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#### ASSESSMENT, DEVELOPMENT, AND VALIDATION

# A Proposed Definition and Structure of Counselor Dispositions

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#### ABSTRACT

Dispositions have been identified as critical elements of counselor development and competency. Although there is currently no professional agreement regarding the definition or structure of counselor dispositions, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP 2016) accreditation standards require counselor educators to assess students' professional dispositions. We endorse the need for a disposition measure that yields reliable and valid scores for use in admissions and gatekeeping processes. We present results of a confirmatory factor analysis of the Professional Dispositions Scale–Counseling Student Version (PDS–CSV), which revealed that counselor dispositions are best understood as a single higher order factor made up of 9 subfactors addressing personal and professional considerations. Based on these findings, we propose a definition of counselor dispositions for consideration by professional colleagues.

**KEYWORDS** 

Confirmatory factor analysis; counselor training; dispositions; structural equation modeling

Together with strong foundations in knowledge, skills, and ethics, dispositions are critical prerequisites to the development of counselor competence. To date, the counseling profession has not produced a universally accepted definition of counselor dispositions, nor has it delineated the factors that comprise dispositions. As a result, there is a paucity of psychometrically sound measures of counselor dispositions and this essential element of clinical competence is frequently not evaluated. Although proxy measures of dispositions (e.g., reference letters, applicant interviews, statements of professional goals) are commonly used during admissions processes in counselor education programs, little evidence of their reliability and validity has been reported in the professional literature. As a result, counseling faculty might admit unqualified applicants and fail to remediate or dismiss counseling students who demonstrate inadequate or inappropriate dispositions. In circumstances where faculty feel compelled to dismiss counseling students for dispositional reasons, they face potential threats of legal retaliation and could be compromised in the courtroom by the absence of a psychometrically sound measure to support their dismissal decisions. With such foreknowledge, counselor educators might be reluctant to dismiss even the most dispositionally incompetent students and opt for personal safety over professional responsibility. These circumstances create grave potentials for client harm, counselor liability, and professional embarrassment.

A comprehensive review of the professional literature on dispositions across the mental health professions of counseling, psychology, school psychology, and social work produced a broad range of definitions, skills sets, and competencies. Most attempts to define dispositions were

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based on characteristics or qualities associated with counseling effectiveness or mastery. Redekop and Wlazelek (2012) suggested that counselor dispositions could be determined by considering the "attributes, characteristics, variables, or qualities that an ideal counselor applicant would possess" (p. 2). Using a review of the professional literature, Pope and Kline (1999) identified 22 characteristics associated with counseling effectiveness, Ackerman and Hilsenroth (2003) specified 11 characteristics, and Jennings and Skovholt (1999) delineated nine categories associated with qualities of a master therapist.

Garner, Freeman, and Lee (2016) reported on the development and psychometric properties of the Professional Disposition Competence Assessment (PDCA) for which they conceptualized dispositions in three domains. In each domain (i.e., academic, professional, personal) the researchers identified specific dispositions: (a) academic: conscientiousness, critical thinking, and appreciation of learning; (b) professional: interpersonal skills; self-regulation, and professionalism; and (c) personal: self-awareness, character, and spirituality. Swank, Lambie, and Witta (2012) presented results of an exploratory investigation of the Counseling Competencies Scale (CCS) and found some consistency in students' dispositions assessed at midterm and final points in the program. A case study reported by Spurgeon, Gibbons, and Cochran (2012) identified five core dispositions considered essential in counselor training: commitment, openness, respect, integrity, and self-awareness.

Common to these definitions and conceptualizations of dispositions is their relationship to professional competence, a concept used interchangeably in the professional literature with professional suitability. As research on trainee dispositions has revealed their relevance to clinical effectiveness, competence, and mastery, mental health training programs and national accreditation organizations have increasingly worked to define dispositions and incorporate evaluations of dispositions into program policies and standards. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) Accreditation Standards implied the importance of evaluating student dispositions without identifying this construct by name. The 2009 standards required assessment of "Each applicant's potential success in forming effective and culturally relevant interpersonal relationships in individual and small-group contexts," "Each applicant's aptitude for graduate study," and "each student's progress throughout the program, including consideration of the student's academic performance, *professional* development, and *personal* development" (pp. 3–4, italics added). The 2016 CACREP accreditation standards expanded on and explicitly referred to dispositions in Section 4 as follows:

B. The counselor education program faculty demonstrate the use of the following to evaluate the program objectives: (1) aggregate student assessment data that address student knowledge, skill, and *professional dispositions*. (italics added)

G. The counselor education program faculty systematically assesses each student's *professional dispositions* throughout the program. The assessment process includes the following: (1) identification of the key *professional dispositions*; (2) measurement of student *professional dispositions* over multiple points in time, and (3) review or analysis of data. (p. 1, italics added)

National accrediting organizations for related mental health disciplines have acknowledged the critical role of dispositions in clinical training. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2008) includes a requirement to assess dispositional traits in its accreditation standards. Referred to as values, these traits include "service, social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, competence, human rights, and scientific inquiry" (CSWE, 2008, p. 2). Similarly, Section 2.10 of the *Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists* (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP]) requires that students in its accredited programs "apply professional work characteristics … respect for human diversity and social justice, communication skills, effective interpersonal skills, responsibility, adaptability, initiative, dependability and technology skills" (NASP, 2010, p. 7). The accreditation standards of the American Psychological Association (APA) address similar behaviors and values in Section

C-8 D, Profession-Wide Competencies, including "openness and responsiveness to feedback ... integrity ... accountability ... concern for others ... effective relationships ... importance of human relationships ... acting in accordance with codes of ethics and relevant laws" (APA, 2015, pp. 16–22). These dispositions are also reflected in the APA general principles and codes of conduct (APA, 2017).

The requirement for dispositional competence extends to counselor supervisors. Although not using the term *disposition*, the 2014 American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) Code of Ethics requires that counselor supervisors "monitor client welfare and supervisee performance and professional development" (F.1.a, Client Welfare), "are aware of supervisee limitations that might impede performance ... and assist supervisees in securing remedial assistance when needed ... and recommend dismissal from training programs" (F.6.b. Gatekeeping and Remediation), "address interpersonal competencies in terms of the impact of these issues on clients, the supervisory relationship, and professional functioning" (F.6.c., Counseling for Supervisees), and "may require students to address any personal concerns that have the potential to affect professional competency" (F.8.d., Addressing Personal Concerns). These standards clearly confirm supervisors' responsibilities to monitor and act on supervisees' failures to demonstrate requisite dispositions.

The 2014 ACA Code also places ethical responsibilities for dispositional competence on counselor trainees by requiring them to "understand and follow the ACA Code of Ethics" (F.5.a. Ethical Responsibilities), and "monitor themselves for signs of impairment from their own physical, mental, or emotional problems and refrain from offering or providing professional services when such impairment is likely to harm a client or others" (F.5.b. Impairment).

Dispositions expected of counseling supervisors are delineated in the Standards for Counseling Supervisors (ACA, 1990) developed by the Supervision Interest Network, Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES). These standards "include a description of eleven core areas of *personal traits*, knowledge, and competencies that are characteristic of effective supervisors" (p. 30, italics added). Standard 2 specifies requisite supervisor dispositions that include commitments to updating counseling and supervisory skills; sensitivity to individual differences; recognition of self-limitations; demonstration of encouragement, optimism, and motivational qualities; identification of strengths and weaknesses as a supervisor; and awareness of personal patterns in interpersonal relationships. Standard 10 delineates the counseling supervisor's ethical responsibility to identify the counselor's (i.e., supervisee's) *professional* and *personal* strengths and weaknesses.

Increasingly, state counselor licensing boards are mandating that counselor licensure applicants have graduated from a CACREP-accredited counseling program as a prerequisite condition for licensure (ACA, 2010). The codification of CACREP accreditation into state licensure laws underscores the critical role of accreditation in professional development, including the importance of dispositional competence (CACREP, 2016) for professional success. Similarly, the association between dispositional proficiencies and clinical competence is reinforced by the inclusion of dispositions with other disciplines such as the State of Ohio Counselor, Social Worker & Marriage and Family Therapist Board Internship Supervisor Evaluation Rating Form (State of Ohio CSWMFT Board, 2016). Representative dispositional items on the form include the following:

- 2) Understands, respects, and accommodates for gender, racial, and cultural differences;
- 3) Understands and maintains professional boundaries with clients;
- 14) Demonstrates ability to develop rapport with clients;
- 24) Demonstrates his/her ability to assess and describe the impact of his/her personality on the client;
- 27) Demonstrates his/her awareness of own limitations of clinical skills and competence;
- 28) Recognizes his/her deficiencies and actively works to overcome them. (pp. 2-3)

Regardless of their description as professional competencies, personal qualities, personality characteristics, traits, personal values, behavioral characteristics, or elements of personal development, an emerging consensus among mental health practitioners, educators, researchers, accrediting bodies, and mental health licensure boards suggests that dispositions are critical prerequisites to the development of clinical and professional competence.

Attempts to measure counselor dispositions have been reported in the professional literature and in online resources for more than 20 years. The majority of these publications have focused on the assessment of student dispositions for admissions and gatekeeping functions in university mental health training programs (e.g., University of Alabama at Birmingham, 2019; University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 2019; University of Tennessee, 2019; see literature review by Redekop & Wlazelek, 2012) and studies comparing student and faculty responses (e.g., Mearns & Allen, 1991). Authors of these studies have generated idiosyncratic conceptualizations of dispositions and only a few have included results regarding the psychometric properties of reported scales.

A recent departure from this trend was publication of a study by Garner et al. (2016) to determine the psychometric properties of the Professional Disposition Competence Assessment (PCDA). Authors described procedures to determine reliability (interrater, internal consistency) and validity (construct) estimates for use of this instrument by counselor educators, who evaluated program applicant dispositions based on recordings of applicant interviews. Authors reported strong support for the interrater reliability of scores and "overall positive support for the psychometric properties of the PDCA" (Garner et al., 2016, p. 10). Swank et al. (2012) reported results of a study to determine the psychometric properties of the Counseling Competencies Scale (CCS), which was designed "to assess trainee competencies within the areas of counseling skills, professional dispositions, and behaviors" (p. 1). Results of exploratory factor analyses conducted at semester midpoint and conclusion reportedly yielded similar factors in slightly different configurations. Analysis of the CCS scores administered at the end of training yielded five factors: professional behaviors, counseling relationship, counseling skills, assessment and application, and professional dispositions. Swank et al. attempted to use course grades to establish criterion-rated validity, but were hindered by the limited range of grades (e.g., A to B-). Although designed as a measure of counseling competencies, results of this study suggest a meaningful relationship between professional dispositions scores and ratings of counselor effectiveness.

As noted previously, there is a growing professional consensus among mental health accreditation standards, professional codes of ethics, and licensing statutes to recognize, assess, and utilize counselor dispositions in admissions and gatekeeping processes. These trends emerge in the context of a limited number of dispositional assessment instruments that propose divergent definitions of dispositions and provide limited psychometric data to support their use.

We responded to these circumstances by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of a counselor disposition model based on an extensive review of the professional literature. Our hope was to elucidate the nature and structure of counselor dispositions, provide initial evidence of score reliability and validity, and offer an empirically derived, however tentative, definition of counselor dispositions. To accomplish these objectives, we report on the development of the Professional Dispositions Scale–Counseling Student Version (PDS–CSV). Although results of this investigation provide preliminary support, it used counseling students to generate findings. The ultimate goal will be to develop a psychometrically sound measure of counselor dispositions for use by counselor educators to make more effective admission, retention, and dismissal decisions. To achieve this goal, this study must be replicated with a large sample of counselor educators to determine if the factor structure and psychometric properties reported herein are supported.

#### Methods

# **Participant Description**

The analyzed sample included n = 283 student participants from 31 universities. Participants included n = 34 males (12.0%) and n = 249 females (88.0%). Participant ages ranged from 21 years of age to more than 55 years of age, with a mean of 30.38 (SD = 8.82). Participants indicated race or ethnicity as White or Caucasian (n = 227, 80.2%), African American (n = 24, 8.5%), Hispanic or Latino (n = 12, 4.2%), Asian (n = 5, 1.8%), Native American/Alaskan Indian (n = 1, 0.4%) and the remaining indicated more than two categories: other and prefer not to answer. Most participants were single (n = 173, 61.6%) with n = 80 (28.3%) married, and n = 14 (4.9%) divorced. Most respondents were enrolled in a master's degree program (n = 263, 92.1%), followed by a doctoral program (n = 11, 3.9%), and educational specialist program (n = 3, 1.1%).

# **Participant Sampling**

We employed a one-stage random cluster sampling procedure to distribute the PDS–CSV nationwide to counseling students enrolled in programs accredited by CACREP. Programs were clustered consistent with U.S. Standard Federal Regions (Office of Management and Budget, 1977), which segments the United States into 10 geographical clusters or regions: One state in each region was randomly selected. To identify accredited programs within selected states, we used the online directory of CACREP programs. Because of the difficulty of identifying and contacting individual counseling students, e-mails were directed to counseling department chairpersons with a request to forward participation information to students. Contact information for program administrators was obtained from the online CACREP directory, and if needed, from the counseling program Web site. Responses from the initial round yielded a sample size that was inadequate for proposed statistical analyses and a second round of states was selected using the same procedure. Invitations to participate in this study were e-mailed to 151 counseling department program chairs. A total of 320 counseling students responded to the PDS–CSV, but only 283 provided complete and usable responses. It was not possible to determine the total number of students in this population.

#### Instrumentation

To create a comprehensive assessment of counselor dispositions associated with professional development, clinical competence, or both, we employed an iterative process of multiple reviews of the professional literature from different disciplinary perspectives. This yielded a diverse set of constructs and themes, which we used in preliminary data collection and analyses. In turn, this activity generated feedback, which provided a focus for further reviews. At each stage of the process, coresearchers discussed findings at regularly scheduled meetings. Eventually, this on-going process yielded a list of nine categories that reflected theoretically related, yet discrete constructs: cognitive, ethical/legal, interpersonal, personal wellness, personal–professional boundaries, professionalism, responsiveness, self-control, and suitability for the profession. We created either six or seven theoretically related or behaviorally anchored items for each construct to produce 59 items, which formed the PDS–CSV.

The PDS-CSV required respondents to evaluate the extent to which students and faculty in their counseling program demonstrated a behavior, attitude, value, or characteristic identified on a 7-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). In addition to the 59 content items, 11 demographic items were designed to capture standard demographic data (i.e., gender, age), information regarding professional education and experience, estimated ratios of suitable or unsuitable students and faculty, and two items asked respondents to rate their

degree of confidence in their responses. Student responses about program peers are the focus of this study. The PDS–CSV was developed in SurveyMonkey, a Web-based service that provides a platform for developing online surveys for research purposes. The PDS–CSV used response options that included radio buttons and text boxes to collect data. To ensure respondent confidentiality, the principal investigator purchased a private Gold account that restricted access to study investigators. The study was approved by the university's institutional review board.

# **Procedures**

Principal investigators e-mailed a hyperlink to the survey to the department chair of each identified counseling program with a request to forward the link to students using only their university e-mail address. These e-mails included a brief description of the study and an invitation to participate. Exactly 1 week after sending the initial e-mail, a reminder e-mail was sent to all department chairs, followed by a final e-mail reminder exactly 1 week later. We used the same procedure for both rounds of data collection.

# **Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

CFA was conducted using AMOS 22.0. This analysis was used to confirm the relationships previously proposed. For this investigation, a one-factor model is supported. In AMOS, model fit indexes are reported for a default model, the saturated model, and the independence model. The default model represents the proposed model. The saturated model is one in which no constraints are placed on the population moments. The independence model goes to the opposite extreme, assuming the observed variables are uncorrelated with each other. For all estimation methods except maximum likelihood, AMOS also reports fit measures for a zero model, in which all parameters are set to zero (Arbuckle, 2011; Bentler, 2007).

Model fit was assessed using a combination of fit indexes. This includes using a combination of criteria to assess the fit of the data to each model. Although the  $\chi^2$  test statistic is the most commonly cited fit index, it is negatively affected by the sample size and the number of parameters in a model. A number of researchers posit that the  $\chi^2$  test statistic is problematic when used with data that are not multivariate normal, as it is extremely sensitive to sample size, and the  $\chi^2$  test statistic value decreases as model complexity increases (e.g., Hoyle, 1995; Satorra & Bentler, 1999; Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003). However, because of the sample size (usable responses, n = 283) in this study, all the *p* values associated with the computed  $\chi^2$  did not exceed .05.

Additionally, model fit was evaluated using the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 2007), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI; Bentler, 2007), normed fit index (NFI; Bentler, 2007), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which, according to Browne and Cudeck (1993, pp. 137–138), are designed to address the following issue: How well would the model, with unknown but optimally chosen parameter values, fit the population covariance matrix if it were available? RMSEA demonstrates optimal fit with a value below .05, and a reasonably good fit with values at or below .08. For CFI, NFI, and TLI, a value greater than .90 is acceptable, whereas a value greater than .95 is considered excellent (Bentler, 2007). According to Fan, Thompson, and Wang (1999), these indexes, with the exception of RMSEA, have been shown to demonstrate very little random variation due to sample size, number of parameters, model misspecification, or method of estimation.

Browne and Cudeck (1993) also proposed the consideration of a complementary question regarding model fit that focuses on the overall error in the model: How well can the model with parameter values determined from the available sample fit the population covariance matrix?

Factor	ltems	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Factor	R <sup>2</sup>
Cognitive	25, 28, 32, 33, 38, 42	.88	COG	.77
Ethical/legal	12, 23, 34, 39, 48	.81	EL	.73
Interpersonal	2, 3, 4, 9, 41, 51	.75	INT	.68
Personal wellness	17, 20, 21, 43, 45, 52, 53, 54, 55	.83	PPB	.57
Personal-professional boundaries	8, 13, 18, 35, 37, 46	.70	PRO	.69
Professionalism	5, 16, 36, 47, 57, 58	.76	PW	.70
Responsiveness	11, 19, 26, 29	.77	RES	.61
Self-control	1, 14, 31, 44, 45, 56	.82	SC	.62
Suitability for the profession	22, 24, 40, 49, 50, 59	.81	SFP	.72

Table 1. Theorized Factors With Reliability Estimates and Reliability Estimates for Indicator Variables.

Browne and Cudeck proposed that the smaller the Expected Cross-Validation Index (ECVI), the smaller the discrepancy, and therefore, the better the model fit.

For this investigation, model fit determination was not based on the traditional null hypothesis approach (i.e., p < .05). The *p* value of a given model is determined more by its sample size than the validity of the statistic (Arbuckle, 2011; Gulliksen & Tukey, 1958; Jöreskog, 1969). Therefore, the model fit indexes mentioned previously were used as the primary determinants of model fit.

#### **Preliminary Factor Analyses**

Starting with the original 59 Likert-type responses, an item analysis was performed by two content experts to identify which items best represented the originally theorized constructs. Items that were duplicative in nature or were reverse worded were examined for their support of the construct that the item was hypothesized to represent. Without exception, only one item of two parallel items was used to support a factor, as this would artificially inflate the reliability estimations (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). Factors were manually established by taking the average responses for each item, and reliability estimates were computed. The resulting factors were compiled from 54 items (see Table 1).

As indicated in Table 1, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  estimate of internal consistency reliability was computed for each factor. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  procedure calculates a number of commonly used measures of score reliability and also provides information about the relationships between individual items in the scale. Factor correlations were computed and are provided in Table 2.

As indicated in Table 2, the correlations between the factors are statistically significantly correlated at p <. 01. Although the correlations are high, there is no multicollinearity or singularity between factors indicated (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). Additional information on the estimation of reliability for factors is provided in Gliem and Gliem (2003) and McLaughlin and Randolph (2012).

#### Results

#### **Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

CFA using AMOS 22.0 was applied to the proposed structural models of professional and personal dispositions. Initially, it was theorized that the model would converge on two factors, as indicated in Figure 1.

The initial theorized model, if supported, would have the two second order factors professional and personal dispositions, potentially supporting a higher order third-order factor. However, this theorized model with two second-order factors was not supported by participant responses. Due to the high correlations between the first-order factors, a second model testing the existence of a single second-order factor, which could be called global disposition was conducted. This model was supported by the current sample of participant responses, and is illustrated in Figure 2.

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Table 2. Factor Correlations.

Factor	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Responsiveness (1)	.641**	.669**	.683**	.670**	.554**	.663**	.677**	.625**
Professionalism (2)	_	.669**	.743**	.705**	.681**	.729**	.747**	.713**
Personal-professional boundaries (3)		_	.732**	.693**	.584**	.717**	.656**	.653**
Ethical/legal (4)			_	.701**	.662**	.779**	.691**	.727**
Personal wellness (5)					.755**	.716**	.732**	.669**
Self-control (6)					_	.655**	.723**	.664**
Suitable profession (7)							.735**	.688**
Cognitive (8)								.754**
Interpersonal (9)								

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.



Figure 1. Initial model based on two theorized higher order factors: professional disposition and personal disposition.

For this model, maximum likelihood estimation was used, and all parameter estimates were standardized with disturbance term variances set equal to one. One correlation was drawn between E7 and E9, accounting for r = .37. Squared multiple correlation values, representing the lower bound of a measure's reliability, are the values nearest the indicator variables in Figure 2.

The final model resulted in model fit indexes of TLI = .948, CFI = .961, NFI = .960, and RMSEA = .090, indicating a good fitting model. RMSEA is larger than would be ideal, but this value is likely affected by the sample size of participants in the model. Likewise, the analysis revealed  $\chi^2(27) = 109.3$ , p = .00. The CFAs supported a theorized global dispositions measure.



Figure 2. Global disposition model. *Note*. Per the analyses settings, the illustrated model provides the coefficient value on each path and the coefficient of determination at the top right corner of each factor.

# **Composite Scale Reliability**

Reliability of the composite scales was tested to determine the consistency with which a given scale measured the construct it represented. These reliability estimates are based on the squared multiple correlation, which is the communality estimate for an indicator variable that measures the percent of variance in a given indicator variable explained by its latent factor. These results are presented in Table 1.

As indicated, the reliability of the battery as a whole is good, based on general guidelines established by Cohen (2002). The reliability estimates are notably strong in spite of the likely impact by the sampling procedures using multiple student populations from various universities. These results speak to the strength of the inventory items working consistently across different groups. With additional research and larger sample sizes, it is expected that the reliability estimates will improve. The full-scale Cronbach's  $\alpha = .964$ .

#### AMOS Regressions on Global Disposition Measure

A comprehensive model of variance in global disposition attributable to first-order factors demonstrates acceptable model fit across all variables in contributing to the second-order global disposition measure. As indicated, the COG factor produces the strongest estimate, followed by RES. These regression estimates are presented in Table 3.

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	Estimate	SE	CR
RES	1.026	0.066	15.645
PW	0.932	0.054	17.290
PRO	Restricted to $= 1$		
РРВ	0.862	0.058	14.886
SFP	0.797	0.045	17.839
COG	1.054	0.056	18.708
EL	0.994	0.056	17.834
INT	0.932	0.055	17.014
SC	0.933	0.059	15.783

Note.  $CR = critical ratio; RES = responsiveness; PW = personal wellness; PRO = professionalism; PPB = personal-professional boundaries; SFP = suitability for the profession; COG = cognitive; EL = ethical/legal; INT = interpersonal; SC = self-control. All estimates were significant at the <math>\alpha < .001$  level.

# Discussion

Results of this study provide initial support for the PDS–CSV score reliability and validity when measuring counseling student dispositions. Although this investigation included a limited sample size, this limitation was mitigated by the analysis of the data at the scale level. Results of the CFA further support the notion that professional dispositions are best understood as a single construct comprised of personal and professional subdimensions and nine correlated factors. This finding might help to explain difficulties researchers have encountered in previous attempts to define and measure professional dispositions.

Although a useful preliminary step in the process of creating a psychometrically sound instrument to measure counseling student dispositions, results of this study enjoy limited applicability. As noted previously, this study employed a sample of counseling students, not faculty. This decision was made for two reasons. First, research findings suggest that students enrolled in counselor training programs spend more time, observe more behaviors, and have greater access to both the inner and outer worlds of peers than do counseling faculty (see Forrest, Elman, Gizara, & Vacha-Haase, 1999; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006; Mearns & Allen, 1991; Oliver, Bernstein, Anderson, Blashfield, & Roberts, 2004). Because a primary goal of this study was to delineate the factor structure of counseling student dispositions, we opted to sample the group most capable of providing credible and accurate data. Second, counseling students were selected because this group produced an adequate sample size required for conducting all statistical tests for purposes of this study, but not necessarily sufficient to generalize results of this study to all counseling students. Although yielding an instrument of limited value to counselor educators in assessing the dispositions of students applying for admission or enrolled in their training programs, results of this study suggest a more precise and coherent structure of counseling student dispositions. As currently constructed, the PDS-CSV might be of value to counseling students for dispositional selfevaluation over time and for comparisons with faculty evaluations of their dispositional performance.

In an effort to comprehensively identify the elements that subsume counselor dispositions, we sought to isolate dispositional qualities identified in the professional literature for all mental health disciplines. As noted earlier, results of these literature searches produced a large number of terms and elements that were viable candidates for inclusion. These terms were systematically analyzed for conceptual overlap, then distilled to produce the constructs that served as a basis for development of the PDS–CSV. Despite the rigor of these efforts to comprehensively capture all relevant terms, elements, and variables that comprise counselor dispositions, it is possible that the model of counselor dispositions presented in this article is incomplete. Additional research that incorporates alternative terminology and concepts is needed to make this determination.

#### A Proposed Definition of Counselor Dispositions

Our review of dispositions related to the helping professions and particularly the field of counseling yielded a bifurcated conceptualization of dispositions as either professional behaviors or innate personality or temperament traits. One perspective emphasizes dispositions of would-be counselors that are not far removed from the core beliefs, attitudes, and skills of master counselors. The second perspective emphasizes the "person" of the expert counselor with the assumption that certain personality traits are predictive of master counselors. In deriving our initial categories we considered both perspectives so that we did not a priori exclude a particular theoretical camp. We hypothesized that data might support this divergence, but what emerged was a more revealing finding. We are proposing a new definition of counselor dispositions as a unidimensional construct: nine unique first-order factors emerging as a definitive, singular second-order entity. Recognizing the need for further study, we have temporarily labeled this singularity as global dispositions, a term that is accurate but unsatisfying in its generality.

Based on results of this and previous investigations that provide evidence for the structure of counselor dispositions, we propose the following definition for consideration by counseling professionals and the larger community of mental health professionals.

Counselor dispositions are aspects of personal and professional functioning that subsume intellective factors, personality characteristics, relational proficiencies, and values orientations accounted for by nine correlated, but independent, factors: cognitive, ethical/legal, interpersonal, personal wellness, personal-professional boundaries, professionalism, responsiveness, self-control, and suitability for the profession. Counselor dispositions influence and are influenced by cognitive, affective, and behavioral development in a manner consistent with the advancement of clinical proficiency. As such, dispositions are both critical prerequisites to and predictors of professional competence.

#### Future Research Directions

Given the limitations of this study and the need for a psychometrically sound, fair, and facultyadministered assessment of counseling student dispositions, several research directions are indicated. The PDS–CSV should be administered to a national sample of counselor educators and the results subjected to a CFA using the same theoretical model used in this study to determine goodness of fit. Should results support the model presented in this article, the PDS–CSV should then be subjected to reliability and validity studies in samples of programs representing all CACREP-accredited counselor training program specialty areas (i.e., addiction; career; clinical mental health; clinical rehabilitation; college counseling and student affairs; marriage, couple, and family; school; counselor education and supervision) as well as in samples of non-CACREPaccredited programs. Reliability and validity studies should also be conducted in counseling programs representing a wide range of program settings (i.e., urban, suburban, rural), institutional type (i.e., public, private, for-profit, nonprofit, online), and candidate demographics (i.e., predominantly White, historically Black).

Future reliability studies should establish internal consistency, interrater reliability estimates, and test-retest reliability, and validity studies should determine construct and criterion-related validities. A critical focus of validation studies should seek to determine the extent to which the PDS-CSV is predictive of clinical performance (i.e., predictive validity) and that scale and total scores differentiate strong from weak clinical performance (i.e., discriminant validity). Fairness studies should comprehensively examine the PDS-CVS for evidence of instrument bias with particular attention to studies of content bias, differential item functioning, and examinations of instrument and criterion relationships for evidence of slope bias and intercept bias. On successful completion of these studies, research should focus on establishing both norming groups representing counseling student diversity (e.g., age, gender, racial identity, disability) to enable normative comparisons of dispositional performance as well as criterion cut scores to establish

performance thresholds at different levels of training (e.g., master's vs. doctoral program, program entry, midpoint, completion).

On completion of these processes, the final version of the Professional Dispositions Scale should be widely used by counselor educators to determine its practical utility in (a) differentiating more effective from less effective counseling students; (b) measuring progress toward counseling student dispositional goals; and ultimately (c) making more effective admission, retention, and dismissal decisions. In the course of these decision-making processes, use of this scale will undoubtedly be subjected to legal challenges by applicants not selected for program admission and students dismissed from counseling programs based on dispositional evaluations. Results of future court decisions will provide additional critical information regarding needs for scale revision and the utility of the Professional Dispositions Scale in counselor education programs.

The process of developing an instrument that yields reliable, valid, and fair counseling student disposition scores for evaluation purposes is a daunting task, but one that must be pursued. This point is made evident by research findings that support the role of dispositions in counselor competence and CACREP accreditation requirements that mandate the evaluation of dispositions in the absence of a currently reliable and valid dispositional evaluation measure. This situation creates significant clinical, ethical, and legal risks for patients, students, faculty, counseling programs, and the counseling profession. Results of this study provide initial evidence that the task is achievable.

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