics class. Fifteen (12.2%) participants did report being currently enrolled in such a class. It was decided by the researcher to place these fifteen participants in the no category as the data were collected the first month of the semester and the assumption was made that there would not be a significant difference between being at the beginning of a class and not having the class.

Sixteen (13%) of the participants had completed a practicum experience and 107 (87%) had not. Nineteen participants did report being currently enrolled in such a class. It was decided by the researcher to place these 19 participants in the no category as the data was collected the first month of the semester and the assumption was made that there would not be a significant difference between being at the beginning of a practicum experience and not having any practicum experience.

Six (4.9%) of the participants had completed an internship while one hundred sixteen (94.3%) had not. One participant did not respond to this question. Seven (5.7%) participants did report being currently enrolled in their internship. It was decided by the researcher to place these seven participants in the no category as the data was collected

the first month of the semester and the assumption was made that there would not be a significant difference between being at the beginning of an internship and not having any internship experience.

Preliminary Analyses

The Ethical Discrimination Inventory (EDI; Baldick, 1980) assesses the ability to discern ethical principles embedded in various clinical situations. It consists of 12 counseling scenarios with one to four different ethical issues embedded in each. Participants identify ethical issues found in each scenario. One point is received for each correctly identified ethical issue. A total score is determined by summing the correct responses across all twelve scenarios. The more ethical issues correctly identified by the participant the higher the score. Lipsitz (1985) provides scoring instructions requiring that two different raters score the participants' responses and that the raters agree that the number of points earned by participants on each scenario not vary by more than one point. Averaging the two raters' scores derives the final score. The interrater reliability on the EDI was determined using Pearson R correlation, two-tailed analysis, the correlation between the raters was .99. The average EDI scores of the participants were normally distributed ($M = 12.88$, $SD = 4.69$); see Appendix E, Table 1. Scores ranged from a low of 3 to a high of 26.5.   Comparison of these results and Dinger's (1997) and Lipsitz's (1985) studies are as follows: Dinger's study of master's level counselor trainees' performance on the EDI ($M = 13.15$, $SD = 3.68$) ranged from scores of a low of 6.4 to a high of 21; whereas Lipsitz's study of doctoral level interns' performance on the EDI ($M = 18.7$, $SD = 3.9$) ranged from scores of a low of 12 to a high of 27.5.

Statistical analyses were not conducted on some the demographic variables, due to large differences in cell sizes. For example, there were 103 women and only 20 men in the sample. Other demographic variables demonstrating extreme variation in cell size were ethnicity and internship completion. Therefore, these variables were eliminated from further analyses in this study. Although the number of participants who completed an ethics course or practicum experience also showed large variation in cell size, these variables were used in the statistical analyses. However, the discrepancy in cell size may have limited the power of the analyses.

A preliminary analysis on other demographic variables was conducted to test for any relation between the demographic variables and the dependent variable, the EDI. A significant difference was found between the means on the EDI for the large and small university ($t(121) = 2.929$, $p = .004$). The mean of the EDI from the large university was significantly higher ($M = 13.8117$, $SD = 4.55597$) than the mean from the small university ($M = 11.3261$, S$D = 4.54999$); see Appendix E, Table 1. A significant difference was also found between the community and school track participants on their EDI scores ($t(108) = 2.637$, $p = .010$). The mean of the community counseling track group was significantly higher ($M = 13.6585$, $SD = 4.89512$) than the mean of the school counseling group ($M = 10.9464$, $SD = 4.05138$); see Appendix E, Table 1.

The means and standard deviations for all the study variables across the sample by large and small university and by community and school tracks can be found in the Appendix E, Table 1.

Finally, a decision was made to discard the "other" category in track of study due to its extreme difference in the EDI mean scores from the community and school

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counseling tracks across the large and small universities as demonstrated in the

histogram. See Appendix E, Figure 1.

Analyses and Research Questions

Research Question # 1 asked, is abstract reasoning ability, as measured by a

standardized instrument, related to the ability of master's level counseling trainees to

discern elements of ethical dilemmas?

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated examining the relationship

between master's level counselor trainees abstract reasoning ability, the CFIT score, and

ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma, the EDI score. The finding was a weak

positive correlation that was not significant ($r(122) = .065, p = .474$). Master's level

counselor trainees' abstract reasoning ability was not related to the discernment of

elements of an ethical dilemma.

Research Question # 2 asked are the personality traits of neuroticism, openness

and conscientiousness, as measured by a widely used personality inventory, related to the

ability of master's level counseling trainees to ethically discern elements of ethical

dilemmas?

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated examining the relationship

between master's level counselor trainees' score on the personality trait of neuroticism

and ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma, the EDI score. The finding was a

weak positive correlation that was not significant ($r(122) = .108, p = .232$). Neuroticism

was not related to the discernment of elements of an ethical dilemma.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated examining the relationship

between master's level counselor trainees' personality trait of openness score, and ability

to discern elements of an ethical dilemma, the EDI score. The finding was a weak

positive correlation that was not significant ($r(122) = .125, p = .168$). Openness was not

related to the discernment of elements of an ethical dilemma.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated examining the relationship

between master's level counselor trainees' personality trait of conscientiousness score

and ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma, the EDI score. The finding was a

weak, negative correlation that was not significant ($r(122) = -.139, \ p = 126$).

Conscientiousness is not related to the discernment of elements of an ethical dilemma.

Research Question # 3 asked, does the completion of a graduate level ethics class

relate to a master's level counselor trainees ability to ethically discern elements of ethical

dilemmas?

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated examining the relationship

between master's level counselor trainees' completion of an ethics class and ability to

discern elements of an ethical dilemma, the EDI score. The finding was a weak negative

correlation that was not significant ($r(122) = -.143, \ p = .115$). Completion of an ethics

class was not related to the discernment of elements of an ethical dilemma.

Research Question # 4 asked, does the completion of a practicum experience

relate to a master's level counselor trainees ability to ethically discern elements of ethical

dilemmas?

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated examining the relationship

between master's level counselor trainees' completion of a practicum experience and

ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma, the EDI score. The finding was a weak

negative correlation that was not significant ($r(122) = .001, \ p = .995$). Completion of a

practicum experience was not related to the discernment of elements of an ethical

dilemma.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

A summary of the statistical findings of this study along with a discussion of conclusions, professional implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research are presented in this chapter.

Summary

This study evaluated certain factors that may relate to master's level counselor trainees ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma. The construct of discernment being defined as the ability to assess and identify intricate elements of an ethical situation or dilemma (Stein, 1978). It investigated the relationship between abstract reasoning in master's level counselor trainees, as measured by The Culture Fair Intelligence Test (CFIT; Measuring Intelligence, 1973), and discernment of the elements of ethical dilemmas as measured by The Ethical Discrimination Inventory (EDI; Baldick, 1980). It examined the relationship of three separate personality factors, neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness in master's level counselor trainees, as measured by The Neuroticism Extraversion Openness-Five Factor Inventory-Revised (NEO-PI-R) and ability to discern elements of ethical dilemmas as measured by the EDI. It evaluated the relationship between master's level counselor trainees' completion of a practicum class experience and their ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma as measured by the EDI. Finally, it investigated the relationship between master's level counselor trainees'

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completion of an ethics class and their ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma as measured by the EDI.

The participants were 123 master's level counselor trainee students, 20 were men and 103 were women ranging in age from 21 to 62 years of age. They were from two different universities in the Midwestern United States. There were 77 participants from a large Midwestern state university, defined as having a student population of 12,000 + students, and 46 participants from a small Regional state university, defined as having a student population of under 8,000 students. A total of 82 participants identified themselves as majoring in community counseling and 28 participants identified themselves as majoring in school counseling while 13 participants identified themselves as being in "other" majors. The 13 participants in the "other" category were excluded from the analyses because of the extreme difference from the remaining tracks.

Participants were volunteers from master's level counseling classes. They were asked to respond to three different instruments plus a short demographic sheet. The instruments were the Cultural Fair Intelligence Test (CFIT; Measuring Intelligence, 1973), the Neuroticism Extraversion Openness-Personality Inventory- Revised (NEO-PI-R: Costa & McCrae, 1992), and the Ethical Discrimination Inventory (EDI; Baldick, 1980). The other criterion that participants needed to meet was that they were in a master's level counselor trainee program.

Data analysis consisted of correlations and independent samples t-test.

Statistical Findings and Limitations

Interrelater reliability for the Ethical Discrimination Inventory was significant at .991. This finding was comparable to Dinger's (1997, p. 62) study, which yielded an interrater reliability of .84.

Demographic Findings

Demographic findings were investigated for possible relationships to master's level counselor trainees' ability to discern elements of ethical dilemmas. A means comparison and independent-samples t-test was conducted. It was found that students from the large university scored significantly higher on the EDI than those from the small university. It was also found that students who were majoring in community counseling scored significantly higher on the EDI than those who were majoring in school counseling.

Research Questions Results

Research Question #1: Is abstract reasoning ability, as measured by a standardized instrument, related to the ability of master's level counseling trainees to discern elements of ethical dilemmas? The findings of this study were that master's level counselor trainees' abstract reasoning ability was not related to the ability to discern the elements of an ethical dilemma. This study does not support the theory or previous research that suggested persons operating at higher levels of analytical ability would be better able to discern elements of ethical dilemmas than those operating at a lower level of analytical ability (DeBell, 2002; Dinger, 1997; Roffey, 1992). Rather, this research suggests that persons operating at a lower abstract reasoning ability are equally capable

of identifying and discerning elements of an ethical dilemma as those operating at a higher spectrum of abstract reasoning ability.

One possible reason for these results is that this study used a different instrument to measure abstract reasoning (e.g., The Culture Fair Intelligence Test) than has been used in previous studies. The CFIT is a non-verbal/non-language measure of abstract reasoning. In contrast, the GRE-Analytic, a verbal measure of abstract reasoning was used in the previous studies (DeBell, 2002; Dinger, 1997; Roffey, 1992). It could be that verbal reasoning is closer to the skills needed for ethical discernment ability. The CFIT was used in this study because it is more culturally fair as it does not rely on language; however verbal reasoning may be an important component of discernment ability. Unfortunately, GRE-A scores are no longer available because this subtest is no longer part of the GRE.

Other factors that could have influenced the results may have included the method of data collection. After the consent forms were collected, the abstract reasoning instrument (CFIT) was administered. Many participants commented on the difficulty of this instrument and stated that they had done poorly on this measure. The remainder of the packet was then distributed. It consisted of the demographic questionnaire first, the personality inventory, NEO-PI-R, and finally the ethical discrimination inventory, the EDI. Participants completed the instruments in this order. The measure requiring the greatest amount of time to complete was the EDI. Many participants were observed checking the amount remaining while in the process of completing the EDI and some were observed sighing. Two potential participants wrote comments on the EDI that it

required too much time or thinking as they were focused on a test to be given in their next class.

Additionally the classes where data were collected met in the late afternoon or early evening and participants had been at work or in classes all or most of the day prior to attending the class where data were collected. Overall, time invested in responding, especially to the lengthy EDI, and inability to control for other factors such as distraction may have been a limitation to the responses given. Further research could attend more closely to factors that may be influence outcome, such as controlling for external variables like tests taking anxiety or personal fatigue. For example, dividing the administration of the packet into two sessions on different days, give a break before administering the EDI might counteract fatigue effects, or counterbalance by varying the order of the instruments distribution. Due to time constraints, these strategies were not used in this study.

Research Question #2: Are the personality traits of neuroticism, openness and conscientiousness, as measured by a widely used personality inventory, related to the ability of master's level counseling trainees to discern the elements of ethical dilemmas? The findings of this study were that master's level counselor trainees' personality factors of neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness were not related to discernment of the elements of an ethical dilemma. Theory suggests that ethical conduct is influenced by personality traits (Mera, 1996; Sophn, 2000) but there seems to be a lack of research focused specifically on the relationship between personality factors and ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma. Actual empirical research supporting or refuting the possible relationship between personality and the ability to discern elements or an ethical

dilemma was minimal. One study Sadowski (1997) suggested both a positive relationship between a need for cognition and those who were high in the domains of openness and conscientiousness and a negative relationship between a need for cognition and neuroticism. However, the results of this study seem to imply that the personality factors of neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness do not relate to master's level counselor trainees' ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma. The participants scored within the limits of average to very high range on the neuroticism scale. All except one participant scored within the limits of average to very high range on the openness scale. And all except two of the participants scored within the average to very high range on the conscientiousness scale. Overall, the three scales demonstrated a restriction of range, which can be a problem in determining statistical significance. Another consideration for the personality scales is that the participants may have answered in a socially desirable way. For example, it may be seen as more "appropriate" for a counselor in training to be seen as "open" or "conscientious."

Research Question #3: Does the completion of a graduate level ethics class relate to a master's level counselor trainees' ability to ethically discern elements of ethical dilemmas? The results of this study suggest that master's level counselor trainees' completion of an ethics class was not related to discernment of the elements of an ethical dilemma. Although past research has supported the idea that ethics training does improve ethical knowledge, behavior, and the ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma (Baldick, 1980; DeBell, Montgmery, Waid & Wood, 2002, Dinger, 1997), training did not appear to influence ethical discernment in the present study.

Because participants' responses to the EDI are qualitative in nature, a review of incorrect responses was done to try to shed light on why this study obtained different results than past research. Answers indicated either a wrong response, a clarification question such as "Who is the client, the mom or child?" or a personal value statement such as "It's against my moral value to go to a nudist colony." Often participants merely wrote "That's just not ethical." Many responses indicated that the participants possessed an awareness of an ethical violation but lacked the ability to verbalize.

Each of the ethical scenarios of the EDI contains a range of categories of ethical violations ranging from two to five violations per scenario. The violations include consumer welfare, counselor competence, confidentiality, legal and moral standards, professional relationships, professional responsibility, assessment techniques and public statements (Dinger 1997). Future research could investigate whether or not participants differ in their ability to discern elements of various categories as well as examine the components of ethics training and curriculum in these categories. For example, review of the responses indicated that participants were more likely to correctly identify areas of confidentiality, professional relationships and legal and moral standards than areas of professional responsibility or public statements. Examination of ethics training programs and curriculum could assess for differences in the emphasis on these different categories.

As mentioned previously, extreme differences in cell size regarding ethics training may have limited statistical power in these analyses.

Research Question #4: Does the completion of a practicum experience relate to a master's level counselor trainees' ability to ethically discern elements of ethical dilemmas? The findings of this study were that master's level counselor trainees'

completion of a practicum experience was not related to discernment of the elements of

an ethical dilemma. However, while surveys and questionnaires showed that practioners

identify experience with ethical situations as promoting learning (Handelsman, 1986)

there has been a lack of evidence that experience leads to improved decision making or

ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma (Dinger, 1997). Theory and research has

implied that experience may be a factor in ethical decision making (Haas, Malouf &

Mayerson, 1988), only one study was found in the review of literature for this study that

was directly related to practicum experience and ethical discernment ability. In that study

Dinger (1997) investigated the effect of having a practicum class experience on

participants' ability to discern elements of ethical dilemmas. No significant difference

was found in ethical discernment ability between those who had completed a practicum

class and those who had not. The present study yielded similar results.

An interesting result of this study was the significant finding that students from

the large university were better able to discern the elements of an ethical dilemma than

those from the smaller university. This finding raises interesting questions. For instance,

these differences could be due to a number of factors, such as admissions criteria,

teaching methods, curriculum, faculty commitment to integrating ethics across the

curriculum, or CACREP accreditation. Without knowing more about these variables,

however, it is not possible to do more than speculate on possible reasons for this finding.

Also worth noting was the significant finding that students specializing in

community counseling being better able to discern the elements of an ethical dilemma

than those who were specializing in school counseling. Again, these differences could be

due to differences in admissions criteria for community versus school students, teaching

methods or curriculum required for each track. The EDI does not include any scenarios that take place in the school system or with children. Perhaps the student in the school track couldn't relate well with the scenarios. Further research exploring how universities and programs of study differ in these or other factors could possibly shed light on these observed differences in ethical discernment.

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to investigate factors that may influence master's level counselor trainees' ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma. The factors of abstract reasoning ability, certain personality factors (neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness), the completion of a practicum experience and the completion of an ethics class were investigated for a possible relationship with the ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma. None of these factors were found to be significant. Two variables that were found to be significant influences on ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma were the different universities where data were collected and the students' different tracks of major study.

Limitations

This study contains certain limitations, which were mentioned in chapter one of this study. The first limitation noted was that this study was limited to a non-random sample of participants. Another limitation of this study was that self-reported measures were used in this study, which could lead to spurious or non-genuine correlations or shared method variance. The third limitation previously mentioned in chapter one was that data were collected from existing classrooms. This method prohibits the researcher from being able to control for diversity within the sample.

The timing of the data collection may have influenced the demographic variable that identified participants being in a CACREP program. A portion of the data collected from the large university was collected in the Summer 2005 session while that program was awaiting the results of their CACREP accreditation evaluation from the Spring 2005 session. Those participants responded "no" to the question of whether they were in a CACREP program or not. Shortly after these data were collected that university was notified that the program met accreditation requirements. Had that information been available the number of participants attending a CACREP accredited program would have been consistent with the demographic variable that identified the type of educational institution and it is expected would have yielded similar significant results.

Other factors that may have limited results were discussed previously in this chapter. These included unequal cell sizes in a number of variables, and fatigue effects in some participants.

Implications for Counselor Training

Professional ethics is probably one of the most studied areas related to the everyday practice of counseling (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003). Ethics education is a requirement of many accreditation programs. Various models of ethical decision making are taught in training programs. One element common to these decision making models is the need to identify the problem or discern the elements of an ethical dilemma. The results of the present study are in contrast to previous research suggesting that abstracting reasoning ability and completion of an ethics class relate to the master's level counselor trainees ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma. It also suggests that certain personality factors; neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness and completion of a

practicum experience are not related to ethical discernment ability. It does however

suggest that ethical discernment ability in master's level counselor trainees is related to

the type of university and counseling specialty. This could imply a need for counselor

training programs to assess what differences could attribute to the students ability to

discern elements of ethical dilemmas and design programs conducive to enhancing

discernment.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research focusing on developing a better understanding of why masters'

level counselor trainees from different universities and counseling specialties would

significantly differ in their ability to discern elements of ethical dilemmas could enable

educators to do more to train students in discernment. Exploring such areas as admissions

criteria, teaching methods of education, curriculum, and faculty commitment to

integration of ethics class discussion, or acquisition of CACREP accreditation could yield

information valuable in developing training programs for future counselors.

Further research on the relation of abstract reasoning and personality factors to

ethical discernment ability would need to control for limitations set by false boundaries

resulting in poor variance or restriction of range. This may be accomplished by assessing

a larger more diverse population. The same recommendation could be made for future

research regarding the relation of ethics education and practicum experience to master's

level counselor trainees' ability to discern elements of ethical dilemmas that is to assess

larger more diverse populations.

Another area to recommend for future research could investigate the various

categories of ethical dilemmas to assess for differences in ability to recognize and discern

certain elements more readily than others. For instance, the category of client welfare may be more emphasized in training programs than the category of public statements and therefore more readily identifiable by the student. Knowledge about what categories of ethical dilemmas are more often recognized by participants could guide educators in the development of their training programs.

The EDI was developed based on the American Psychological Association's 1977 code of ethics and latter revised based on the 1981 code of ethics (Dinger, 1997). This is approximately the fourth study in which the EDI did not yield very high results (Baldick, 1980; DeBell, et al., 2002; Dinger, 1997). The responses of participants often indicated that they were aware that an ethical violation was occurring but they seemed to have difficult pulling out intricate elements. Sometimes two responses with the same meaning would be given such as, "breach of confidentiality" and "disclosed information without permission." It is possible the EDI underestimates students' ability. Another research study might be to re-norm the EDI. Updating it to include more current issues such as Internet counseling and cultural diversity competency and gender issues might be considered. The past twenty-five years has seen awareness in cultural diversity issues in the field of psychology and a need to understand how culture relates to ethics could be of value in understanding the course of ethical development including the area of discernment ability. The EDI was developed during the time that Carol Gilligan was researching the gender differences in ethical development and was likely based on the work of Kohlberg whose research was exclusively conducted with male subjects (Gilligan, 1977). Re-norming the EDI could consider these factors as well as expand to consider more current ethical challenges such as Internet counseling, working with

children and within agency confines where many master's level therapist are found

working these days, agencies such as school systems or mental health settings. While

discernment ability is only one part of the ethical decision making model, it is a vital step

in the initial stage of decision making and further research to understand the factors that

may influence discernment ability could also shed light on why counselors chose to

conduct themselves in an ethical manner or chose not to behave ethically. It is essential

that counselor training programs continue to develop in order to prepare future counselors

to function ethically within the paradigms of psychology.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Gender (*circle one*)   (1) Male   (2) Female

2. Age _____

3. Ethnicity (*circle all that apply*)   (1) White   (2) Asian

                                           (3) American Indian   (4) Hispanic/Latino

                                           (5) Black/African American (6) Other_____

4. Current level of Education _____

5. Type of Educational Institution   (1) large university   (2) mid-size university

                                           (3) Small university or college

6. CACREP approved program?   (1) Yes   (2) No

7. Track (*circle*)   Community Counseling   School Counseling

        Student Personnel Counseling   Other_____

8. Have You Completed a Master's Level Ethics Class? (*circle*)

(1) Yes   (2) No   (3) Currently Enrolled

9. Have you completed a practicum experience? (circle)

(1) Yes   (2) No   (3) Currently Enrolled

10. The number of hours completed in a master's degree program are

_____ Quarter   _____ Semester

APPENDIX B

Ethical Discrimination Inventory

Ethical Discrimination Inventory
Baldick, T. L. (1980) and N. E. Lipsitz, (1985)

This questionnaire consists of 12 ethical problem situations, in which you as a counselor might find yourself. For each situation, please indicate in a two to five word phrase, the possible ethical problem or problems involved in each situation. It is not intended for you to resolve the posed ethical dilemma, or to make judgments about whether behaviors presented in each dilemma are right or wrong, but to recognize what the problems or considerations are in each situation. The example below illustrates the test procedure and indicates that more than one problem may be involved in each case.

Example: A graduate student in counseling is in the midst of his dissertation. He is mailing a questionnaire to two groups of licensed professional counselors. Because it might interfere with his results he gives misleading reasons for their cooperation. In addition, he disguises a recently published questionnaire as his own in an effort to evaluate professional reaction to student efforts.

    1. Problem of appropriate publication credit.

    2. Possible misuse of research participants.

    3. Question of appropriate supervision.

1. A client informs his therapist that he plans to murder his girlfriend due to her unfaithfulness to him. He is extremely angry. The therapist later contacts both the girl and the local authorities explaining the situation.

—   —

2. While running a weekend encounter group, where the rule is that "each member is totally responsible for him or herself and what he or she does", the therapist has sexual intercourse with one of the group members. This is described as a "deeply moving and releasing experience" for both of them, and was "healthy and therapeutic since it was thoroughly discussed with the other group members".

3. A psychologist serving a small city was consulted by the local high school guidance counselor and asked if he would "look over" M.M.P.I. profiles of certain students from time to time and write a "rough" interpretation so that the counselor can help the students better understand themselves.

—   —

4. As a professional counselor you receive an announcement from a licensed colleague inviting you to a nude marathon weekend. the literature states that the "the effectiveness of the nude marathon has been proven... unquestionable superior to clothed marathons in fostering self-actualization".

—   —

5. During a cross-country flight, the passenger sitting next to a counselor begins to unfold his many troubles. The counselor feels he can help the passenger so he encourages him to talk, and is able to make several interpretations and interventions. When they reach their destination the passenger says, "I don't know whether I feel better or worse after talking with you." Then they go their separate ways.

6. A mother of a teenage son consults with a counselor about the conflicts that she is confronting at home and further arranges for her son to see the therapist the following week. The day following his appointment the mother comes into the office to pay her bill and asks, "What did he say to you?"

7. A claustrophobic patient contracts with a therapist to be treated by flooding technique, involving continued exposure to the conditioned stimulus until extinction. The therapist carefully explains the procedure and its theoretical justifications. Accordingly the patient is placed in a confined space with avoidance blocked by locking the door. After a time, she panics and pleads with the therapist to be released. He refuses, based on the fact that this panic must be overcome in order for extinction to take place.

8. A counselor has been counseling with a young married female for about a year. Her husband becomes quite psychologically dysfunctional and is a suicide risk. He is hospitalized and treated by a local psychiatrist and his staff. In the course of his treatment, the psychiatrist working with the husband meets with the wife to discuss her therapy and suggests she terminate therapy with her counselor and begin treatment with him. During her next session she reveals this to her counselor.

9. A 45 year old psychologist is consulted by a young man who appears anxious about his homosexual orientation. The psychologist discloses to the client that he is himself a homosexual, and that he is willing to counsel the client toward understanding and accepting his homosexual desires.

10. After several sessions with a married, 32 year old female, who is requesting therapy due to "mood changes", the counselor notes increased agitation, excitability and hyperactivity being manifested in session. She is unable to concentrate on any one particular subject and is quite distractible. The therapist calls the client's husband, who states that this is not uncommon behavior for her and that her mother and brothers have this problem. The counselor arranges for sessions to be three times per week, and sets up a home token economy to help the client develop more stable and appropriate behavior.

11. During the initial group session the group leader discusses the value of group, how "it" works and some of the techniques which may be used. About 3 weeks later a member exits from the group because a friend of his, who was taking a course from the group leader at a local college, saw him on a video tape of group process, shown in class.

—   —

12. A busy psychologist makes it a practice to give a prescribed battery of psychological tests to all new clients. Because of his busy schedule and the lack of space in his office, he will send the M.M.P.I. and the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule home with the client to be completed there.

—   —   —

APPENDIX C

Permission for Neuroticism Extraversion Openness-Five Factor Inventory Use

PAR

Psychological
Assessment
Resources
INCORPORATED

16204 N. FLORIDA AVENUE
LUTZ, FLORIDA 33549
Tel.: (813) 968-3003
Fax: (813) 968-2598
www.parinc.com

<u>Sent Via Email: Bbeach55@yahoo.com</u>

April 25, 2005

Ms. Barbara Beach
Oklahoma State University
6109 W. 83rd Street S.
Oktaha, OK 74450

Dear Ms. Beach:

In response to your recent request, permission is hereby granted to you to modify the format and reproduce up to a total of 120 copies of the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) for use in your research study titled *Investigating Factors That May Influence Masters' Level Counselor Trainees Ability to Discern Elements of an Ethical Dilemma*. If additional copies are needed, you will need to write to PAR for further permission. Permission is also granted for you to include up to 3 sample items from the NEO-FFI in the appendix of your dissertation.

This Agreement is subject to the following restrictions:

    (1)   Any and all material will contain the following credit line:

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restrictions. I will return a fully executed copy to you for your records.

Sincerely,

Kimberly S. Pellegrino
Administrative Assistant

ACCEPTED AND AGREED: ACCEPTED AND AGREED:

BY: *Barbara Beach*   BY: *Kimberly S. Pellegrino*
    BARBARA BEACH   KIMBERLY S. PELLEGRINO

DATE: 4-26-05   DATE: 5-16-05

                                        PAYMENT RECEIVED: 5-16-05

SIGNATURE OF PROFESSOR REQUIRED:

I hereby agree to supervise this student's use of these materials. I also certify that I am qualified
to use and interpret the results of these tests as recommended in the *Standards for Educational
and Psychological Testing*, and I assume full responsibility for the proper use of all materials
used per this Agreement.

BY: *C DeBell*

Printed Name: *Camille DeBell*

                    A tradition of innovative assessment solutions and unparalleled service.

APPENDIX D

Neuroticism Extraversion Openness-Five Factor Inventory

NEO-FFI, NEO Five- Factor Inventory

Paul T. Costa, Jr., PhD, and Robert R. McCrae, PhD

INSTRUCTIONS: Carefully read all of the instructions before beginning. This questionnaire contains 60 statements. Read each statement carefully. For each statement **circle the number** that best represents your opinion. Make sure that your answer is on the correct line. Fill in only one response for each statement.

1 = SD (Strongly disagree or the statement is definitely false)
2 = D (Disagree or the statement is mostly false)
3 = N (Neutral if you cannot decide, or if the statement is about equally true or false)
4 = A (Agree or the statement is mostly true)
5 = SA (Strongly agree or the statement is definitely true)

	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. I am not a worrier…………………………………………………	1	2	3	4	5
2. I like to have a lot of people around me…………………………….	1	2	3	4	5
3. I don't like to waste my time daydreaming………………………….	1	2	3	4	5
4. I try to be courteous to everyone I meet……………………………	1	2	3	4	5
5. I keep my belongings neat and clean……………………………….	1	2	3	4	5
6. I often feel inferior to others………………………………………	1	2	3	4	5
7. I laugh easily…………………………………………………….	1	2	3	4	5
8. Once I find the right way to do something, I stick to it……………	1	2	3	4	5
9. I often get into arguments with my family and co-workers……….	1	2	3	4	5
10. I'm pretty good about pacing myself so as to get things………… done on time.	1	2	3	4	5
11. When I'm under a great deal of stress, sometimes I feel………… like I'm going to pieces.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I don't consider myself especially "Light hearted"………………	1	2	3	4	5
13. I am intrigued by the patterns I find in art and nature……………	1	2	3	4	5
14. Some people think I'm selfish and egotistical……………………	1	2	3	4	5
15. I am not a very methodical person……………………………….	1	2	3	4	5
16. I rarely feel lonely or blue………………………………………..	1	2	3	4	5
17. I really enjoy talking to people…………………………………	1	2	3	4	5

	SD	D	N	A	SA

18. I believe letting students hear controversial speakers can............ 1   2   3   4   5
only confuse and mislead them.

19. I would rather cooperate with others than compete with them....... 1   2   3   4   5

20. I try to perform all the tasks assigned to me conscientiously......... 1   2   3   4   5

21. I often feel tense and jittery…………………………………… 1   2   3   4   5

22. I like to be where the action is……………………………… 1   2   3   4   5

23. Poetry has little or no effect on me……………………………… 1   2   3   4   5

24. I tend to be cynical and skeptical of others' intentions…………… 1   2   3   4   5

25. I have a clear set of goals and work toward them in an…………… 1   2   3   4   5
orderly fashion.

26. Sometimes I feel completely worthless…………………………… 1   2   3   4   5

27. I usually prefer to do things alone………………………………… 1   2   3   4   5

28. I often try new and foreign foods………………………………… 1   2   3   4   5

29. I believe that most people will take advantage of you if ………… 1   2   3   4   5
you let them.

30. I waste a lot of time before sitting down to work………………… 1   2   3   4   5

31. I rarely feel fearful or anxious…………………………………… 1   2   3   4   5

32. I often feel as if I'm bursting with energy……………………… 1   2   3   4   5

33. I seldom notice the moods or feelings that different …………… 1   2   3   4   5
environments produce.

34. Most people I know like me…………………………………… 1   2   3   4   5

35. I work hard to accomplish my goals…………………………… 1   2   3   4   5

36. I often get angry at the way people treat me…………………… 1   2   3   4   5

37. I am a cheerful, high spirited person…………………………… 1   2   3   4   5

38. I believe we should look to or religious authorities for………… 1   2   3   4   5
decisions on moral issues.

39. Some people think of me as cold and calculating……………… 1   2   3   4   5

	SD	D	N	A	SA

40. When I make a commitment, I can always be counted on ………… to follow through.	1	2	3	4	5
41. Too often, when things go wrong, I get discouraged and ………… feel like giving up.	1	2	3	4	5
42. I am not a cheerful optimist…………………………………	1	2	3	4	5
43. Sometimes when I am reading poetry or looking at a work….. … of art, I feel a chill or wave of excitement.	1	2	3	4	5
44. I'm hard-headed and tough-minded in my attitudes………………	1	2	3	4	5
45. Sometimes I'm not as dependable or reliable as I should be………	1	2	3	4	5
46. I am seldom sad or depressed……………………………	1	2	3	4	5
47. My life is fast-paced………………………………………	1	2	3	4	5
48. I have little interest in speculating the nature of the universe…… or the human condition.	1	2	3	4	5
49. I generally try to be thoughtful and considerate…………………	1	2	3	4	5
50. I am a productive person who always gets the job done…………	1	2	3	4	5
51. I often feel helpless and want someone else to solve my ……….. problems.	1	2	3	4	5
52. I am a very active person………………………………….	1	2	3	4	5
53. I have a lot of intellectual curiosity………………………	1	2	3	4	5
54. If I don't like people, I let them know it………………………	1	2	3	4	5
55. I never seem to be able to get organized………………………	1	2	3	4	5
56. At times I have been so ashamed I just wanted to hide………….	1	2	3	4	5
57. I would rather go my own way than be a leader of others……….	1	2	3	4	5
58. I often enjoy playing with theories or abstract ideas……………	1	2	3	4	5
59. If necessary, I am willing to manipulate people to get what ……. I want.	1	2	3	4	5
60. I strive for excellence in everything I do…………………………	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX E
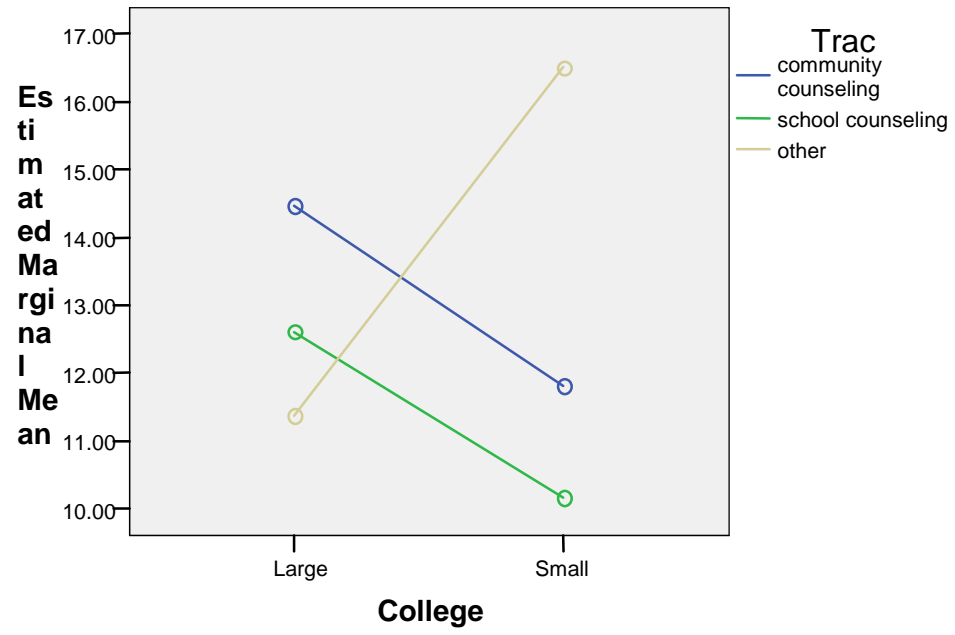
Figure Captions and Tables

Estimated Marginal Means of EDI

Figure 1. Histogram of track of study means by college.

	Large University	Small University	Community Track	School Track
N	77	46	82	28
EDI Mean	13.8117	11.3261	13.6585	10.9464
EDI S.D.	4.55597	4.54999	4.89512	4.05138
CFIT Mean	112.0130	112.5217	113.2805	109.8929
CFIT S.D.	13.91089	14.11026	14.73492	12.79566
Neuroticism Mean	66.0260	66.6522	66.2195	67.2143
Neuroticism S.D.	6.84984	7.16230	7.12676	6.53966
Openness Mean	69.8052	67.5000	69.0488	68.1786
Openness S.D.	7.18741	6.55490	7.45008	5.53142
Conscien. Mean	66.9091	69.8696	67.2927	67.8214
Conscien. S.D.	9.24830	6.49310	8.63740	8.69676

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations.

APPENDIX F

Institutional Review Board

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Tuesday, May 10, 2005
IRB Application No	ED05104
Proposal Title:	Factors that may Influence Master's Level Counselor Trainees' Ability to Discern Elements of an Ethical Dilemma
Reviewed and Processed as:	Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 5/9/2006

Principal
Investigator(s

Barbara Dean Beach   Camille DeBell
6109 W. 83rd S.   421 Willard
Oktaha, OK 74450   Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

X The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, emct@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Sue C. Jacobs, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Barbara Dean Beach

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: FACTORS THAT MAY INFLUENCE MASTER'S LEVEL
COUNSELOR TRAINEE'S ABILITY TO DISCERN ELEMENTS OF AN ETHICAL
DILLEMA.

Major Field: Educational Psychology

Biographical:

Personal Data: I live at Oktaha, Oklahoma. Married to Leon and have four adult
children and two grandchildren.

Education:
Master of Science in Counseling Psychology.
Bachelor of Art in Psychology

Experience:
Indian Health Care Resource Center,
Stillwater Domestic Violence Services
Stillwater Women's Clinic
Green Country Behavioral Health Services
Oklahoma Children's Center

Professional Memberships:
American Psychological Association,
Association for Advancement of Behavior Therapy

Name: Barbara Dean Beach   Date of Degree: May, 2006

Institution: Oklahoma State University   Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: FACTORS THAT MAY INFLUENCE MASTER'S LEVEL
COUNSELOR TRAINEE'S ABILITY TO DISCERN ELEMENTS OF AN ETHICAL
DILLEMA.

Pages in Study: 101   Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Educational Psychology

Scope and Method of Study:
      This study investigated the relationship among abstract reasoning ability, the
personality factors of neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness, completion of an
ethics class and a practicum class, on master's level counseling students' ability to
discern elements of an ethical dilemma. Data were collected from two
midwestern universities (N = 123) and included a questionnaire, the Culture Fair
Intelligence Test, the Neuroticism Extraversion Openness-Personality Inventory-
Revised, and the Ethical Discrimination Inventory.

Findings and Conclusions:
      Abstract reasoning ability, neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness, completion
of an ethics class and completion of practica were not found to be significantly
related to the ability to discern elements of an ethical dilemma. However,
significant relationships were found between ability to discern elements of an
ethical dilemma and the educational institution of the participants and the specific
counseling options in which they were enrolled.

      These results and their implications as well as the limitations of the study are
discussed. Suggestions are made for future research on variables that might be
important in teaching ethics to counselor-trainees.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Camille DeBell, Ph.D.