Candidate: Bonnie L. VanderWal
For the degree of: Doctor of Philosophy
Department: Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology
Title: The Relationship between Counselor Trainees’ Personal Therapy Experiences and Client Outcome
Committee: Dr. Mary Z. Anderson, Chair
Dr. James Croteau
Dr. Glinda Rawls
Time/Place: Wednesday, November 4, 2015
2:30 to 4:30 p.m.
3120 Sangren Hall

Research on mental health professionals’ use of personal psychotherapy indicates that a majority of practitioners have participated in their own personal therapy for both personal and professional reasons (Bike, Norcross, & Schatz, 2009; Norcross & Connor, 2005). Psychotherapists typically suggest that engaging in their own personal therapy has aided in their professional development and clinical effectiveness in their work with clients (Orlinsky, Norcross, Ronnestad, & Wiseman, 2005); however, researchers have been unable to conclude that such evidence exists (Clark, 1986; Greenberg & Staller, 1981; Macaskill, 1988; Macran & Shapiro, 1998; Orlinsky, Norcross et al., 2005). Studies have often included psychotherapists already established in their careers where levels of experience may have influenced their performance and/or subjective reflections of the benefits of personal therapy (PT) experience. One reason past studies are inconclusive is that the methods employed lacked the capabilities of current statistical techniques to detect small effects. Additionally, client outcome was measured in a variety of ways including supervisor ratings of therapist effectiveness, client reports of satisfaction levels, and client termination patterns. The current study addresses these problems by using a counselor trainee population (e.g., to control for levels of experience), more sophisticated methods (e.g., growth curve analyses capable of examining both the amount and rate of change), and advanced measures of outcome (e.g., repeated measures of client...
psychological distress designed to identify clinically significant change) to explore the relationship between counselor trainees’ personal therapy experiences and client outcome.

Thirty counselor trainees completed a counselor information questionnaire regarding their experiences in personal therapy. Client outcome data from participating counselor trainees were obtained from archival measures of psychological distress. Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) was used to analyze client growth trajectories to predict relationships between counselor trainee PT experiences and reductions in client psychological distress. Results indicated that counselor trainee PT experience was associated with the rate at which clients reported changes in psychological distress over the course of therapy. That is, clients of counselor trainees who reported PT experience showed faster rates of distress reduction compared to clients of counselor trainees who denied PT experience. Moreover, group differences in client distress levels over the course of therapy were found to be greater for clients who met with trainees who reported experience in personal therapy compared to clients who met with trainees who reported no PT experience. Additionally, counselor trainees identified if PT experiences occurred during graduate training. Results indicated that clients of counselor trainees who participated in personal therapy during their graduate training reduced distress more quickly than clients of counselor trainees indicating either no PT experience or PT experience occurring prior to training. Likewise, clients showed greater total reductions of psychological distress when their respective counselors reported PT experience during graduate training compared to no reported PT experience or PT experience occurring prior to graduate training. Suggestions for future research focus on replicating the study using a larger counselor trainee sample size with more clients per counselor trainee and increased observations (i.e., sessions) per client. Implications for the training of psychotherapists include focusing on how personal therapy may enhance counselor growth and development.