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Investigating the Receptivity of Counseling Students toward Receiving Counseling

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Investigating the Receptivity of Counseling Students toward Receiving Counseling

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Tonna Okei and our two wonderful children, Otitodilinna and Chetanna.

I love you all.

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The successful completion of this dissertation rests on the appreciated contributions of many individuals. I thank Professor Joshua Gold who has guided me through this journey. His patience, feedback and motivation resulted in the development of this research paper.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the perceptions of graduate students in counseling toward seeking counseling as part of the efforts to promote the personal and professional development. The main research question is: what are the perceptions of graduate counseling students toward receiving counseling? The secondary questions are: What are the reasons graduate students in counseling would be willing or reluctant to receive counseling? What are the perceived benefits of counseling? And, finally, what are the perceived drawbacks of counseling? The study is qualitative in nature applying a phenomenological design. The participants were purposefully selected from the Ed.S. program in Counselor Education. Six participants were involved in the study. Data was collected through individual interviews which were analyzed through interpretation and codification to derive themes as they pertained to content analysis. Overall, the results indicated that the participants' had a positive perception about seeking counseling. However, the participants also shared hindrances that prevented them from seeking counseling.

Keywords: Willingness, Reluctance, Benefits and Drawbacks.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The field of counselor education has evolved over the year of practice, more recently guided by the accreditation standards created by CACREP (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs). CACREP are those standards of preparation for professional practice, the latest being dated 2016, that specify the knowledge and skills needed to offer professional counseling. From these standards, so far it has been observed that knowledge and skills comprise only two aspects of the professional practice; the third aspect being the qualities of the provider of those competencies, the professional counselor. This means that the self-of-the counselor is vital to the success of counseling as well as the other two components, yet harder to ascertain. Previous sources such as Corey & Corey (2003); Campbell & Christopher (2012); & Neukrug (2012) have identified several personal characteristics that exemplify an effective helper. However, the question could be raised as to how students respond to the realization that they too, carry “baggage” that might interfere with their professional duties and efficacy. Baggage in this situation is referred to as psychological baggage or impairment.

According to De Vries, Valadez (2006), impairment was described as “interference in professional functioning due to chemical dependency, mental illness, or personal conflict” (p.78). Because client transparency and vulnerability are integral to the process of counseling, through what venues might counselors-in-training experience the

curative nature of this therapeutic relationship and what might their perception of accessing counseling be? In order for counselors in training to become effective professionals, they must be aware of their own inadequacies and seek help when necessary. It is impossible to help others if the student is unable to help herself or himself. Loizos (2013) suggested that “work with the self sheds light on the characters and personalities of those who are fit and those who are unfit for the profession, and provides trainees with expertise and skills that are necessary to exercise counseling and psychotherapy” (p.1).

The focus of this study is on the receptivity of graduate counseling students from a CACREP Counselor Education and Supervision program toward seeking counseling. Studies have been done to investigate the perceptions of students in the general university population towards seeking counseling, but when it comes to seeking information about how students in the counseling field perceive counseling themselves, as the main advocates of counseling, there is inadequate information (De Vries & Valdez 2006). The counseling field lacks adequate information about graduate students’ attitude in comparison to undergraduates in the area. Haberstroh 2010; Hayes, Youn, Castonguay, Lock, McAleavey and Norberg 2011, and Tse, Wantz and Firmin 2013; and Laxson 2014, focused primarily on the help-seeking attitude of college age students alone. As a result of the limited information or knowledge in this topic area for this specific population, the researcher has chosen this area of study interest for its uniqueness, which has led to the main research question for this study which is whether graduate counseling students are willing or reluctant to seek counseling themselves.

To date, most literature reveals what we know about students' willingness to seek professional counseling but it does not provide insight into the reasoning of counseling students who do or do not avail themselves of this opportunity. Studies of undergraduate students' revealed five psychological factors, in order of significance which are; social support, self-disclosure, anticipated utility or anticipated risk of seeking help, social stigma and social norm predicted attitude towards seeking counseling. This contributed to or affected the intent to seek help (Vogel, Wester & Boysen 2005). Stigma came up again as a factor associated with seeking counseling in the study done by Vogel, Wade and Hackler (2006). Perceptions of public stigma were positively associated with self-stigma, which in turn is negatively associated with attitudes individuals have toward counseling. These attitudes are then positively associated with the willingness to seek counseling. Self-stigma was described as "the internalized negative perceptions of oneself if one were to seek help, whereas attitudes toward seeking counseling are the positive or negative perceptions of counseling in general" (p.46). Gulliver, Griffiths and Christensen (2012), in the study of barriers and facilitators to help seeking attitude, found that participants rated stigma as the most dominant barrier, followed by lack of mental health education, and then negative past experience. The reinforcements were encouragement by others, established relationship with the counselor, positive previous interactions with the counselor and positive attitude of others.

In Laxson's (2014) study about help-seeking attitude, participants reported being hesitant to seeking counseling when experiencing stress and in risking stigmatization. Participants were not comfortable about seeking counseling. They were more willing to endure the problem alone. Counseling was reported to be needed only when experiencing

severe stress or extreme mental health issue after one has exhausted all other support systems or other coping techniques. The proposed study intends to address this gap in understanding by revealing the underlying factors that may support or impede the attitudes of the students towards seeking counseling themselves. Currently, there is lack of information regarding graduate counseling students, in regard to information about the second research question which is; what are the perceptions of graduate counseling students toward counseling? This question is open ended with the intent of allowing the participants to elaborate on their thoughts extensively. Other questions about this research study are developed to find out the perceived benefits of counseling, as well as the drawbacks. The study will generate responses or answers that may lead to other themes such as factors that may promote or hinder in order of significance. Therefore, the study is relevant to the field of counseling and the process of counselor education in the following ways:

First, the results of this study will provide information to the stakeholders (faculty, department chairs, deans, and other professionals in counseling) to help explain the reasons that may hinder or encourage the perception of the students towards seeking counseling. Possible suggestions or recommendations can then be made to improve or remedy unfavorable situations that may hinder the students in seeking counseling. Through this investigation, counselor education programs and counseling staff will be provided with the information on how to better support the students' personal development, which will in turn have a positive impact on their professional development. Hence, counselor education programs will be able to produce well-adjusted counselors-in-training who will eventually become effective professional counselors.

The second reason is that the study will assist counselor education students to be more proactive in seeking counseling by providing them with information about the benefits of counseling and possible suggestions and recommendations. As a result, improvements will be made regarding accessibility. This will enable students to feel more comfortable with the idea of seeking counseling.

Again, in the training of students, counseling may be used as an instrument for self-awareness by counseling educational programs (McCarthy 2008). Faculty in counselor education programs are encouraged to give opportunities for self-growth as standards of the counseling profession. CACREP (2016) & ACA (2014) ensures the quality and continuous enrichment of counselor education programs through established standards developed for students to practice and master knowledge and skills. The standards encourage students to be involved in activities of self-growth and personal development both personally and professionally. These standards have important implications in admission, gatekeeping and endorsement processes for counselor educators in evaluating students. All counseling students despite emphasis or track of study are expected to possess the skills and practice necessary to address a wide variety issues for their professional identity.

Also, the ACA Code of ethics, regarding student welfare, suggests that counselor education programs describe requirements for self-growth experiences. Programs or counselor educators may recommend self-growth experiences. Counseling may be recommended or required to address any personal issues of the student that may affect their competency (Code F.7.b., Self-Growth Experiences). Because counseling is regarded as a tool for personal growth and development of the students, program

opportunities include personal counseling. This is a result of the realization that counseling is an important element in the self-growth of students.

In line with the above position, Neukrug and Williams, (1993); Prosek, Holm, and Daly (2013), outlined the benefits of counseling for counselors in training to include an increased emotional health, a deeper understanding of intra and interpersonal functioning; increased awareness; an increase in confidence about ability to work; and a decrease in counselor acting out behavior; fewer psychological problems; decreased depressive symptoms and anxiety symptoms. Furthermore, in order for persons to become effective counselors, they must acknowledge their psychological issues and seek healing (Remen, May, Young & Breland, 1985). Unaddressed psychological issues in counseling students could become problematic for universities as a result of the potential for lawsuits due to graduating ineffective therapists (Custer, 1994). Untreated mental health problems are significant contributors to graduate student dropout. (Wilson, Mason & Ewing, 1997).

Another reason for this study is to draw attention to the advantages of counseling for graduate counseling students. It is hoped that this study will support the idea of personal counseling for graduate counseling students. De Vries, and Valadez (2006) stated “ A by –product of such personal counseling might be that graduate counseling students would be afforded first hand experiences of what it feels like to lie on the proverbial couch, and would help them gain better insight into what counseling might mean to their clients” (p.85). Downs (2000); Murphy (2005); and Norcross (2005) suggested that counseling provides students with the opportunity for personal growth and development which involves an increased understanding of what it feels like to be a client. Counseling during counselor training is regarded as a positive influence on the

training and eventually in professional practice. Corey and Corey (2002) encouraged counseling students in training to seek personal counseling, suggesting that it can assist in improved understanding of motives in leading groups, examining biases, exploring perceptions of group members and identifying ways to use members' potentials. As a researcher, there is a tendency for bias that may affect subjectivity. A bias on the part of the researcher for this study is that the researcher is a counselor education student, therefore, there is a tendency to promote the topic of personal counseling for students. As a student in the field of counseling, there is a strong desire to help develop counseling competencies in counseling. As a result of the above tendency, the researcher may desire to contribute to the notion that supports counseling for the respondents. However, this study will only rely on the self-report of the participants that will be analyzed and interpreted using member check and peer review, thereby enhancing objectivity in order to prevent personal views and misinterpretations. The researcher also will discuss the nature of positionality and subjectivity so that participants are aware of and provided an opportunity for checks and balances as it relates to the study. Hence, the researcher affirms to desist from subjectivity to promote the validity of the study.

To explain the concepts of attitudes and perceptions, Lillios (2010), posits that the association between attitudes and perception is that attitudes are developed from a combination of various recurrent processes of sensation, perception and feelings. "An attitude is the psychological response to people, society, objects, events, occurrences and circumstances to life itself that generally influences our behaviors and actions. Attitudes are either positive or negative." (Life-success.secrets.com 2015). Attitudes are studied in order to get an idea of how much individuals or groups vary in their orientations toward a

particular object or issue. Attitudes are studied in a particular setting or practical situation. (Arul 2015). Hogg & Vaughan (2005) define attitude as “a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioral tendencies towards significant objects, groups, events or symbols” (p.150). I define the concept of attitude as what an individual believes about a specific idea or object. Perceptions on the other hand is defined as “our recognition and interpretation of sensory information (study.com 2015). Perception is part of the components that formulate attitudes. According to Zanna & Rempel (1988) attitude consists of both cognitive and affective aspects. Millar & Tesser (2015) further reiterated that the cognitive aspect involves the encoding of attributes and beliefs about the topic or object. If affect is more prominent than cognition, the attitude report will reflect on feelings about the topic but if cognitions are more significant than the attitude, the report will reflect beliefs about the topic. For this research study, it is expected that participants discuss about perceptions based on their cognitive processes through self-reporting. Concentration will be on the cognitive process or thoughts of the students rather than on the feelings associated with the topic of study.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Dearing, Maddux & Tagney (2005) indicated that more research is needed using graduate counseling students as participants, and that most issues mainly focus on the mental health aspect of the participants rather than on personal counseling as the main concentration. De Vries, & Valdez (2006) stated that “only a few studies have investigated the perceptions of counseling students toward counseling” (p.79). McCarthy (2008) also suggested that there is insufficient information regarding studies done particularly on counseling trainees about their attitudes in seeking counseling and the

impact it has on professional development of the students. Many studies have focused on the help-seeking attitudes and utilization of counseling by undergraduate college students such as those of Haberstroh (2010); Hayes, Youn, Castonguay, Lock, McAleavey and Norberg (2011); Rickwood and Bradford (2012); Tse, Wantz and Firmin (2013); and Laxson (2014). The few studies on help-seeking that involve graduate students, which include those done by Bryne, and Shufelt (2014), Although, some of these studies mentioned above are decades old, they however have been cited in recent studies due to their relevance in the topic of the perceptions graduate counseling students towards seeking counseling. Among the studies recently published and referenced or cited using one or more of these studies include; McCarthy, Bruno and Sherman (2010) study that explored the help-seeking attitudes of graduate students at higher education level; Loizos (2013) study of personal therapy for future therapist; and Prosek, Holm & Daly (2013) study of the benefits of required counseling for counseling students; The seasoned studies serve as a foundation in research especially in retrieving information regarding graduate counseling students perceptions towards seeking counseling. It is therefore understandable that researchers of today, including I and possibly, future researcher will continue to utilize the articles as they are vital resources to counselor education due to the quality of information concerning the topic of my study.

With regard to the few studies done on perceptions of graduate counseling students towards counseling, there seems to be a plethora of information regarding the knowledge and skills of graduate counselor trainees but not on perceptions. A search of counselor education and supervision using the Psych Info search engine based at a Southern university library website indicated 2,353 article journals. Information on

counseling students yielded 20,577 articles. Still, most of these articles are information on the skills and knowledge of the students. Little is known about the topic on the perceptions of the students in seeking counseling. Most of the information obtained was on multicultural issues, counseling skills, skills competency, rehabilitation, child centered therapy, assessment, grief counseling, clinical supervision and so on. This study therefore is an attempt to fill the gap of information on the topic because of the advantages to the population of students and to the cause of professional development, skills and knowledge in the area of counselor education.

1.2 NATURE OF THE STUDY

This study will investigate the receptivity of graduate counseling students towards counseling. The researcher has chosen to use a qualified approach in order to obtain in-depth or robust information for the study. Heppner and Heppner (2003) suggested that through qualitative research rich descriptions of phenomena are analyzed to represent individual lived experiences through writing and interpretations. Different methods enable this kind of study to enhance rigor, breadth and depth. Focus is on individual perspectives through multiple strategies. Hovart (2013) affirmed that qualitative research is appropriate to describe and understand processes or problems. It also shows how respondents make sense of their world in relation to a specific context. Therefore, qualitative study is very apt for this study as the researcher is interested in this particular study with the target population being graduate counseling students at a university location. This will provide the researcher the opportunity to develop individual experiences, gather depth and detail, allow opportunity to build openness to expand

responses, provide understanding and description of personal individual experiences and meanings, and identify contextual factors as it relates to the study.

The following are the reasons why the qualitative designs are more suited for this study:

First, the researcher will use an interpretative paradigm as a framework to guide this study. The general framework for the study is to explore a phenomenon. The phenomenon is to investigate the receptivity of graduate counseling students towards receiving counseling themselves. Heppner and Heppner (2003) stated “Phenomenological researchers need to design their studies to be ideally suited to understand the phenomenon under investigation” (p.168). The participants are expected to discuss the meaning of their experiences on the topic. Thus, this method will allow the researcher to develop, bring together and convey the participants’ meanings. Furthermore, Turner (2010) suggested that the main advantage of qualitative designs or approach is to provide information regarding the “human” aspect of an issue which involves the attitudes, beliefs, emotions, opinions and relationship of individuals. These ideas support the suitability of using an interpretative paradigm as the best approach to carry out this social science study.

Secondly, through the use of individual interviews in the collection of data, the researcher will be able to obtain in-depth information from the participants. The interview process allows for flexibility in regards to the ability to ask open ended questions, develop and modify follow up questions to derive the optimal amount of information from the participants. Questions will be developed and modified to give

opportunity to obtain specific information that will attempt to answer the research questions. Open ended questions will allow the participants to express themselves further, thereby increasing the depth of information. According to Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest & Namey (2005), open ended questions and probing allows participants to answer questions in their own words rather than to force them to select from fixed responses like in quantitative research methods. They stated that “open ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the participants, unanticipated by the researcher, rich and explanatory in nature” (p.4). Another advantage of using open ended questions is that it allows the researcher to be flexible in the process of probing previous responses made by participants. The researcher is able to ask “why” or “how”. In the current study, the researcher intends to make use of open ended questions as well as follow up questions for flexibility in order to derive extensive, comprehensive and thorough amount of responses from participants.

Also, individual interviews promote the issue of confidentiality in research. Givens (2008), advocated for researchers to protect the privacy of the research participants. This means that researchers must not disclose information that can in any way identify a participant. This is done to prevent harm or stigma. For the current study the researcher intends to conduct individual interviews at a secure location rather than conduct a focus group interview where participants will be expected to discuss at once as a group. Individual interview will provide more privacy on the topic of study which involves sharing personal information about experiences concerning “counseling”. The topic of my research is very sensitive in nature as participants will be expected to share personal information regarding their attitudes and perceptions of counseling experiences.

Purposive sampling will be used to obtain data. According to Tongco (2007), purposive sampling provides a researcher with dependable and robust data. It is used in a natural social science setting. It is a process of finding participants intentionally, and then selecting them randomly within the purposive sample. For the current study, the researcher selects a specific population which is graduate counseling students in a counseling program. The reasons are that this specific population or sample possess the knowledge of the research topic and may be more willing to participate in the research. Thus they are more likely to contribute appropriate data in application and depth.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions of this study are developed and modified from the ATSPPH (Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help, Fischer & Farina, 1995)- Short Form. The ATSPPH form contains ten questions about attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help. According to Vogel, Wade and Ascherman (2009), the ATSSPH-SF was developed to measure attitudes towards seeking psychological help which is to be tested by researchers and clinicians. Alheimer and Hansen (2012), it is also used to understand how individuals view counseling. The test correlates with the use of professional help for a problem. The internal consistency is reported to be .84 in college sample study (Fischer and Farina, 1995). The items on the test ranges from 0 (disagree) to 4 (agree). Since this study is qualitative, the questions are modified into open ended questions in order for the researcher to obtain more specific details to correspond with the research questions.

The main research question that guides this study is:

1. What are the perceptions of graduate counseling students towards counseling?

Other related questions are:

2. What are the reasons graduate counseling students would be willing to or reluctant to seek counseling?
3. What are the perceived benefits of graduate counseling students in receiving counseling?
4. What are the perceived drawbacks of graduate counseling students in receiving counseling?

As the questions are developed for individual interviews, depending on the response of the participants, follow up questions will be developed and expanded to derive more responses. According to Turner (2010), it is necessary for qualitative researchers to ask open ended questions which allow participants to explain their experiences. It is particularly used to keep participants on focus with responses, to ensure and obtain optimal responses from participants.

Among the questions developed for each of the research questions are the following:

Question regarding the students' perceptions about counseling (Research Question 1).

1. What are your thoughts about a person who engages in counseling to cope with psychological issues?

Question regarding students' willingness or reluctance in seeking counseling (Research Question 2)

2. What are your thoughts about your readiness in seeking counseling?

Question regarding the potential benefits from seeking counseling (Research Question 3)

3. What do you think are the benefits of engaging in counseling especially at the university level?

Question regarding the potential drawbacks from seeking counseling (Research Question 4)

4. What may be the reasons for counseling not being an effective means to cope with psychological problems?

These questions directly inquire about the participant's idea about their attitude towards counseling. The question provides an opportunity to answer in either a positive or negative way. As the participant answers these questions, follow up questions about the responses in order to seek more information about the participant's stance on the topic will be asked. Other questions tend to allow the participant to expand on their thought processes in responses.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of graduate counseling students towards receiving counseling. In doing so, information regarding the willingness or reluctance toward receiving counseling will be gathered. The study will attempt to fill in the gap of information regarding this particular topic and the targeted population which will help to answer the problem of insufficient studies in this specific

group towards seeking counseling. The other related purpose is to find the benefits derivable from their readiness to seek counseling.

1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As already stated, this research is qualitative in nature. The study involves the use of individual interviews, document review and analysis of data. Lacey (2010) suggested that a conceptual framework identifies the researcher's worldviews about a topic. It describes assumptions and predeterminations for a study. Fulton and Krainovich-Miller (2010) further described a framework as a map for a study, providing a rationale for development of research questions. Lobiondon-Wood (2010) proposed that a framework is the design for a study together with the research questions, purpose and literature review. All should complement each other and help with the operationalization of the research design. A framework assists the researcher in making sure that projects are understood. It helps the researcher focus ideas of what the study is to achieve.

Robson (2002) believed that research studies need to have a definite story from the beginning. Most beginning researchers find it helpful to use a conceptual framework to guide and lay out a plan for study. It is then that conceptual framework is refined, as data collection and analysis develops. Green (2014) believed that the use of a conceptual framework was developed to fulfill the demands and expectations of research projects, which are helpful in guaranteeing that information is presented in an organized manner that is clearly communicated. Robson (2002), however, suggested that a framework is commonly developed as a diagram.

This study is conceptualized as reflected in the diagram below:

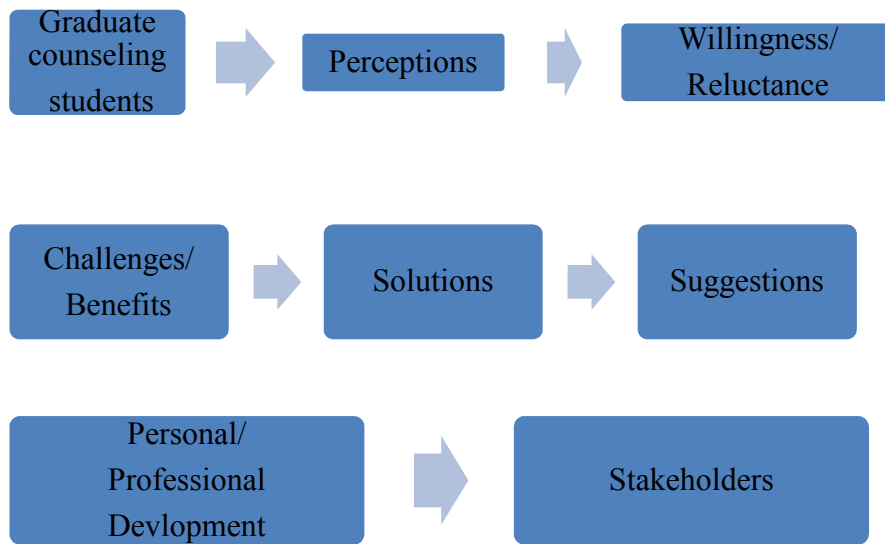


Figure1.1 Diagrammatic Representation of the Conceptual Framework

In a nutshell, the study will investigate the perceptions of graduate counseling students towards counseling. The willingness or reluctance of graduate counseling students in seeking counseling is related to their perceptions toward counseling. It is expected that in finding out this information, it will gradually lead to obtaining information for the main research question. It is probable that the responses gathered from the participants will be of a positive or negative response to the idea of seeking counseling. Some of them may have challenges in seeking counseling help and some may not. Despite the perception, there are benefits and drawbacks that may accrue from seeking counseling. The information gathered from this study naturally leads to the recommendations that are usable to the counseling programs, leading to personal and professional development of the students which in turn will be beneficial to the

stakeholders. The stakeholders that this study may be of benefit to are curriculum developers, counseling educators and the government.

Thus, whether negative or positive perceptions, some students may not necessarily want or need counseling. This does not automatically suggest that the students who seek counseling or decide to seek counseling are deficient in any way. The response of the students in the research process will consequently lead to the direction or pathway through the conceptual framework regarding their responses. Proseck, Holm & Daly (2013), suggested that it is not every counseling student that may demonstrate psychological concerns related to academics and relationships. De Vries & Valadez (2006) in their study that involved the attitudes of counseling students toward counseling showed that a negligible percentage of counseling students showed serious psychopathological concerns. This statement shows that not all counseling students are in need of seeking counseling.

Like a domino effect, effective counselors will be used to tackle the growing number of psychological problems in college students as well as in the adult population generally. The National Survey of College Counseling Centers (2014), reports that there is an increase in students with severe psychological problems by 55%. This was an increase to the reported 44% of the previous year. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIHM 2015) reported that there is an increase 6% of adults who are affected by mental illness. The government spends an estimated \$300 billion dollars each year for treatment of mental health services. Mental health costs for all Americans spent on mental health treatment over a ten- year period were estimated at \$57.5 billion. This simply shows that the demands for qualified and adjusted counselors are in great demand.

1.5 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Attitudes: A settled way of thinking or feeling, typically reflected in a person's behavior.

Help-seeking: Assistance from professionals who have legitimate and recognized professional role in providing relevant advice, support and/or treatment. (Rickwood 2012).

Internship Counseling Students: Students currently undergoing internship training enrolled in the Educational Specialist degree program (Ed. Graduate Studies Bulletin (2014-2015)).

Perception: A way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something; a mental impression. Dictionary.com (2015).

Mental Health: A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community www.cdc.gov/ment (2011).

Receptivity: Having the quality of receiving, taking in, or admitting. Able or quick to receive knowledge, ideas, etc.: a receptive mind. Willing or inclined to receive suggestions, offers, etc., with favor: a receptive listener. Dictionary.com (2014).

1.6 ASSUMPTIONS

It is assumed that through the use of qualitative research design, the researcher will be able to obtain a rich description and deep understanding of the phenomenon being

investigated through the use of individual interviews. Also, semi-structured interviews will enhance positive interpersonal interaction between the researcher and the participants in the process of social communication. Individual interviews will also provide the participants with more privacy. Participants will be more comfortable sharing personal information regarding the study in an individual setting than to share information in a focus group setting.

1.7 LIMITATIONS

The following are the potential limitations of this qualitative study:

First, in this study, the sample size of the participants will relatively be small as opposed to the use of hundreds of participants that could result from a quantitative study. Madrigal and McClain (2012) suggested that the small size of participants is common in qualitative studies. It is usual to conduct studies using between 6 to 12 participants. However for this study, more details and information will be derived as a result of the use of the research designs utilized in the process of collecting data in interviewing, probing, and use of open ended questions as well as follow up questions.

Also, another limitation is that the researcher will rely use on the use of self-report of the participants in the collection of data. As a result, there is a question of validity or credibility for the study. Paulhus and Vazire (2007) pointed out that the data from personal statements made by the participants may lack reality as seen by the researcher and others. Participants may be deceptive for the purpose of self-enhancement, consistency seeking and self-presentation. In this current study, the researcher will develop an effective interviewing style. Non-judgmental empathic attention will be used

to give participants the opportunity to reflect and communicate. The researcher will avoid leading questions, listens to the participants with tolerance and acceptance. Other techniques such as questioning (open ended), probing, and use of follow up questions in interviewing will help to prevent bias and misinterpretations of the results since this information is obtained directly from the participants themselves.

Since the individual interviews were a duration of one hour, information may not be known about the number of participants who interviewed versus those that did not agree to an interview or participate which may have to do with the level of interest for this study.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

1.8.1 KNOWLEDGE GENERATION

The study is done to gather information about the orientations of graduate counseling students towards seeking counseling or not. There are limited research studies done on the perceptions or the willingness of graduate counseling students seeking counseling services. When it comes to information about graduate counselor education skills and knowledge, there is evidence of substantial information compared to information on graduate student's perceptions. Forest, Elman, Gizara and Vacha-Haase (1999) offered a summary of ten previous studies from 1975, and noted that the studies had very limited information. Most of the information done about student perceptions of Counseling Services is done using the general student population. This study will bring about more awareness about the receptivity of graduate counseling students towards counseling. The importance and promotion of counseling to counselor educations

students will be disseminated to counselor education programs and serve as a way to promote the field of counseling education by drawing attention will be given to this particular topic in the area of counseling. Part of the motivation for this study is the interest in doing research in Counselor Education. The findings emanating from this study are capable of contributing to literature in the topic area. I find it rewarding to be able to provide possible suggestions and also to do research in topic areas that have not been done before or are rarely done. My work experience with students and colleagues in counseling services especially at the higher education level has made me more interested in and focused on embarking on this exceptional research topic.

Counseling is viewed as the start of a lifelong process of personal development that impacts personal life in a positive way. It includes facing personal issues, deeper understanding of self and self-awareness (Kumari 2011). Bryne and Shufelt (2014) suggested that research focusing on counseling students' perception on counseling has both positive and negative effects. It is believed that there are still many unanswered inquiries concerning the perspectives of counselor trainees towards personal counseling. Counseling students who have never experienced counseling themselves may be insincere to the profession as they are in a position of recommending services to clients that they may not understand. This makes them unprepared as practitioners. The counseling students may not be able to connect with the client's outlook. The present study will, however, attempt to add to the limited studies done on counseling seeking attitudes of U.S counseling graduate students.

In embarking on this study, the perceptions of graduate counseling seeking counseling will be obtained. The study will determine through data collection,

information on the themes that either support or discourage the willingness to seek counseling. By so doing, factors that promote or hinder help-seeking attitudes will be discussed. The perceptions of the students towards counseling would be addressed, thereby recommending suggestions on how to improve the comfort level of those students towards seeking help. Generally, counseling students are regarded as advocates for the Counseling process and because of this, counseling students must have a positive sense of self.

1.8.2 SOCIAL CHANGE

Curriculum developers can benefit from the findings of this study through designing and regularly reviewing their curricula in the area of student's willingness and reluctance as factors that may contribute or mar the effectiveness of counseling services in higher educational institutions. This could be achieved by developing a sound curriculum that addresses the overall development for counselors in training. This development includes the promotion of personal growth by studying perceptions. According to Patel, Hagedorn and Bai (2013), the main goal of counselor education is to increase the growth of the counseling profession. Counselor educators are responsible for instilling the skills, knowledge and practice that is best to promote client welfare as mandated by the ACA code of Ethics. Part of the best practices involved in gatekeeping is that counselor educators be informed of the current state of counseling profession and hold a working knowledge of current and innovative practices in counseling. This will in turn enhance training and educational processes.

Publishers of learning and teaching materials also may benefit from the findings and recommendations of this study, as they publish or periodically edit and review their

products for dissemination to the public. Bryne and Shufelt (2014) stated, “As the research on this topic continues to emerge across the helping professions, it will remain important for counselors to stay involved in efforts to better understand trainees issues, such as developing an appreciation for the work we do, identifying with our clients’ experiences, and finding ways for training programs to best respond to the needs of the students”. (p.188).

1.8.3 PROFESSIONAL APPLICATION

As opposed to other professionals, Counselors/Counselors in Training are held in high regard when it comes to professionalism. According to the ACA (2014), code “C.2.g”. “Counselors monitor themselves for signs of impairment from their own physical, mental, or emotional problems and refrain from offering or providing professional services when impaired. They seek assistance for problems that reach the level of professional impairment, and if necessary, they limit, suspend, or terminate their professional responsibility until it is determined that they may safely resume their work”. (p.9).

1.9 SUMMARY

This qualitative research study is an investigation of the attitudes and perceptions of graduate counseling students towards seeking counseling. The main research question of the study is; what are the perceptions graduate counseling students towards receiving counseling? The samples of participants are students graduate counseling students in internship at a CACREP accredited Counselor Education program at a Southern University. There is an inadequate number of studies done to find out the attitudes of

graduate counseling students towards counseling. In conducting this study, possible challenges and benefits of seeking counseling as well as solutions could be developed for the topic.

This chapter gives a general overview of the study. In the next chapter, there will be discussion of previous research done in regards to the topic as well as the contributions of this particular study. Chapter 3 will focus on methodology, which will include information about study design, sample, and instruments. Chapter 4 will include presentation of data, analysis and interpretation of data. Finally, chapter 5 will discuss the findings, limitations of this research, implications and suggestions for future research

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH AND LITERATURE
INTRODUCTION

This literature review will discuss previous research done on the topic of my study. The main research question of this study is what are the perceptions of graduate counseling students towards receiving counseling? This will be done to gain a better understanding of the attitudes and perceptions of graduate counseling students for choosing to seek counseling or not. Counseling is viewed as a lifelong process of personal development that influences life in a positive way. Perceptions about counseling may either be positive or negative (Kumari 2011 and Bryne & Shufelt 2014). In obtaining the resources or materials for this literature review, the search engines used were; PsychINFO, PsycTESTS, Academic Search Complete, and Google Search. The key words used in the searches were; Counseling Students, Counseling Students Attitudes, Students Attitudes towards Counseling and Personal Counseling. The searches were done using a university library website. The sources obtained were journal articles and textbooks dated 1984 to 2015. In order to find answers to the research question, this review will also discuss the issue of graduate counseling student awareness and understanding of “self as a therapist” and possible counselor impairments. This literature review will begin with the rationale for personal counseling. Information gathered has been narrowed down to contain related literature reviews specific to or that include graduate counseling students.

2.1 RATIONALE FOR PERSONAL COUNSELING IN THE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF COUNSELOR TRAINEES.

Grimmer & Tribe (2001), Kumari (2011), & Loizos (2013) concurred that two roles necessary for personal counseling of counseling trainees that are paramount for personal development and growth of future counselors are: 1) to develop knowledge and skills for effective understanding of the counseling process and 2) to promote self-awareness (p. 24). Dryden & Thorne (2008) suggested that the continuous experience of self-awareness is beneficial for the counseling psychologists and the counseling process as well. Counseling trainees must be aware of their beliefs, values and moral principles in order to be able to identify their own feelings and reactions to different problematic situations, which will eventually lead to self-actualization. In other words, the satisfaction of personal needs will in turn enable counselor trainees to become better professionals in the future.

2.2 RESEARCH SUPPORTIVE OF PERSONAL COUNSELING

In a qualitative study that involves the experience of counseling students towards personal counseling during training, Murphy (2005) conducted the study that involved the experience of students enrolled in a Master's degree program towards required personal counseling. The program required 40 hours of personal counseling for a course. Interviews were done in a group setting and the outcome of the study revealed three phases of themes from the respondents. The first phase was reflexivity. The awareness that self-material (unresolved personal issues) can influence counseling practice. The second phase describes empathy as an important part of self-awareness. The third phase suggests authentication, referred to as validation of the counseling self as valid and

acceptable tool for practice. Lastly, the fourth phase, prolongation, respondents viewed counseling in this phase as beneficial for long term and continuous professional development. The study concluded that personal counseling is effective and has a positive impact on both personal and professional development of students. A limitation of the study is that only five participants were involved which made it small scale. Although this study seems to have a small number of participants which is a common feature of qualitative studies, the current study will attempt to utilize as many participants as possible, even though it is also a small scale study. However, the current study will gather deep information from the participants through intense individual interviews.

Also, Kumari (2011) conducted a qualitative study that involved the impact of counseling on counseling trainees for personal and professional development. The aim of the study was to explore trainee counseling psychologist's experiences of personal therapy as well as the impact of counseling on personal and professional development. Eight trainee counseling psychologists participated in the study. The results of the study showed that participants viewed counseling as a form of experiential learning that was highly valued. Participants learned the importance of the therapeutic relationship as an essential component of the counseling experience and the foundational basis of clinical work. Participants also gained first-hand experience of the techniques of counseling, experienced what it was to be a client. In personal development, participants viewed counseling as a lifelong process that involves positive characteristics that involve the ability to deal with personal challenges and develop a sense of self or insight. Limitations of the study were that personal counseling was mandated as part of the requirement for training; therefore, participants did not willingly choose to seek counseling. Participants

did not fully understand the reason counseling was a requirement for training. Also, a small sample size was used for the study.

However, Kumari (2011) concluded that personal therapy improved counseling trainees' self-awareness that in turn created a positive impact on the personal lives and professional development of the students. Kumari used a qualitative approach to find out the impact of counseling on counseling trainees' personal and professional development. The current study is also qualitative in nature. The focus is on the attitudes and perceptions of students towards counseling. A common word or term that is synonymous with both studies is "Counseling". Counseling is an important feature in both studies. The impact of counseling on the students' development is related to attitudes, which is why this study is pertinent to the current study. The current study will attempt to find out the attitudes of the students without having counseling as a mandated learning experience. It is hoped that this will help to gather accurate data from the students without any fear of disclosing socially undesirable information. Again, though this and current study are small scale, the researcher intends to gather deep information or data from the participants through individual interviews.

Similarly, Von-Haenisch (2011) carried out a study which explored the influence of personal counseling on professional and personal development of counselor trainees in a qualitative investigation. Personal and professional development was defined as "the process of learning, experience and growth that happens as a consequence of personal therapy, a compulsory component of many counselor training courses". (p. 148). Six participants were involved in the study. Personal counseling was a requirement for the diploma course. Participants were practicing counselors. The ages ranged from 40 to 45.

Interviews were conducted and data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Results indicated that participants viewed counseling as an integral part of training that helped explore and promote issues of self-awareness and self-acceptance. Personal counseling also helped to develop core and advanced skills as well as establish suitable relationships with clients. Limitations of the study were that the researcher lacked time and experience in research which might affect the analysis of data.

2.3 WILLINGNESS/RELUCTANCE OF STUDENTS TOWARD COUNSELING

2.3.1 HELP SEEKING ATTITUDE

The approach used to examine a general model of help seeking was based on Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) theory of reasoned action. According to this theory, one of the determinants of the willingness to seek help is one's attitude toward the counseling process. Attitudes are formed through an evaluation of the expectations the individual has about seeking psychological help. The premise is that the perceptions of stigma should influence one's attitudes, which then influence one's willingness to seek help (Vogel, Wade & Hackler 2007).

It is important to recognize the help-seeking process in the counseling profession and as students in counselor training. There are many who could use assistance from professional counseling services but do not utilize them. There are inadequate studies on help-seeking that have included graduate students as participants. Most of the studies done have focused on undergraduate students (McCarthy, Bruno & Sherman 2010). As a result, there is more to learn when it comes to graduate student research. Furthermore, in 2011 it is estimated that there were about 2.9 million graduate students in the United

States, according to the NCES (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Despite this significant number in the population, preceding research on help seeking attitudes has mainly focused on undergraduate students (Patel, Hagedorn & Bai 2013).

McCarthy, Bruno & Sherman (2010) conducted an investigation to find out the help-seeking attitudes of graduate students in the Northeastern U.S. The focus was to explore the help-seeking attitudes of graduate students in order find out if graduate students view stigma and cost of services as impediments to counseling and identify factors that influence help-seeking attitudes. The total number of participants was 217. The participants represented 10 academic programs namely; community counseling, school counseling, business administration, criminology, adult and community education. The Attitudes toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help-Scale, Shortened Form (ATSPPH-SF, 1995) was used to gather information about help-seeking attitudes toward seeking professional help. The overall results of the study indicated that the graduate students reported a moderately favorable attitude toward seeking professional help although time, cost and lack of insurance coverage were hindrances to the help-seeking process. Among the factors that influenced help-seeking attitudes, discomfort with self-disclosure, insurance status, prior counseling experience, membership in a graduate counseling program and stigma were identified. However, stigma was not seen as a significant problem. The limitations of this study were that inadequate data was collected from graduate students in programs on the main campus which affected comparisons on help seeking behavior. Also, the study had a smaller size of male participants. Lastly, a convenient sample of participants was used, affecting external validity (McCarthy, Bruno & Sherman 2010).

The next study focused on predictors of psychological help seeking in clinical and counseling graduate students in a psychology program. Dearing, Maddux and Tagney (2005), posit that past studies rarely focus on graduate student therapists-in-training. Most of the researches done are geared towards mental health professionals. Emphasis was placed on the importance of finding out why psychotherapy students-in-training choose to seek or not to seek personal psychotherapy, as well as investigate variables (perceived faculty attitudes about students in personal therapy). Questionnaires were completed by 262 participants in the study. Most of the participants were seeking either a PhD (48.5%) or a PsyD (26.7%) and the remaining were pursuing a Master's degree. Students rated 11 potential concerns in terms of the consideration to seek personal therapy or not. General attitudes about seeking personal therapy, was measured using ATSPPH; Fisher & Farina, 1995; Fisher and Turner, 1970). Participants were also questioned about the perception of graduate program faculty's view on therapy for graduate students. Results showed that cost was the most rated factor, followed by time and then confidentiality (Dearing et al, 2005). In the investigation of the perceptions about seeking counseling, students reported a very favorable attitude towards counseling. It was also reported that the students perceived faculty attitudes about students in counseling as mildly positive. A limitation of this study was that it was a cross-sectional design and was based on self-reporting.

De Vries and Valadez (2006) also conducted a study that involved counseling students' attitude toward counseling. The study assessed students in terms of attitude toward counseling and psychopathology. Participants were 86 graduate counseling students in a master's program. Among the items used in collecting data were the

personal Orientation Inventory (POI) which measured levels of self-actualization, the Nature Man-Constructive (NC) which measured One's Constructive view of nature of Man, Acceptance Aggression (A) for measuring ability to accept one's natural aggression and the Attitude toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPH). Results indicated that a subset (7.1%) could possibly be impaired. Lack of recognition of the usefulness of personal counseling was also reported by some participants (7%). The researchers expressed concern for these results. It was suggested that these attitudes could be projected unto clients in counseling sessions. It was also inferred that individuals with a negative attitude may be less likely to seek therapy. Limitations of this study were that the study had a low reliability score, it was suggested that future research need to use more reliable instruments for better reliability.

The current study will however, use a qualitative approach rather than quantitative study which will involve the development and use of specific questions to be able to collect specific information regarding the study. Improvements will be made from the previous study, in the process of using qualitative interview design to gather data. Turner (2010), asserted that the interview aspect is the most significant area in qualitative research design as it allows the researcher to obtain more data or responses from the participants through an investigational perspective. The use of standardize open-ended interviews allow participants to contribute as much information as desired. In turn more information is obtained as participants explain, add and expand on their responses as they fully express their perspectives. This results in more data which is coded, analyzed by the researcher in the current study to reflect an overall perspective of all responses which will

prevent researcher bias than to request participants to select from specific categories in questionnaires or surveys in quantitative research.

The above three studies involved the investigation of graduate counseling and/or psychology students' help seeking attitude towards personal counseling or psychotherapy. Results indicated moderately favorable to very favorable responses toward personal counseling. Counseling was seen as an integral part of training which was further encouraged by positive faculty perception of counseling. The hindrances reported in the help-seeking attitude of students were time, cost, lack of insurance coverage and confidentiality. The studies directly relate to the topic area of this research study which is aimed at investigating the attitudes of graduate counseling students toward counseling.

2.3.2 SELF- CONCEALMENT/STIGMA

In a study done by Leech (2007), Cramer's (1999) model of willingness to seek counseling was tested on how well it fits with master's level counseling students. The ideas for this model were that; individuals who are high in self-concealment tend to be low in social support. Low social support increased levels of distress. High distress resulted in increased willingness to seek counseling. Individuals with high self-concealment are likely to have high level of distress. Individuals with low self-concealment tend to have a positive attitude toward counseling. Individuals with a positive attitude toward counseling increased willingness to seek counseling. In the study, there were 519 master's level counseling students, mostly in schools of education in CACREP programs nationwide. Surveys as well as questionnaires, and intention to seek

counseling inventories were completed by the students. Three positive relations were found in the model. The first is self-concealment and distress, then distress and willingness to seek counseling and lastly, attitude toward counseling and willingness to seek counseling. Results showed that self-concealment was positively related to distress, signifying that counseling students with high self-concealment are likely to have a high level of distress and counseling students with low self-concealment are likely to have low levels of distress. Counseling students who experience high distress have tendency to have an increase in willingness to seek counseling. Having a positive attitude toward counseling have tendency to increase a counseling student's willingness to seek counseling. Counseling students with negative attitudes toward counseling tended to have less willingness to seek counseling (Leech, 2007). The limitations of the study were that the sampling method was used in recruiting faculty through a listerv in distribution of surveys. Most of the faculties were not included in the sampling process and lastly, data was collected by participants through self-report as a result, participants may not want to disclose personal information about self. It was recommended that future studies examine the relationship between willingness to seek counseling for counseling students and benefit received in counseling which is part of the study that I will conduct.

The idea brought about by this study suggests that counseling students would be more receptive to seeking counseling if there is a possibility of high concealment leading to high state of distress. Positive attitude towards counseling increases a students' willingness towards counseling. This is very much related to the current research of study particularly to research question number one which states that "Are graduate counseling students willing or reluctant to seek counseling?"

2.3.3 PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS TOWARDS COUNSELING

Ordinarily, perception is defined as “the ability to see, hear or become aware of something through the senses”. It can also be explained as a way of regarding, understanding or interpreting something. When linked to counseling and psychology, perception is explained as a process where we take in sensory information from our environment. Through the perceptual process we gain information about the properties and elements of the environment that are critical to our survival (psychologyabout.com 2015).

On the issue of Students’ Perceptions of Counseling, Cook, Park, Williams, Webb, Nicholson, Schneider and Bassman (1984) conducted a study to find out the areas of concern, conservative preferences for interventions, general favorable perceptions about counseling, and sex differences. The problems identified by students in order of significance were educational concern, anxiety, habits (breaking troublesome habits), thoughts, emotions, life changes, career choices, dating, beliefs and values, physical well-being, sexual relationships, friendship, self-control and multiple roles or responsibilities. In the preferences for interventions, students preferred to rely on themselves to solve problems. The assistance of friends and relatives were second preference. Self-reliance was favored for problems of friendship, self-control, and physical well-being. Friends or relatives’ help was preferred over self-reliance for problems of belief and values, life changes, and career choices (Cook et al, 1984). Counselors represented the third most preferred source of help, especially for career choice problems. Most of the participants in the study had positive views about counseling. 83% of the students agreed that counselors can be helpful with a variety of problems. 80% stated that they would be

willing to see a counselor only if they had serious problems. About a third of the participants stated that they would be uncomfortable disclosing personal problems with a stranger and they would not know where to go for counseling. However, a limitation of the study was that there were inadequate preferences for students to select in reporting different kind of problems depending on the severity. Thus, problems on the survey may be seen as normal daily issues that do not require external or professional help (Cook et al, 1984). It is also possible that the results have changed since it was a study done years ago.

2.4 BENEFITS OF COUNSELING

This section discusses the benefits of counseling to students, faculty and counselor education programs. In Leech's (2007), study that tested how well Cramer's (1999) model of willingness to seek counseling was appropriate for master's level counseling students, result indicated that having a positive attitude toward counseling tended to increase a counseling student's willingness to seek counseling. The major premise of this study was that possessing a positive attitude toward counseling tended to increase a counseling student's willingness to seek counseling. Trainees with negative attitudes toward counseling tended to have less willingness to seek counseling.

Furthermore, McCarthy (2008), in his study that focused on helping counselor trainees overcome barriers to seeking psychological help, McCarthy stressed the importance of counseling as beneficial although there exists obstacles that discouraged trainees from seeking help. One of the obstacles was the negative perceptions of counseling. It was suggested that this factor was a contributor to negative perception toward receiving counseling, as a result it was recommended that counseling programs

promote, encourage and facilitate the use of counseling by supporting trainees in pursuit of voluntary counseling for professional and personal reasons, emphasize the importance and benefits of receiving counseling as a trainee and as a human being and assist to identify different counseling resources available within the university community and within the surrounding community.

The two above studies clearly provided the link between perceptions of graduate counseling students and the willingness to seek counseling. The perceptions of counseling was said to have an impact on help seeking behavior. The decision to seek counseling may be affected by other individuals. As a result of this association, the researcher developed this section of the literature review to promote awareness of the benefits of counseling which is believed to be an important aspect in the study of graduate counseling students. This shows the relevance of the topic of the benefits of counseling in the development of the attitudes towards receiving counseling.

Also, Bryne and Shufelt (2014) stressed the importance of personal counseling to counseling trainees and counseling programs in a study that focused on factors for personal counseling among counseling trainees. In this study, it was stated “In an effort to train ethical and well-adjusted counselors, it is important that we understand any potential barrier that prevents mental health professionals and trainees from seeking therapy, or whether these individuals differ from therapy-seeking counterparts in any meaningful way”. (p.180). This is in keeping with the rationale to my study to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of graduate counseling students towards seeking counseling, in order to identify and uncover “any potential barrier” that may prevent counseling trainees from seeking therapy themselves if need be.

The above study also investigated the attitudes of U.S graduate counseling students in a CACREP counseling program that included five emphases in counseling namely mental health counseling, school counseling, addictions counseling, career counseling, student affairs and college counseling towards personal counseling. The results of the study showed that most of the participants regarded counseling as beneficial. Counseling experience was viewed as a means to improve self-concept, personal growth, career or issues with sexual preference. Counseling was believed to also improve adjustment to new circumstances or situational concerns, such as relationship issues and new living situations. The limitations of this study were that there was a small sample size of the participant pool. This is a common problem with these types of studies due to the nature of the study. Also, the study could not estimate accurately the size of the population assessed, and public information about the participants was unavailable due to issues of confidentiality.

Proseck, Holm and Daly (2013), also carried out a study that involves the benefits of counseling for graduate counseling students in a master's level CACREP counseling program at a large Southern state university. The number of participants was 55. 73% were female and 27% were male. 67% were white. 11% African American/Black, 7% Hispanic/Latino, 7% Asian, 6% multiracial and 2% other. The participants received 10 sessions of counseling as a curriculum requirement. An intake form was used to gather demographic information about the participant's previous mental health-seeking attitudes. The Adult Self-Report (ASR: Achenbach & Resorla 2003). The ASR 126- item was used to report emotional and behavioral issues for adults ages 18-59 years. Three ASR subscales were used to provide detailed assessment for different

clinical problems. The three subscales were Total Problems, DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 1994)-oriented subscales and DSM-oriented Anxiety Problems. The results of the study indicated that a majority of the participants had normal range for Total Problems, DSM-oriented Depressed Problems, and DSM-oriented Anxiety Problems subscale. In all, students enrolled in introductory counseling courses reported less problems, decreased depressive problems, and decreased anxiety problems after receiving counseling. Although this study mainly focused on wellness in terms of mental health issues of the graduate students, the outcomes relate to the help-seeking attitude of the students, specifically in finding out the information about whether students are willing to seek counseling and the benefits derived from counseling. The study reported that the counseling students were willing to seek counseling more than the general graduate student population. However, among the limitations of this study were that there was inconsistency of constructs measured using the ASR Total Problems subscale to identify current distress. The subscale represented problem categories based on general problems and not specific problems. Secondly, it was felt that there was a disproportionate size of the number of white female participants compared to male participants.

Furthermore, Everson (2013) conducted a qualitative study on the impact of personal therapy on graduate counseling psychology students enrolled in an APA accredited counseling psychology or clinical psychology doctoral programs. The experiences and potential benefits of personal counseling were investigated. Participants enrolled in a 3 year individual counseling course. Eight to 15 participants were involved in the study. The CGR manuscript (Hill, Thompson & Williams 1997) was used to collect

data using open-ended questions. The results indicated most of the participants described multiple positive views of counseling. The students admired ethics, work habits, natural style and valued rapport building process. They also reported coping more effectively with depression and anxiety, improved learning in the graduate program, a better ability to empathize with clients and improved learning of skills and techniques. A limitation of this study is that the students were selected from different emphases of mental health related fields, (doctoral students in clinical or counseling psychology, and master's level students in mental health related fields). The current study will attempt to use a more homogenous group of participants in the same departmental program.

Norcross (2010) made a case for personal counseling in Counselor Education. The importance of personal therapy was emphasized and recommended for personal counseling for all mental health practitioners regardless of experience. Personal counseling was particularly suggested for beginning counselors. It is believed that due to the nature of the counseling process, trainees are likely to experience frustrations, challenges and successes involved in the process. There is also an expectation of increased patience and tolerance for ambiguity on the part of trainees. As a result, counselors are expected to have empathy for clients. Trainees in counseling find it more comfortable to respect the client's individual process of counseling and pacing. Counseling facilitates the therapeutic process by enhancing self-knowledge and promoting heightened awareness of feelings. Furthermore, counseling, according to Norcross (2010) is believed to help prevent client harm through self-knowledge. This helps to avoid the imposing of one's own beliefs, values and attitudes on the client. As a

result, counselor education curriculum is suggested as the ideal setting for teaching the importance of self-care through personal counseling.

In reviewing more information about the benefits of counseling to graduate counseling students' in regards to the provision of counseling to clients, the search generated information not particular to the topic. Basically, when it comes to obtaining more information about this issue there is not much information available. Further research is needed to find out the benefits of counseling as it relates to the providing counseling to the clients. However, the students are strongly encouraged by their programs to seek counseling when necessary.

In conclusion, this section has discussed the benefits of counseling to students and how it could assist with their program of study both academically and personally. Participants have also reported positive views of counseling as it relates to the current study research. The current study will gather a more comprehensive and possibly new information about the students' views of counseling as it relates to the research questions. Information will be gathered from graduate counseling students as opposed to a general student population or basically undergraduate students.

2.5 COMPARISONS/CONTRASTS OF RESEARCH OUTCOMES

On the benefits of counseling to graduate counseling students, most of the studies support the idea that personal counseling is of great benefit to counseling trainees in terms of their personal and professional development. The studies discussed above have all reported that counseling is beneficial and very helpful as it results in improved learning, increased empathy and respect for client's individual need in the counseling

process. Also counseling enhances self-knowledge and promotes awareness of feelings. Less psychological problems were reported and that majority of counseling students were willing to seek counseling. Bryne & Shufelt (2014;), Proseck, Holm & Daly (2013), & Everson (2013).

In particular reference to the impact of counseling on personal and professional development, counseling is seen as a lifelong process that involves positive characteristics that assists in dealing with self-awareness, and improved personal lives, thereby promoting professional development (Von-Haenisch 2011). In the study that investigated the experiences of graduate counseling psychology students towards personal counseling, Murphy (2005) reported that participants viewed counseling as necessary and beneficial for long term and continuous professional development.

Furthermore, McCarthy, Bruno and Sherman (2010) examined the factors that influenced the perceptions of graduate counseling psychology students in seeking counseling. The factors identified were discomfort with self-disclosure, insurance status, prior counseling experience, membership in a graduate counseling program and stigma. In support of the above observations, Dearing, Maddux and Tagney (2005) in their study postulated that graduate counseling students in-training view confidentiality as an issue affecting the willingness to seek counseling. It was suggested that students may fear seeking treatment in order to not raise questions among faculty and peers about the status of their mental well-being and suitability for the profession. In spite of the assurance of confidentiality by university counseling centers counselors, students may still have concerns about the connection between the counseling center and the graduate

department. There is also a concern that being a client at a university counseling center may jeopardize future training prospects at the location.

In the study conducted by Cook et al, (1984), factors identified as influencing seeking counseling included educational problems, anxiety issues, habits, thoughts, emotions, life changes, career choice and dating issues. Confidentiality and self-disclosure did not seem to be a factor like in other studies. However, in the study conducted by Dearing et al (2005), the issue of confidentiality was an important factor in seeking counseling. In short, many of the studies suggest that individuals are less likely to seek help for problems that are viewed negatively by others (Tse et al 2007; Corrigan & Mathews, 2003; Overbeck, 1977; and Leech 2007). Finally, it is suggested that negative self-disclosure and high self-concealment are believed to reduce an individual's willingness to seek counseling resulting in a negative perception towards counseling (Leech 2007).

2.6 SUMMARY

The focus of this study is to investigate the perceptions of graduate counseling students toward receiving counseling. It is believed that counseling has a positive impact on the personal and professional development of the students. Also, counseling improved self-awareness, helped develop core and advanced skills necessary to establish a therapeutic relationship with the clients and also helped the students to experience what it is to be a client. (Kumari 2011). Also, it was conveyed that counseling students who seek counseling report less psychological problems, and increased personal growth and professional identity (Proseck, Holm & Daly 2013; & Bryne et al 2014). Graduate counseling students who have a positive attitude toward counseling tended to have an

increased willingness to seek counseling. However, counseling students with negative attitude toward counseling have less willingness to seek counseling (Leech 2007). Counseling students are more willing to seek counseling than the general student population (Proseck, Holm & Daly (2013). Perceptions of stigma influences an individual's attitude toward counseling which has an influences the willingness to seek counseling (Vogel, Wade & Hackler 2007).

Graduate counseling students had a moderately favorable to a favorable attitude toward help seeking counseling process. Among the factors that influenced help-seeking attitude were; discomfort with self-disclosure, insurance status, prior counseling experience, membership in a graduate program and stigma (McCarthy, Bruno & Sherman 2010). However, cost, time and confidentiality were identified by Dearing, Maddux & Tagney (2005) as the significant factors that were significant concerns in choosing to seek counseling or not. The next chapter will focus on research design and methodology of this qualitative study.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY
INTRODUCTION

This study will investigate the receptivity of graduate students in counseling towards receiving counseling. The chapter details the research and methodology that will be used in the study. The role of the researcher will be discussed as it pertains to the methods used in conducting the research, collection, and analyses of data. The main research question of this study is: What are the perceptions of graduate students in counseling to receiving counseling?

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

Qualitative research which will be used in this study is described as research used to gain insight into people's perceptions, behaviors, value system, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture and lifestyles. Qualitative research deals with meaning and interpreting data in the form of words, which will be derived from interview. The primary focus is to capture, understand and represent participants' perceptions and meanings. Qualitative research is most suitable to describe and understand processes or problems (Joubish, Khuram, Ahmed, Fatima & Haider 2011, Ruona 2005 & Hovart 2013). Through the use of a qualitative approach for this study, the responses of student participants will be obtained and understood more deeply. The researcher will apply a general interpretative paradigm as a theoretical framework guiding the study. The term as applied to psychology and social science is characterized by a concern for the individual.

The central endeavor is to understand the subjective world of human experience. Interpretive approaches focus on action or ‘behavior- with – meaning’. From an interpretive perspective, theory gives way to multi – faceted images of human behavior as varied as the situations and contexts (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2005). In this paradigm, the role of the researcher is that of accessing others’ interpretations and intentions. Part of the characteristics of the interpretive paradigm is to share the goal of understanding human ideas, actions, and interactions in specific contexts or in terms of a broader culture (Glesne, 2011). Furthermore, the interpretive approach in qualitative study relies on naturalistic methods of interviewing and developing meanings in the process.

In addition to the above statement, the phenomenological approach will be used in this study. The phenomenological approach is defined by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2007) as “a philosophical approach to the study of experience that shares a particular interest in thinking about what the experience of being human is like, in all of its various aspects, but especially in terms of the things that matter to us, and which constitute our lived world” (p.11). The main feature of this approach is a focus on individual experiences, beliefs and perceptions. In this study, the experiences, perceptions, beliefs and lived world of graduate students in counseling pertaining to their predisposition to counseling will be investigated.

3.2 RESTATEMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of graduate counseling students towards receiving counseling. Therefore, the main research question

is: what are the perceptions of graduate counseling students towards receiving counseling? The secondary questions are: What are the reasons graduate counseling students would be willing or reluctant to receive counseling? What are the perceived benefits of counseling? And, finally, what are the perceived drawbacks of counseling?

3.3 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

The researcher is a Doctoral student in the Department of Counselor Education and Supervision at a CACREP accredited institution. As a Student, the researcher's topic of interest is in the field of Counseling. The researcher strives to focus attention to the studies that involve graduate students in counseling. Thus, the researcher is passionate about the study and may possess a view of seeing personal counseling as beneficial and a positive tool to manage psychological problems.

Given the acknowledged potential biases, this protocol will directly implement strategies to ensure the objectivity of the data analysis. The researcher will use a step by step approach to interpret data using Glesne's (2011) techniques. The strategies that will be used to ensure the credibility and validity of the current research study are prolonged engagement, member-checking, peer review and triangulation.

3.3.1 POSITIONALITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

St. Loius and Barton (2002) stated "As critical qualitative researchers, we understand that because we work with people, methodological issues arise that we had not previously considered as part of our research design. In particular, we found ourselves confronted with questions of subjectivity and the intersections between the

parent's lives, our own lives, the research process and the intended and outcomes of research" (p.2).

The researcher is a counselor education student. The issue revolves not only around how interviews are conducted but more importantly how data is analyzed. The researcher may have a tendency to see or view personal counseling as a helpful way to cope with a stressful situation or psychological issue due to the education and training received in the field. Information received will be recorded. In the analysis of data, only the self-reports' of the participants will be analyzed and interpreted. The researcher will not attempt to contribute, misconstrue or add to the report. The accuracy of the transcribed data will be assessed through the practice of member checking. The interpretations and analysis of the study will go through triangulation and peer review to determine the objectivity of the analysis.

3.4 INSTRUMENTS

3.4.1 INTERVIEWS

Individual interviews will be conducted with the participants using an audio-recording device. The information gathered will then be transcribed in a Microsoft word document. Individual interviews are appropriate due to the sensitive nature of this study and will be handled with caution to safeguard confidentiality. According to Packer (2011) "the semi-structured interview is the workhorse of qualitative research today. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher has a general plan for the topic to be discussed but does not follow a fixed order of questions or word these questions in a specific way. Interviewees are allowed a great deal of latitude in the way they answer, the length of

their responses, and even the topics that they discuss. The aim of such interview is to speak “in their own words to obtain a first-person account” (p.43).

3.4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

The demographic questions such as gender and race have been developed from demographic information of the ATSPPH-SF (Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Help-Short Form) (1995) (See Appendix A). The original instrument consists of 2 demographic questions. In the current study, question 3 was developed and included by the researcher for participant in order to be able to indicate whether he or she had previous counseling experience.

1. Gender: Male Female
2. Race: White/European American
 Latino/a

These two categories of race (White/European American, Latino/a) have been selected due to the current internship population demographic representation in the sample population. The other categories (African American, Asia/Asian American, Native American, Arab/Middle Eastern, and Other) categories were removed from the options since there is no demographic representation of these categories internship population for the current study.

3. Have you received counseling before? Yes No

Interview Questions: The questions were developed after the review of the ATSPPH, short version developed by Fischer & Farina (1995). This ATSPPH-SF scale is correlated with previous usage of professional help for psychological problems (Vogel,

Wade & Hackler, 2009). Ahmaier and Hansen (2012) described the ATSPPH as a strong predictor for seeking psychological help to understand how individuals perceive personal counseling.

The ATSPPH is comprised of 10 quantitative questions in total. However this study is intended as a qualitative investigation and wanted to explore individual's experiences within this content rather than to enumerate their occurrence. Therefore, two matters arose: a) how to adapt a quantitative survey for qualitative use, and, b) how to determine how many questions to utilize. The interview questions were paraphrased as open-ended questions (see appendix B for a copy of the ATSPPH-SF). The rationale for this adaptation is to enable participants of the current study to respond to the interview questions using a qualitative approach. Diccio-Bloom and Cabtree (2006) suggested that individual interviews in qualitative studies usually have between 5 and 10 questions. Therefore the decision to formulate and utilize eight (8) questions for the current study falls within their parameters.

The following are the questions that have been developed for the interviews in this study:

Questions regarding perceptions about seeking counseling (Research Question 1)

1. What are your thoughts about a person who engages in counseling to cope with a psychological issue?
2. How important is the use of counseling in university settings?
3. What are your thoughts about counseling as the only effective way for you to deal with a psychological problem?

Questions regarding the willingness/ reluctance in seeking counseling (Research Question 2)

4. What are your thoughts about your readiness in seeking counseling?
5. What are the reason(s) you would be reluctant to seeking counseling?

Questions regarding the potential benefits of seeking counseling (Research Question 3):

6. What do you think are the benefits of you engaging in counseling especially at the university level?

Questions regarding the potential drawbacks of seeking counseling (Research Question 4):

7. For what reasons may counseling not be an effective means for you to cope with psychological problems?
8. What do you view as a potential harm that could emanate from you seeking counseling?

3.5 CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

“Central to most forms of qualitative inquiry is the idea that human actions, of whatever kind, can be properly understood in context-that by their own very nature are situated. Qualitative researchers generally seek to gather data in “natural settings and in ways that are sensitive to the contexts in which the data were generated” (Givens.2008, p.122). The location for this research study is on a campus at a southern university. The entry-level graduate programs are CACREP accredited. The participants are graduate counseling students in the Department of Counselor Education and Supervision.

3.6 PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study are graduate counseling students enrolled in the Ed.S (Education Specialist degree) program at a CACREP-accredited southern university. The program consists of two concentrations. One is in School Counseling and the other is Marriage, Couples and Family Counseling. The reason this pool of students is chosen for the study is that they have gone through extensive training in the counselor education field. They possess advanced skills and training in their education. Hence, they may be well-informed about the phenomenon of study.

Robinson (2014) suggested that a target population for a study is the totality of persons that are justifiably sampled in interview study. In order to demarcate a target population, a set of inclusion criteria or exclusion criteria or a combination of both must be specified for the study. Inclusion criteria should stipulate characteristics that a participant must have in order to qualify for the study. Exclusion criteria on the other hand should stipulate the characteristics that disqualify a participant.

According to the Counselor Education and Supervision departmental enrollment information of students, there were 22 students in the Ed.S program currently enrolled with internship for Spring 2016 semester. The total number of Black students is 0. Total number of Caucasian/White students is 21, total number of Latino/White student is 1; total number of female students is 19 and for male students is 3. The researcher will recruit the sample for the study from this group of students.

In the exclusion of certain category of respondents, students who have taken minor courses in counseling taught by the researcher as an instructor will be asked not to

participate. The justification behind this decision is to avoid a dual relationship; a situation where the investigator will play a dual role of a previous instructor and a current researcher.

3.6.1 SAMPLING STRATEGY

The voluntary sample for this qualitative inquiry is enlisted in order to derive cases that are rich in relevant information and experience with the phenomenon of interest (Patton 2002). Volunteer sample consists of people who are willing to volunteer for a study (Davis, Gallardo and Lachlan 2016, p.165). The students who are in this category will be contacted by the researcher by e-mail invitation (see Appendix C for a copy of this invitation) to participate in the study through the departmental listserv.

3.6.2 SAMPLE SIZE

According to Creswell (1998) for phenomenological research studies, it is suggested that between 5 and 25 participants are needed. From the previous literature review of the following qualitative studies done in relation to the current study, 5 to 8 participants were involved. In the study done by Murphy (2005) that looked into the experience of mandatory personal therapy of counseling trainees using Master's students in counseling, only five participants were involved in the study. The study was small scale using a group interview approach. The current study will however make use of individual interview process which will provide a more personal atmosphere, privacy and room for obtaining in-depth information. A similar study conducted by Von-Haenisch (2011) that explored the influence of personal counseling on the personal and professional development of counselor trainees involved only six participants. Lastly,

Kumari's (2011) study of the impact of counseling on counseling trainees for personal and professional had eight participants. So these studies had a range of 5 to 8 participants, a range which will be replicated in the current study.

Furthermore, O'Reilly and Parker (2012) and Walker (2012) suggested that data saturation can occur when there is enough information to replicate the study. Another factor that determines sufficient information is when theoretical data saturation occurs. Data saturation occurs when further coding is no longer possible (Guest, Bourn & Johnson 2006). In the current study, the impact that data saturation has on the sample size is that once the researcher has reached a point in the collection of data when no new information or ideas emerge and there is an occurrence of repeated data, the researcher will not increase the number of individual interviews.

3.6.4 INFORMED CONSENT

The researcher will outline all of the guidelines of the informed consent form. It will be stressed that participation is voluntary. The participants will be made aware of any aspect that may affect their well-being. In gathering data of information from the participants, personal information of the participants such as names will not be used in the study. This process will safeguard the identities of the participants to ensure confidentiality. The informed consent includes the purpose of the research, expected duration, risks and benefits and how the researcher will maintain confidentiality. (See Appendix C for the Informed Consent form). This inclusion will show genuineness and transparency of the researcher as a component of the relationship-building process between the researcher and a potential volunteer.

3.6.5 RISKS AND BENEFITS

Participating in this research does not involve the participant's exposure to physical pain, discomfort or injury. The potential risk to the participants is that participants may have changes in thought processes and emotion. Such changes may either be a positive or negative association connected with reflecting on perceptions regarding the values and drawbacks of personal counseling and/or the memory of a previous experience in counseling. According to the Institutional Review Board Guidebook (1993), most psychological risks are minimal or momentary, and feelings of stress, guilt and loss of self-esteem or embarrassment may occur from the participant's attitudes on sensitive topics. In the event of this occurrence, the participant has the option to withdraw from the study with no penalty or continue and be offered a referral to the University counseling services.

One of benefits of this study is that the participants are provided an opportunity to be a part of a study that promotes attention to graduate counseling students. Most studies regarding this topic rarely involve the use of graduate students in counseling as the target population. Hence, the study will generate insight about the intended population. The study will potentially bring about more awareness to the field of counselor education. Another potential benefit of the study to the participants is that this study may be provided a therapeutic element to the participants as a result of engaging in discussion about their experience with counseling in the interview process, although the intent is not designed for therapeutic benefit but mainly for the purpose of obtaining information about the research study.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

In the collection of data, there will be individual 1-hour interviews with graduate counseling students in the Ed.S degree programs in the Counselor Education and Supervision Department. The researcher will go through the list of interview questions with the participants. Data will be collected through self-report of the participants. An audio recording device will be used to capture the responses of the participants during the interview process. This procedure will allow the researcher to focus on interviewing and will also save time from having to take notes while interviewing.

3.8 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Qualitative methods involve the understanding, interpretation and explanation of meaning. In order to accurately interpret the words of the participant, it is important for the researcher to understand the words of the participant from his or her perspective (Watts 2014). In the current study, the researcher will use a first-person perspective in the analysis and interpretation of data. The researcher will reflect on the participants' subject matter monitoring the possible imposition of one's own views on the participants' comments. While aware of this possible contamination, the researcher intends to utilize established means to confirm the objectivity of the data analysis; such methods to be presented later in this section. The researcher will employ the standards in reporting of data, which are trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in data analysis.

Data will be analyzed and articulated using the following steps: a) the researcher will listen to audio-recordings from the interviews. According to Maxwell (2013), it is

important to read, listen and write notes of what you collected, and to develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships; b) the information will then be transcribed; c) The next step is to code information gathered. Coding is a process of sorting information (Glesne 2011). The aim of coding is to identify important themes, issues and meanings in the data set in a thorough and systematic manner (Watts 2014). D) The themes will then be matched with the research questions. E) Major themes will be arranged into hierarchies, which will then be arranged into categories and sub-categories. The following step involves sorting data information by arranging major codes into logical parts. F) The last step will be to display the data. Glesne (2011) described data display as an organized gathering of information that allows conclusions of the study to be shown and of what the possible implications may be gleaned from this interpretation.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Loh (2013) trustworthiness refers to the criteria used by the researcher to ensure quality in research. The criteria are credibility, dependability, confirmability transferability and authenticity to establish trustworthiness.

Cope (2014) further suggested that different strategies are used by the researcher to achieve the criteria in order to deepen the credibility of the study.

3.9.1 CREDIBILITY

One of the techniques involved in achieving credibility is prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement involves the process of establishing trust and rapport with the participants in order to obtain rich and detailed responses. Prolonged engagement allows the researcher to have enough time in collecting data, understanding the participants and

the phenomenon of study (Cope 2014). According to Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) the length of interviews depends on the topic, the researcher and the participants. On the average, healthcare interviews are 20 to 60 minutes long. Based on the qualitative studies presented in chapter 2, the normative lengths of those data-gathering protocols ranged from 30 minute to one hour interviews. The study conducted by Von-Haenisch (2011) had six semi-structured 30 minute interviews. In the study done by Kumari (2011) interviews lasted for about one-hour. In the current study, to develop prolonged engagement, the researcher will engage the participants in one hour individual interviews. The researcher will build trust and rapport with the participants to provide a conducive atmosphere for sharing of ideas. These interpersonal objectives will be done through the use of open ended questions to allow the respondent guidelines to consider yet freedom of individual expression, insight and thought.

Another technique to enhance credibility is member checking. Barbour (2001) and Bryne (2001) defined member checking as “a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility and validity of what has been recorded during a research interview” (p.511). Member checking is described as the process of returning transcripts and interpretative summaries to each participant for verification and confirmation of their accuracy (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Doyle, 2007; Harvey, 2015; Richards, 2003). This process will be done by e-mail communication with a two-week timeframe for feedback to the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Member checking will give the each participant a chance to review and revise errors in transcription or misinterpretations of the data.

Also, peer review examination will be used to strengthen the validity of this study. Kurdhi (2015) defined peer as “a person who is equal in ability, standing, rank or value. Peer reviews are experts who have knowledge, experience and have interest in the manuscript topic” (p.465). Peers are expected to provide productive comments and suggestions to improve the quality and thoroughness of the important parts of scientific publication process. Mandal, Giri & Parija (2012) further described peer reviewing as a process whereby a peer reviewer gives unbiased constructive criticism to bring about good quality in research study. Among the responsibilities of a peer reviewer are he or she must be available for the work and have sufficient knowledge in the related field. A peer reviewer should disclose any potential conflict of interest that may exist with the study. In the current study, expert opinion about congruence between the content of the transcripts and the data interpretation will be communicated to the researcher in order to increase the accurateness and objectivity of the interpretations for the study.

Peer reviewers will be recruited from the Department of Physical Education and Athletic Training as this department represents the sole respondent to an initial inquiry. The initial plan was to recruit peer reviewers from the Departments of Educational Leadership and Policies and the Department of Instruction and Teacher Education in the College of Education for the purpose of obtaining more objective perspectives from different sources to enhance credibility and validity of the research study. There were no responses from those departments. However, the researcher was able to receive approval from the chair of the Department of Physical Education and Athletic Training to utilize the Ph.D. student listserv to contact the students. Two peers will participate in the review process; that number having been established as adequate by the Council of Science

Editors (2016). The criteria for selection are that the reviewers must be doctoral students who have completed a doctoral-level qualitative research course. The peer reviewers will be selected on a first come, first serve basis once they have satisfied that curricular requirement. The reviewers will be sent transcripts and analysis of data or themes developed by the researcher for their review and comments. Peer reviewers will be allowed 2 weeks to complete their analysis and convey feedback to the researcher.

Finally, triangulation will also be used as a measure to ensure validity and credibility of the results of the study. Flick, Kardorff and Steinke (2004) defined triangulation as “the observation of the research issue from at least two different points”. (p.179). The kind of triangulation utilized in the current is triangulation of data sources. The three data sources that will be used in the current study is the data source from participants through the member checking process. The researcher will present the transcribed data to each participant in the form of their own transcript to review and check for accuracy. The researcher will receive feedback from the participants. The second data source is the feedback received from the first peer reviewer. The third data source is the feedback received from the second peer reviewer. The two peer reviewers will receive copies of all the participants’ transcripts and the analysis of the data in order to check for consistency. The feedbacks received from the three data sources will then be compared the researcher to cross-check for accurateness and consistency. The peer reviewers deal not only with accuracy but objectivity of the identified themes based on the content of the data.

Shenton (2004) suggested that in a situation in which similar results or viewpoints are confirmed using different people, the results of the study have more

credibility in the eyes of the reader. However, if differing results emerge, the researcher will include more information in the projected findings; add more codes in response to the research questions, clarify any ambiguities as suggested by Firouzkouhi & Boroujeni (2015). The researcher will reanalyze data using the content of transcripts by adding or removing information based on the feedback from the participants as well as the peer reviewers if needed.

3.9.2 TRANSFERABILITY

Transferability refers to the process in which the findings can be applied to other situations (Polit & Beck, 2012; Cope 2014 & Murphy 2013). The researcher will provide detailed description of the participants to give the readers an opportunity to make comparisons with other individuals or other research findings in order to determine if the research study is transferable or not.

TECHNIQUE

The technique involved in transferability is thick description. Thick description makes it necessary for the researcher to provide a rationale for the method, explaining the research process, information of the data collection method and fully specifying the analysis process of the study (Curtin and Fossey 2007). In the current study, the researcher will enhance thickness of data by audio taping the responses of the participants to the research questions. The responses from the individual interviews will be transcribed word for word through the use of the participants self-report. The information will then be coded to identify important themes in the data. The themes obtained from

raw data will emerge from identified similar responses of the participants for each research question.

3.93 DEPENDABILITY

Dependability refers to the constancy of the data in similar circumstances (Polit & Beck 2012). Dependability is achieved when another researcher concurs with the decision trails of each stage of the research process. A study is dependable when the research process and descriptions are replicable with same results (Cope 2014). In guaranteeing dependability in this study, detailed explanation of the research process is provided for readers to understand and be able to use as part of the methods of the study. It is expected that similar results will be obtained when the study is repeated elsewhere with the same content.

3.94 CONFIRMABILITY

Confirmability refers to the ability of the researcher to show that the data reflects the participants' responses and not the biases or perspectives of the researcher. The researcher explains how the interpretations and conclusions are formulated (Cope 2014).

TECHNIQUES

In ensuring confirmability, the researcher uses direct quotes from the participant to show emerging themes (Cope 2014). The researcher will also use prolonged engagement, member checking, peer review as well as triangulation of data sources to check for accuracy and consistency of data. The researcher will also ensure that the

findings are the outcomes of the experiences and ideas of the participants and not the views of the researcher.

3.10 SUMMARY

In summary, a qualitative approach will be used to investigate the perceptions of graduate students in counseling toward seeking counseling themselves using an interpretive paradigm. Chapter Four will focus on data analysis, and report the results of the member checking and peer review process to confirm the validity and trustworthiness of the identified themes. In Chapter Five the researcher will discuss the interpretations of findings, reflect on the researcher's experience with the research process, offer implications of the results for in terms of new knowledge generated, professional application and social change, as well as acknowledgement of the limitations of the current study with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The content of this chapter includes information on the sample demographics, data gathering procedures, data tracking methodology, validation of themes, and finally, the themes discovered from the data.

4.1 SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

In phenomenological studies, such as this research, Creswell (1998) suggested that between 5 and 25 participants are needed. Past studies that involved the exploration of personal counseling with graduate students in counseling had a range of 5 to 8 participants (Murphy 2005; Kumari 2011; Von-Haenisch 2011). The current study falls within this range. The participants recruited for this study were six graduate students in counseling from the Ed.S program at a Counselor Education program at a Southern University. All of the participants were currently doing internships at their various sites in the program. There were five females and one male participant. Five were Caucasian, and one student identified as Latino. Each participant received counseling before at some time in their lives. However, the researcher was not able to obtain evidence of prior counseling from the participants. Information obtained from this study was through self-report. The researcher will discuss more about the narrowness of data and how comments from students who did not seek counseling might provide more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of this study in Chapter Five.

4.2 DATA GATHERING PROCEDURES

Students were contacted to participate in the study. The researcher sent e-mail messages to the Ed.S students' listserv with the help of the department administrative assistant. The message invited the students to voluntarily participate in the study. The students were instructed to contact the researcher either through e-mail or by phone to participate. The researcher set up meetings with each of the participants through e-mail at a designated location for individual interviews. The individual interviews were conducted in one of the counseling laboratories in the Department of Educational Studies. To enhance credibility, the researcher was able to build trust and rapport with the participants to obtain rich and detailed responses from the participants. The researcher explained the interview process to the participants. The participants were given information about the study. The researcher had the participants review the informed consent form before the researcher embarked on the interview process. The researcher explained the issue of confidentiality, the benefits and risk, as well as the right to withdraw from the study at any time of the study with the participants (See Appendix C).

The duration of interviews in qualitative studies, range from 30 minutes to an hour (Von-Haenisch 2011 & Kumari 2011). In the current study the researcher earmarked a maximum of one hour for individual interviews. The duration of one hour interview was planned in order to give every participant the opportunity to share as much information as possible within the specific time frame. The researcher went through the interview questions from the beginning to the end. The researcher used open ended questions, as well as follow up questions for the participants to share individual

expressions, insight, and thought until the interview process reached a saturation point. The researcher covered all the interview questions with each participant.

4.3 DATA TRACKING METHODOLOGY

The researcher transcribed verbatim. The responses of the participants were transcribed by the researcher within two days of individual interviews. A complete transcription is recommended to ensure that no important information is omitted (Carlson 2010). The researcher sent the transcriptions to each of the participants by e-mail in order for the participants' to verify that the information transcribed represents their responses to the interview questions and also to ensure credibility in order to emphasize the truthfulness of the reports.

The member checking process provides the participants an opportunity to review and revise errors in transcription. Member checking prevents the occurrence of incorrect data and the incorrect interpretation of data (Creswell 2007; Harper & Cole 2012). Braun and Clarke (2013) suggested that the member checking process is usually done within a two-week timeframe for feedback to be given to the researcher. In the current study, feedback was given within a week of the participants receiving transcriptions. Each of the participants verified and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts.

The researcher then coded information gathered. Coding is a process of sorting information (Glesne 2011). The aim of coding was to identify important themes, issues and meanings in the data set in a thorough and systematic manner (Watts 2014). In the current study, the researcher identified important themes, issues and meaning in the data obtained from the responses of the participants. The researcher arranged the themes into

sub-themes, according to each category to reflect the participants' perceptions regarding the study. The researcher then displayed the data in the final step using a table.

The researcher also invited peer reviewers to check for accuracy of the data. Setchell (2015) suggested that the aim of peer review is to improve the quality of manuscript and to ensure the quality of scientific publications. The benefits of peer review are that the process improves the quality of manuscripts in the form of comments and criticisms, which are addressed by the author. Peer review also gives the author the opportunity to revise manuscripts (Ware 2008). The researcher sent e-mail invitations (See Appendix E) to Doctoral students' listserv in the Department of Physical Education and Athletics to volunteer as peer reviewers for the current study. The peer reviewers were selected from this particular department because they have completed a qualitative research course at the Doctoral level, hence the researcher believes that they are capable of understanding and providing meaningful feedback about the phenomenon of study. Also, the researcher sought the perspectives of peers from this department in order to recognize researcher bias. Lewis (2009) suggested that every researcher will have some kind of bias. The researcher is a Counselor Education student, and, therefore, there is a tendency to promote the topic of personal counseling for students.

Two students volunteered as peer reviewers. The researcher e-mailed copies of transcripts of the individual interviews with the analysis of data to each peer reviewer. The peer reviewers were instructed to add new themes, sub themes and categories developed by the researcher. The researcher received the perspective of each peer reviewer within a week and proceeded with the analysis taking into account the feedback received. The only constructive feedback received was from the first peer reviewer who

gave no disagreement of any of the themes, but gave a suggestion in terms of re-organization of the content, which was to have positive attributes to become a main theme instead of the theme “willingness”. Firouzkouhi & Boroujeni (2015) suggested that researchers clarify themes to clearly depict the main themes and categories. In the current study, the researcher decided to have the “willingness” remain the first main theme because the word “willingness” encompasses and accurately describes the other categories such as openness, positive attributes and non-exclusivity.

Triangulation of the data source was also utilized as a strategy to ensure the validity and credibility of data. The three data sources used in the current study is the data source from participants through the member checking process. Each of the participants in the study agreed to the accuracy of the information transcribed by the researcher. The second data source is the feedback received from the first peer reviewer. The third data source is the feedback received from the second peer reviewer. Farmer, Robinson, Elliott and Eyles (2006) suggested that triangulation protocol begins with sorting out the findings from each data source, comparing the findings to determine the degree of convergence and dissonance of the meaning and importance of themes established. In the current study, the researcher compared the three data sources and discovered the similarities and differences in the feedback received from the two peer reviewers. The only difference observed was the feedback received from the first peer reviewer.

4.4 VALIDATION OF THEMES: Member checking, peer review and triangulation were used as strategies to enhance credibility in this study. These strategies have been explained earlier in the chapter. The following are the criteria used to ensure the quality of the current study:

4.4.1 CREDIBILITY

Credibility refers to the richness of the information gathered and the believability of findings (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Shenton (2004) described credibility as a process that ensures that study measures or tests exactly it intended. In the current study, the researcher used prolonged engagement, member checking, peer review and triangulation as strategies to confirm trustworthiness of data.

4.4.2 TRANSFERABILITY

Thick description was used by the researcher in the current study to provide detailed information about the research process, data collection method and the analysis process in the research study as suggested by Curtin and Fossey (2007). Transferability is the process in which the results of the study can be applied to other situations (Polit & Beck, 2012; Cope 2014 & Murphy 2013). In the current study, the researcher provided adequate information about sample demographics and the setting for the study earlier in the chapter.

4.4.3 DEPENDABILITY

Member checking, peer review and triangulation process were also used to enhance dependability of this research study. Dependability refers to the constancy of data in similar circumstances Polit and Beck (2012). Dependability is achieved when another researcher agrees with of each stage of the research process (Cope 2014). Steps should clearly show credibility in research reporting to ensure trustworthiness of the content analysis (Elo, Kaariainen, Kanste, Polkki, Utrainen, and Kyngas 2014). In the current study, the researcher ensured dependability through the use of the member

checking process. Each participant confirmed and verified the transcriptions of the individual interviews. The researcher also invited two peer reviewers to review the transcriptions and analysis of data. The researcher provided information about the themes that were developed and asked for feedback. The researcher also used the process of triangulation in ensuring trustworthiness of data by receiving validation from the three data sources used in the study, which were the member checking process, the first peer reviewer and the second peer reviewer. Analysis of data was supported using these multiple sources. The researcher checked for convergence and dissonance of perspectives.

4.4.4 CONFIRMABILITY

The results of this study are direct outcomes of the experiences and ideas of the participants through the use of verbatim quotations to ensure confirmability. Confirmability refers to objectivity and shows that data precisely reflects the information that the participants provided, and that the interpretations of data are authentic (Elo, Kaariainen, Kanste, Polkki, Utrainen, and Kyngas 2014). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985); Polit and Beck (2012) the results must represent the participants' responses and conditions of inquiry and not the researchers biases, motivations or perspectives. In the current study, the researcher used direct quotes from the participants to develop themes. Corden and Sainsbury (2006) affirmed that the use of verbatim quotations from research participants is regarded as an effective standard practice in most qualitative studies. Hence, the current study falls under this category because the researcher presented verbatim quotations as evidence for interpretations of the study for readers to view original data showing how results emerged. The researcher used also used quotations to

explain how the participants understood the phenomenon of study. Evidence and conclusions are drawn from verbatim quotations, which served as important component in clarifying relationships between data, interpretations and conclusions.

4.5 THEMES DISCOVERED

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of graduate counseling students towards seeking counseling. As a result, information regarding the willingness or reluctance of graduate students in counseling towards seeking counseling was also gathered. The other related purposes were to find out the benefits derivable from their readiness to seek counseling as well as the perceived drawbacks of seeking counseling. Themes were extracted from the data in the form of quotes and words. The quotes and words were derived from the transcribed individual interviews Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggested that themes are abstract constructs that connect expressions derived from texts, images, sounds and objects. A theme answers questions. Themes are derived from data and from the researcher's theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of study. The easiest way of identifying a theme is through repetition, specifically through topics that occur frequently. The researcher is responsible for deciding on the frequency of occurrence of data that constitutes a major theme. Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove (2016) suggested that categories on the other hand describe themes. Categories describe themes. "A category refers to the descriptive level of text and is explicit manifestation of the participants' account" (p.102). A category is an idea that is directly expressed in the text, but a theme is more than a category. "Theme" is the main product of data analysis that yields practical results in the field of study. Theme is used as attribute, descriptor, element and concept (p.101). Theme consists of codes that

have similar ideas and has a high level of generality that encompasses concepts regarding the subject of inquiry.

According to Corden and Sainburg (2006) readers who view original data are able to develop their own perspective about the fairness and accuracy of the analysis. Direct quotes depict how the researcher's finding emerged, and provides an audit trail, which enhances credibility. The researcher then coded by sorting out the information gathered. In the current study, the researcher identified re-occurring topics from the responses of the participants to the interview questions. The following are the main themes and categories from the analysis of the responses of the participants' about their experiences regarding the phenomenon of the study in answering the research questions:

4.5.1 WILLINGNESS

Willingness is the first main theme related to the perceptions of the participants. This refers to the degree of willingness towards receiving counseling. The following are the sub-themes developed from the responses:

Openness. Openness refers to the receptivity to the idea of seeking counseling. Most of the participants (5 out of 6) were open and ready to the idea of seeking counseling. All the participants felt ready to receive counseling, except participant # 1 who was not sure if she was ready. A reason was not given about her uncertainty.

Participant # 1:

I was actually thinking about this yesterday weird enough. I was thinking I would really love to go for counseling. I know about the process. I know it is not

scary. I know it's helpful. It's just like I just haven't done it so I don't know If I am completely ready yet but I am getting there, which is kind of stupid because I am in the counseling field.

I don't know I am not ready.

Participant # 2:

I think I am ready. I don't ever have a problem with seeking it. Uhm I.. You know , my cohort. It is different with my cohort or friends or semi-close friends. I live with two of them and they'll put their counselor hat on. You know once in a while. If I definitely have problem again I will do counseling even though you have the tools sometimes you need somebody to help you.

Participant #3:

I feel very ready, just being kind of prepared as a counselor through this program. I also have a broader awareness of what it is like to be a client as well in an individual context and group context as well. So I would rate my readiness fairly high.

Participant #4:

I think that I am definitely ready to seek counseling. I definitely have no problem with doing that. If I find time I would do it tomorrow.

Participant #5: *I have an open mind. A lot of clients do but some don't want to change. They just have to be there. I also work a lot with mandated clients who*

come to see us. They are here because they are required to stay in school. They are not ready to change for that.

Participant # 6:

I think I am pretty open to counseling. I didn't even seek out counseling in grad school. I sought counseling when I first started college. I am very open to counseling again because at the time in my life my counselor saw the deepest, rawest emotion in me. I m not afraid to go again, being a Counselor now. I know that self care is important and how to take care of myself, I kind of let go. So just having another person to discuss my life with to help my clients better is something I am really open to.

Positive Attributes. Positive attributes refers to the characteristics that were described by the participants of a person that engages in counseling to cope with a psychological issue. All the participants gave positive responses. According to the response of the participants, the researcher developed four categories used under positive attributes. These attributes are; encouraging, resourceful, very important and non-exclusive. To start with the positive attributes, participant #1 responded:

I think that is perfectly wonderful. I think everybody should get counseling some sort of counseling. Ah, because even if you are not suffering from something huge, I think everyone can benefit from having someone to speak to, so I would say if you are having psychological issues you should absolutely seek counseling

Participant #2 commented: *I think it's great I don't have any problems with counseling. I think it should be encouraged a lot more. I think that it gives people an*

outlet to say what they are feeling without being judged or how it should be. You know vocalizing it could be a lot or a part of the process of accepting it as well.

Participant # 3 stated:

I think that person as far as seeking counseling is brave but not as brave as it once was. There is still a stigma I think attached to people that seek out counseling but I also think that they are very smart and aware of the benefits of it. I think that counseling can benefit everyone. The stress of life whether it is seemingly mundane issues or major traumas. I think that counseling can be benefit for all of those things. Is very smart and is engaging in something that would be of help to them.

Participant # 4 suggested:

I think that they are a strong person for putting themselves out there and trying to find a solution. I think that they are smart for taking the time to find resources that can help them find solutions to what they're going through. Overall just a really good decision. It shows that they are willing to do what it takes to get better. Just like when there is a physical illness or something like that.

Participant # 5 stated:

I think it is a healthy way to cope with it compared to a lot of other things.

Participant # 6 explained:

I admire their strength because for me it was hard to admit maybe I needed to seek out a third party with issues that I was going through in the past. So I think it

is really good to go for counseling. I would not be in the profession, If I think I should not feel that way. I think that there are more benefits of counseling that people don't realize in regards to counseling and that more people should go and those that do are making really good decisions for themselves.

In all, the idea of a person who engaged in counseling to deal with a psychological issue was described as brave, smart, aware of benefits, strong and healthy. The idea of seeking counseling was viewed as a perfectly wonderful situation, a great idea, and helpful. The following are the sub-themes underneath the willingness of the students to receiving counseling. These positive attributes were expressed by the participants in the interview process.

Encouragement: The participants used words of encouragement to get others to seek counseling. Participant # 1, #2, #3 and #6 further supported others to seek counseling to cope with psychological issues. Among the statements made to encourage the idea of seeking counseling was that:

Participant # 1:

I think everybody should get counseling.

Participant # 2:

I think it should be encouraged a lot more.

Participant # 3:

I think that counseling can benefit everyone. The stress of life whether it is seemingly mundane issues or major traumas. I think that counseling can be

benefit for all of those things. Is very smart and is engaging in something that would be of help to them.

Participant # 6:

I think that there are more benefits of counseling that people don't realize in regards to counseling and that more people should go and those that do are making really good decisions for themselves.

Resourcefulness: Resourcefulness refers to the ability of an individual to effectively deal or cope with a problem. Participants # 2, 4 and 5 gave information about the process of engaging in counseling and described it as a healthy way to cope with a situation, an outlet to express feelings without being judged and a smart way to find resources that can help to find solutions to problems.

Participant # 2:

I think that it gives an outlet to say what they are feeling without being judged or how it should be. You know vocalizing it could be a lot or part of accepting it as well

Participant # 4:

I think that they are smart for taking the time to find resources that can help them find solutions to what they're going through.

Participant # 5:

I think it is a healthy way to cope with it compared to a lot of other things.

Very Important: The participants viewed counseling as very important in a university setting. Each of the participants thought that using counseling at a university level was important. Most believe that it is very important (5 out of 6). One participant specifically used the word “important”. The reasons why they believed counseling was important were to deal or cope with the following issues:

- Adjustment
- Time management
- Stress,
- Roommate conflict,
- Relationship issues
- Transition to life at a university level.

Participant #1:

I think it is really important. It is kind of hypocritical of me because I have not been to counseling since I was in high school. So to make it through this program without it but. I think I should have gone to counseling. I wish it had been required so that I would have gone because I think it is really important to go.

Participant #2:

I think it's really really big. I think it is so important. I used it as an undergrad and my graduate program too. Uhm, which is funny. One of the reasons I did not go right away was that I was going through some stuff because of counseling I should have the tools and ability to work with what I was going through and

process it and everything. I just couldn't get pass it. It was a big huge roommate conflict and I could not. You know I needed a third party. Not a friend or a co-worker, not a boyfriend or parent to kind of validate me and talk me through it. I felt like I did everything that I could to kind of resolve everything but I needed someone to talk me through it and so I think but I think development wise. Undergraduates and all students in general need somewhere where they can go and experience their transition issues.

Participant # 3:

I think it is very important in speaking of stress in life but being enrolled in a college program whether undergraduate or graduate program can be very stressful and life isn't take a break from doing things in college and having counseling services available at the school you attend I think is very important. I have taken advantage of it myself with a couple sessions at the counseling center here at USC and felt like I really benefitted from it.

Participant #4:

Super important. Very very important because it is a huge change, a huge transition in your life for students going through being away from home for the first time and studying for things that are difficult and having to navigate new relationships at different stages in their life. It is important to have that resource available to people who are struggling with that adjustment.

Participant #5: *I think it is important. I never did any counseling in my undergrad but from what I hear from people at the counseling center who are doing their internship*

there, it is a really important piece for some of the students that seek out counseling services and having that available to them.

Participant # 6:

I think that it is really important for universities to have counseling centers available to students. I don't think a lot of students realize that they are there and understand how to utilize them. I know that the USC counseling center does a pretty good job letting us know that there is free counseling available but even when I talk to people they are really "really they give ten free sessions!". "That's awesome" and they don't realize that but I think a lot of them don't realize how helpful it can be. Just with adjustment, time, classes, trying to figure out the social scenes. I think that the counseling center is really important.

Non-exclusivity: Non-exclusivity refers to the idea that counseling was not viewed as the only effective way to cope with a psychological issue. Most of the participants (5 out of 6) believe that counseling is not the only effective way of dealing with a psychological issue and that some psychological conditions require both medicine and counseling. Participant #3 believes that counseling may not be effective for severe mental health disorder. Participant #3 further believes that alternative forms of therapy could also be helpful. Different alternatives produce the best results.

Participant #3 stated:

I don't think that counseling is the only way. I think in some situations for certain people or certain disorders, maybe some medication or alternate forms of therapy can definitely be helpful. I think counseling would help in almost any

situation. I cannot imagine it hurting anyone regardless of the issue or the person. I think it is always a helpful addition, even if it is not only the therapy issued.

4.5.2 RELUCTANCE

The second theme is reluctance. Most of the participants (5 out of 6) were willing to receive counseling. The following reasons were given by the participants as hindrances towards receiving counseling:

Money was the most significant reason. Money was mentioned three times by three different participants. Participant # 1 stated:

Uhm. Money. I don't have money right now. I work pretty much the entire time the USC counseling center is opened so I don't really get that option and then as far as seeking help outside of the university setting it costs money and I don't have money right now.

Participant #2 mentioned:

Uhm money. I think paying for it you know if you weren't insured. Cost per session. Maybe the convenience of it. If it was located farther away and I did not want to do it after a long day of work. I think that might be the reasons I have.

Participant # 5 commented:

For me it is mostly if financially I can afford it. Uhm because I don't have any other reservations personally but I understand that it is expensive like I said earlier and that can be big roadblock.

Time as a factor came up twice as a reason for reluctance to seeking counseling by two participants. Participant #1 stated:

I think a lot of it is time. In just feeling I don't have time to do it. I am also semi terrified that they will uncover something about me that is awful and I am not ready to deal with.

Participant # 4 expressed that:

being reluctant in that I have to take off work to go because I have not been able to find places that work outside of the 8 to 5 window which is when I am working but emotionally I don't have any anxiety about it.

Stigma. Stigma refers to the feeling of shame associated with engaging in counseling. Social stigma refers to the feeling of disapproval by society with counseling. Some of the participants' viewed counseling as a difficult thing for people to engage in even though they admit that it is beneficial to seek counseling.

Participant # 1 talked about self-stigma and her fear of uncovering something awful about herself as the third reason she would be reluctant to seeking counseling. She stated:

I am also semi terrified that they will uncover something about me that is awful and I am not ready to deal with.

Participant # 3 discussed about the fear of judgment. He stated:

I guess fear of judgment maybe and still having some of that stigma associated with counseling. Some people may be viewed, if you are seeking counseling as

crazy and obviously, as a future counselor, I know it is not true but still there still this voice in your head that can make you feel reluctant to maybe not seeking counseling as soon as the problem arises. Anytime something is significant or persistent, I always was able to overcome any reluctance but there is still that little society voice in your head, is it that big of a deal that kind of thing.

In all, the participants above expressed issues with stigma associated with self or society in the process of engaging in counseling especially for individuals who are in the counseling field.

4.5.3. BENEFITS

Benefits is the third theme developed from the students' responses. The following were the responses:

Coping Skills. Coping skills refer to the way the participants use counseling to deal with psychological issues. Participant # 1 believed that counseling helped her to process and deal with everyday situations with another individual. In working with clients, counseling helps to prevent countertransference. Reidbord (2010) described countertransference as a situation in which a therapist transfers his or her feelings towards a client. The participant stated:

I think it is really important because it will help me to process what I deal with every day. I mean just today I do get someone wanting to commit suicide. It's hard to deal with that kind of stuff on your own. It could be really helpful to me to see somebody and kind of talk about what I see and deal with everyday and also talk about my past so that I will not have countertransference on clients.

Participant# 2 referred to counseling as a toolbox. She suggested that:

I think of counseling a lot like a toolbox. You are given a toolbox and then they help you to use those tools so that you can use it further down the road. That is one of the perks of it. Using it as an adult. Being able to gain the coping skills and abilities and then being able to apply them in other areas of your life I think are the biggest thing.

Participant #4 and #5 also discussed the ability to cope with adjustments to new developments, especially in stressful situations. Participant #4 stated:

being able to cope with adjustment to new developments. Having the ability to cope with skills to solve when you are in high stress situation. Having a perspective of someone who can help you look at everything that is happening right now rather than snowballing. Getting super overwhelmed focus on your strengths when you are constantly thinking about.. ah can't do it, I can't handle it.

Participant #5 further explained:

I think it could be a really helpful adjustment piece at the university level. Uhm helping to adjust especially at a really stressful time. Seeking that support especially if you are away from your family. I went to school really far from my family and it was a difficult transition. If you have little social support near you because it kind of gives you support

4..5.4 DRAWBACKS: The following were the categories produced from the responses that are related to the drawbacks of counseling:

Fear. The first drawback of seeking counseling, as identified by the participants, was fear of uncovering something about the self. Three participants discussed this issue.

Participant # 1 commented:

Just having to deal with things I may not even know that I am repressing and having to really come face to face with problems or situations from my past.

Participant #2 discussed a similar fear as a factor. She stated:

The best thing I can think of is opening a can of worms you cannot put back. I think would be the biggest thing. You know deep issue that the counselor or the patient in a team are not equipped to handle. Uhm. Even when I was going for counseling, it would be about something I would think of in our session and what was talked about. Reflecting on my personal reaction and what I said... For some people it might be on a downward spiral maybe if they are trying to work out some stuff in the session but they are not able to and things can get out of hand I think are the only things I could think of.

Participant # 6:

If there is a certain topic I am reluctant to talk with a counselor, it would be like my relationship with my boyfriend. I've talked about so many other different things but that is the one that is really difficult for me to divulge into because I feel uncomfortable about talking about maybe if the conversation was about like sex. I would not want to talk about that.

The participant expressed fear of social stigma due to the husband's profession as a military officer. She also feared that, if she happened to see a professional counselor and it was found out at her husband's work, there may be negative consequences, jeopardizing his job.

Unethical Counselor-Participant #3 discussed an unethical counselor, as a reason why counseling may be harmful. The participant specifically mentioned breach of confidentiality as a potential harm coming from counseling. He stated:

To be honest I don't necessarily see one. I mean I guess if the counselor were to act unethically or something I guess there's potential harm there but I think that I have a pretty much trust in that relationship. Obviously harm can take place if confidentiality is broken or boundaries are broken other than that I don't see any other harm coming from counseling.

Participant #4 also discussed a similar issue of "a bad counselor who is judgmental". She stated:

If you come across a bad counselor who is judgmental. Doesn't have your interest at heart, doesn't show you warmth and empathy. Really need in order to cope with something. It wouldn't be something I did as a client it would be something where a person slipped through the cracks it would be a potential harm.

Participant #6 believed that the biggest harm is breach of confidentiality. She stated:

If there is any harm it is hard for me to choose. I don't think that it is harmful to go because it helps you keep awareness of yourself. The biggest harm would be

that someone else knows my story that could be very vulnerable for a person. Obviously with counseling there is confidentiality. So I don't have to worry about that, like I can't think of anything that could be a potential harm that's maybe it. That is the only thing that I can think of being a harm or about counseling. Just Thinking that someone knows about what's going on in your life, in your head at the same time there is confidentiality but I know that I have to be trusting and hope that the counselor follows those ethical guidelines.

The following table shows the main themes, sub-themes and categories:

Table 4.1- Themes

Willingness	Reluctance	Benefits	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-Ready • Positive Attributes- Encouragement, Resourcefulness, Very important, Non-exclusivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Money • Stigma • Fear of uncovering about self. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coping Skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear • Unethical Counselor

4.6 DEVIANT PERSPECTIVES.

According to Booth, Carroll, Ilott, Lan Low & Cooper 2013, “Actively seeking the disconfirming or deviant case is properly regarded as a hallmark of trustworthiness in primary qualitative research” (p.126). Qualitative research comprises of typical, deviant,

critical or ideal information rich cases. Deviant cases are important because emphasis is mostly placed on commonalities or confirming evidence rather than on evidence that disconfirms our reasoning. Lewis (2009) affirmed that the researcher must discuss information regarding deviant cases in analysis. A deviant or negative case occurs when respondents' viewpoints are different from the majority or main body of evidence (Hsiung 2010). In the current study, the researcher brings attention to the following categories that represent the deviant cases derived from responses that are related to the drawbacks of counseling. These are the deviant responses extracted from the responses of the participants.

4.6.1 RELUCTANCE

The researcher identified three deviant perspectives related to the reluctance of seeking counseling through the responses of the participants. The following were the perspectives:

Location was brought up as the second reason by participant # 2. She may be reluctant if the location was far away. She would not be in the mood after a long day of work. She stated:

Maybe the convenience of it. If it was located farther away and I did not want to do it after a long day of work. I think that might be the reasons I have.

Theories and Techniques. Theories and techniques refer to the theoretical approach and procedures that are used by a counselor in the process of counseling clients. The first reason given by participant # 4 for being reluctant to seek counseling is having access to clinicians who use a theory that does not work with her. She commented:

Maybe only having access to clinicians who use a theory that doesn't really work with me.

Independence. Participant # 6 considers herself as a very independent person. It is difficult for her to get help but when she believes that she reaches a point where she does need help, she would be willing to seek counseling. She stated:

I think the only reason I would be reluctant to seeking counseling is because I am a very independent person it is hard for me to sit down and say O.K. maybe I need some help but when I get to that point I am always willing to do it. Uhm with that said that would be the biggest factor I wouldn't go or be reluctant.

BENEFITS

Therapeutic. Only one participant expressed a different view of a benefit of seeking counseling. The participant believed that an individual could derive a therapeutic benefit from seeking counseling. The statement below shows the response. Participant #3 stated:

“Just being able to express your thoughts and emotions with someone else, I think is hugely helpful with someone that is unbiased and un-invested as you get to express your feelings and have your feelings validated I think can be very beneficial to the client seeking counseling that is married. It is nice to do that to someone that is not your wife or friend or whatever to prevent some stress on your relationships when you are in that venting process”.

DRAWBACKS

Social Stigma. A participant expressed the view that social stigma was a major hindrance to seeking counseling. Social stigma was discussed by participant #5. The participant explained social stigma as it related to military families. The participant is married to a military man. She described a situation in which stigma could occur if she engaged in counseling and the information was made available to her husband's place of work or employers. She stated:

Oh, a potential harm for me. Personally for me, my husband is in the military and knowing like how the military views counseling I would not want it to affect his career because if they saw me in counseling that could be viewed as detrimental. Things getting better in the military but it can still have an effect.

If there is any harm it is hard for me to choose. I don't think that it is harmful to go because it helps you keep awareness of yourself. The biggest harm would be that someone else knows my story that could be very vulnerable for a person.

Obviously with counseling there is confidentiality. So I don't have to worry about that, like I can't think of anything that could be a potential harm that's maybe it.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter provided overall information about how data was generated, gathered and recorded. In-depth individual interviews were used to collect data from the participants in a secured counseling laboratory in the Department of Educational Studies within a College of Education building on a University campus. The researcher used member checking, peer reviewers, and triangulation to check for accuracy and validity of

the study. Chapter 5 will include information about why and how the study was done, interpretation of findings, implications for social change and recommendations for action and for further studies.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS

This chapter discusses the findings and how they relate to the professional literature in Chapter 2. The chapter also addresses the assumptions, scope, and limitations of the study as well as implications for Counselor Education Programs and Professional Practice. The study was done to gather information about the orientations of graduate students in counseling towards receiving counseling themselves, to bring more awareness about the receptivity of the target population specifically rather than the general or undergraduate student population. The outcomes for the study will be used to promote the field of counseling to Counselor Education students and make necessary recommendations for the Counselor Education program as well as suggestions for professional practice.

The results of the study show that the graduate students in counseling perceive counseling positively for dealing with psychological problems. The students view counseling to be crucial in a university setting. Counseling was believed to be helpful to cope with personal, work and academic problems. However, time, money, stigma, and fear of uncovering problems about the self were given as reasons for the reluctance of the identified group to seek counseling.

5.1 DISCUSSION OF THEMES

The first theme that emerged in the current study is the willingness towards seeking counseling. The second theme is reluctance to seek counseling. The third theme is the benefits of seeking counseling and the final theme is the perceived drawbacks of counseling. The researcher will discuss how the results of the current study either support or are at odds with previous studies. Any new information gathered from the study will also be shared.

5.1.1 PERCEPTIONS TOWARD RECEIVING COUNSELING

The result of the current study found that the participants view seeking counseling as a positive way of dealing with psychological issues. Positive attributes were used to describe a person that seeks counseling for a psychological problem. The participants encouraged others to seek counseling and also saw counseling as a tool to deal with problems. The participants also found counseling to be important at a university level in dealing with adjustment, time management, stress, roommate conflict, relationship issues and transition to life at university level. Counseling was perceived as a healthy way to cope with problems. Overall, the participants were receptive to the idea of seeking counseling.

These outcomes are in support of previous studies such as the study conducted by Cook, et al (1984) which suggested that most of the participants had positive views about counseling. The students agreed that counselors can be helpful with a variety of problems and are willing to see a counselor if they had serious problems. Kumari (2011) also concurred that graduate students in counseling viewed counseling as a form of

experiential learning that was highly valued. The participants learned the importance of the therapeutic relationship as an essential component of the counseling experience and the foundational basis of clinical work. Participants also gained first-hand experience of the techniques of counseling by experiencing what it was to be a client. In personal development, participants viewed counseling as a lifelong process that involves positive characteristics and the ability to deal with personal challenges and develop a sense of self or insight. In addition, Von-Haenisch (2011) also suggested that participants viewed counseling as an important part of training that helped explore and promote issues of self-awareness and self-acceptance. Personal counseling also helped to develop core and advanced skills as well as establish suitable relationships with clients.

5.1.2 WILLINGNESS TO RECEIVING COUNSELING

In the current study, most of the participants (5 out of 6) showed positive responses to the idea of seeking counseling. All of the participants have received counseling before, according to their self-report. However, there was only one exception that stated that she was not ready yet to seek counseling. No reason was given about this response which is a deviant perspective from the responses of the other participants. The outcomes of the current study also supported a previous study in 2005 by Dearing, Maddux and Tagney, and Leech (2007) which reported that graduate students in the counseling field having a positive attitude towards counseling which resulted in the willingness to seek counseling. The outcomes of these studies are in agreement with the current study regarding the willingness of the participants to seeking counseling.

5.1.3 RELUCTANCE TOWARD RECEIVING COUNSELING

In the current study, the reasons the participants gave in terms of reluctance to seeking counseling were; inadequate financial means, not having enough time from work and academics, and stigma (self and social stigma because of the fear of uncovering or revealing issues about the self). Money was a significant factor that came up three times, followed by time management (twice) and stigma (twice). These results are in agreement with Dearing, Maddux and Tagney (2005) study suggested that graduate students viewed cost as the main obstacle to seek or not seek personal counseling, followed by time and then confidentiality. Although confidentiality was not mentioned as a factor in the reluctance of seeking counseling by participants in the current study, it was however raised as an issue in the drawbacks of seeking counseling. In a more recent study, McCarthy, Bruno and Sherman (2010) identified factors for not seeking counseling were discomfort with self-disclosure, insurance status, prior counseling experience, membership in a graduate counseling program and stigma.

5.1.4 BENEFITS OF SEEKING COUNSELING

In the current study, counseling was seen as a tool used for coping with stress and other psychological issues which helps to process everyday situations. Counseling also helps to prevent countertransference to the client(s). It was also used to adjust to new developments in high stress situations and also get another perspective or a different way of looking at situations. The outcome is in congruence with the study conducted by Grimmer and Tribe (2001), Kumari (2011), and Loizos (2013) that personal counseling of counseling trainees enhanced their personal development and growth through the

development of knowledge and skills to promote self-awareness. Dryden and Thorne (2008) also supported the idea by suggested that the continuous experience of self-awareness is beneficial for counseling psychologists and the counseling process as well. Von-Haenisch (2011) suggested that personal counseling also helped to develop core and advanced skills as well as establish suitable relationships with clients.

Graduate students in counseling enrolled in a CACREP counseling program reported fewer problems, had decreased depressive problems, and decreased anxiety problems after receiving counseling (Proseck, Holm and Daly 2013). Similarly, Everson (2013) suggested that graduate students in a counseling psychology doctoral programs believed counseling was effective in coping with depression and anxiety, improved learning in the graduate program, a better ability to empathize with clients and improved learning of skills and techniques. Consequently, in the current study, participants viewed counseling as a therapeutic process that helped to express thoughts and feelings to an unbiased and un-invested individual.

5.1.5 DRAWBACKS OF SEEKING COUNSELING

The perceived drawbacks of counseling mentioned by the participants were fear of uncovering a problem of the self and social stigma, unethical behavior of a counselor such as breach of confidentiality, judgmental counselor, and lack of warmth and empathy. The results are in agreement with Gulliver, Griffiths and Christensen (2012) study, in which participants rated stigma as the most dominant barrier, followed by lack of mental health education, and then negative past experience. In Laxson's (2014) suggested that participants reported that counseling was only needed when experiencing

severe stress or extreme mental health issue after one has exhausted all other support systems or other coping techniques.

5.2 ASSUMPTIONS

The first assumption was that graduate students in counseling possess adequate knowledge about the phenomenon of study. The participants in this study were students enrolled in the Education Specialist degree (Ed.S) program at a CACREP-accredited southern university. This group of participants was chosen for the study because they have gone through extensive training in the counselor education field. They possess advanced skills and training in their education; therefore, they are well-informed about the phenomenon of study. The participants were able to provide responses regarding the phenomenon of study. In the current study, the participants were able to identify with specific situations and reflect on past circumstances in answering the research questions in individual interviews.

The second assumption was that graduate students in Counselor Education have a positive perception towards seeking counseling. Cook et al (1984) reported that most of the participants had positive views about counseling. Dearing, Maddux and Tagney (2005) also suggested that graduate students in counseling have a very favorable attitude toward counseling. McCarthy, Bruno & Sherman (2010) believed that graduate students have a moderately favorable attitude toward seeking professional help. The current study, too, revealed that graduate students in counseling have a positive view of counseling; they are willing to receive counseling, encourage others to seek counseling, believe that it enables them to develop coping skills to deal with stressful situations and that it has a

therapeutic value that enables them to express self to another without reluctance and judgment.

The third assumption is that the study will achieve the objective of bringing more awareness of the issue of receptivity towards receiving counseling among graduate students in counseling. The counseling field lacks adequate information about graduate students' attitude in comparison to undergraduates in the area (Haberstroh 2010; Hayes, Youn, Castonguay, Lock, McAleavey and Norberg 2011; and Tse, Wantz and Firmin 2013; and Laxson 2014). The current study has developed responses or answers to the research questions. The study is relevant to the field of counseling and the process of counselor education which will provide information to the stakeholders (faculty, department chairs, deans, and other professionals in counseling) to help explain the reasons that may hinder or encourage the perception of the students towards seeking counseling. The study will also help counselor education students to be more proactive in seeking counseling by providing them with information about the benefits of counseling and possible suggestions and recommendations.

5.3 SCOPE

The study was done at a southern university in the United States. Participants were recruited from a CACREP accredited program in the Department of Educational Studies. The results of this study could be applicable to Counselor Education and Supervision departments from different universities worldwide. The focus of this study is on gathering information about graduate students' perceptions toward seeking

counseling. The outcomes will mostly be appropriate for studies needing information to graduates students as target population.

5.4 LIMITATIONS

A limitation of this study is that the researcher relied on the use of self-report of the participants in the collection of data. Paulhus and Vazire (2007) suggested that data from personal statements made by the participants may lack reality as seen by the researcher and others. Participants may be deceptive for the purpose of self-enhancement, consistency-seeking and self-presentation. In the current study, the researcher developed an effective interviewing style: non-judgmental empathic attention was used to give participants the opportunity to reflect and communicate. The researcher avoided using leading questions, and listened to the participants with tolerance and acceptance. The researcher used open ended questions, probing, and use of follow up questions to interview the participants to obtain in-depth information. An audio-recorder that helped to prevent bias and misinterpretations of the results since information was obtained directly from the participants.

Another limitation was that the researcher is a Counselor Education student. The researcher was concerned with bias in the analysis of data which was mentioned in chapter 3. The researcher may have a tendency to see or view personal counseling as a helpful way to cope with psychological problems due to the education and training in the field. However, in the current study, the researcher adopted strategies as measures to avoid this situation. The strategies used were: the use of member checking process, peer reviewer and triangulation to check for accuracy and validity of the results. Cope (2014)

mentioned that these strategies help to enhance credibility of the study. Direct quotes from the participants were shown as evidence of the responses students in the data. According to Corden and Sainsbury (2006), direct quotes as evidence for interpretation of data helps to establish the audit trail, thereby enhancing credibility. The researcher did not contribute, misconstrue or add to the report received from the participants. The questions asked during the individual interviews were developed from the ATSPPH-SF Attitude Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help, Short Form (1995). The ATSPPH is a strong predictor for seeking psychological help in order to understand how individuals perceive personal counseling (Ahmaier and Hansen (2012). The ATSPPH-SF scale is correlated with previous usage of professional help for psychological problems (Vogel, Wade & Hackler 2009).

The next limitation is a methodological limitation. The current study involves a limited sample size and diversity. The sample of the study consists of six participants from the Ed.S program in a Counselor Education program. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, the Ed.S program had 22 students enrolled with internship, in which 6 students voluntarily participated. Focus was on the students in internship. One student was excluded from participating in the study due to fact that the student had taken a minor course with the researcher in order to avoid a dual relationship, in which the investigator would play a dual role of a previous instructor and current researcher. Past qualitative studies done by Murphy (2005), Von-Haenisch 2011, and Kumari (2011), had a range of 5 to 8 participants. However, in the current study, the number of the participants fell within this range. According to Creswell (1998), for phenomenological studies between 5 and 25 participants is adequate. In terms of diversity, the Ed.S program consisted mostly

of Caucasian students (21) and Latino students (1) among which were 19 females and one was male. The results of this study may be different from students enrolled at other universities, from different programs within the counseling field, and at different levels of educational degrees.

5.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

5.5.1 GENERATION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE

The purpose of the study was to gather information about the perceptions of graduate counseling students towards seeking counseling. The goal of this study is to create awareness and knowledge about how graduate students in the field of counseling perceive the idea of seeking counseling for themselves. By so doing, information about the willingness or reluctance, perceived benefits as well as the drawbacks of seeking counseling will be also be gathered in effort to promote the personal and professional development of the students. As mentioned earlier in chapter 1, the CACREP (2016) standards clearly specify the two aspects of professional practice which are: knowledge and skills needed to offer professional counseling. However, when it comes to the third aspect being the qualities of the provider of those competencies, there is lack of information. Loizos (2013) placed emphasis on brining attention to the focus on the “self” of counselors in training. Loizos (2013) mentioned that work with the “self” gives more information on the characters and personalities of those who are fit and unfit for the profession. In order to produce effective counselors, they must be aware of their own inadequacies and seek help when necessary. Work on the “self” provides trainees with expertise and skills necessary to provide counseling and therapy. The “self” is important

to the success of the professional counselor. Grimmer and Tribe (2001), Kumari (2011, and Loizos (2013) posit that personal counseling of counseling trainees is crucial for the personal development and growth of future counselors to develop knowledge and skills for the effective understanding of the counseling process and to promote self-awareness. Thus, the researcher embarked on the current study to provide a platform for this concept.

Also, in the review of literature, there is an indication that more research is needed using graduate student in counseling as participants, as suggested by Dearing, Maddux and Tagney (2005). De Vries & Valdez (2006) agreed that there are only a few studies that focused on the perceptions of graduate students in the counseling field. McCarthy (2008) stated “Few studies examine trainees’ voluntarily help seeking and associated difficulties they may experience in seeking counseling” (p.47). This means that there are limited research studies done on the perceptions or the willingness of graduate counseling students toward seeking counseling. Most of the information done about student perceptions of counseling services is done using the undergraduate student population (Haberstroh 2010; Hayes et al 2011; Rickwood and Bradford 2012; Tse, et al 2013; & Laxson 2014). However, the current study has contributed to the understanding of the receptivity of graduate counseling students towards counseling. The results of the current study will be disseminated through publication as a way to promote the field of counseling education by drawing attention to this particular topic. Thus, the findings from this study will contribute to the existing literature in the topic area.

The results of this study suggest that the perceptions of graduate students in counseling are mostly favorable. The students are willing to seek counseling for various problems such as adjustment, time management, stress, roommate conflict, relationship,

and issues related to transition at the university level. The students perceive counseling to be very important and beneficial. The process of seeking counseling was highly encouraged and viewed as a helpful way to cope with personal as well as academic issues. The students were open and ready to seek counseling even though time, money, self/social stigma, location, poor counseling techniques/theories and independence seem to create some reluctance towards the process. The study has addressed the issues that cause the reluctance of students to seeking counseling. Recommendations are made to improve the comfort level of the students, Counselor Education programs and for professional practice.

5.6 THEMES DISCOVERED FROM GRADUATE STUDENTS IN COUNSELING VERSUS UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

This section consists of information about the themes that were found in the current study from graduate students in counseling versus themes discovered in previous studies related to the perceptions of undergraduate students toward seeking counseling in higher education setting. The information includes both the similarities and differences between the groups. The following themes below are similarities between the two groups:

5.6.1 STIGMA

According to Blaine (2000) stigma is defined as “a mark or flaw resulting from a personal or physical characteristic that is viewed as socially unacceptable” (p.2). Stigma is associated with psychological help. There is a negative perception of individual who seeks psychological help as being objectionable in some way. Public/social stigma is described as negative views of person by others. Self-stigma is the perception of an individual that he or she is socially unacceptable, which results in low self-esteem or self-

worth if that individual seeks counseling (Vogel, Wade & Hackler 2007). Individuals are less likely to seek help for problems negatively viewed by others (Overbeck 1977). Individuals conceal psychological problems and evade treatment due to the negative result of stigmatization (Corrigan & Mathews 2003). Vogel and Wester (2003) posit that stigma may decrease the willingness of an individual to seek counseling.

In the current study, stigma occurred as a sub-theme under one of the reasons why graduate students in the field of counseling would be reluctant to seek counseling. Stigma was used to refer to the feeling of shame associated with engaging in counseling.

Participant # 1 discussed about self-stigma as a result of social stigma. The participant mentioned being semi-terrified that others will uncover something about her that is awful and that she is not ready to deal with it. Participant # 3 discussed about fear of judgment as a result of social stigma. The participant described the fear of judgment associated with counseling. He mentioned that some people may be viewed negatively, specifically as “crazy and obviously, as a future counselor”.

In undergraduate students, perceived public stigma and self stigma were significantly related to each other, and to the attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, and to the willingness to seek counseling. Attitudes were also significantly related to willingness to seek counseling. “Public stigma is positively related to self-stigma, self-stigma is negatively associated with the attitudes individuals have toward counseling, and that these attitudes are positively associated with the willingness to seek help for psychological and interpersonal concerns” (p.12) (Vogel, Wade & Hackler 2007). Vogel, Wester, Wei and Boysen (2005) also found out that attitudes were related to the intent to seek counseling for both psychological and academic problems. Attitudes

were related to social stigma, self-disclosure, self-concealment, anticipated risk, anticipated utility and social norms. Vogel and Wester (2003) reiterated self-disclosing distressing information predicted help-seeking attitudes and intentions including the tendency to conceal information and the anticipated outcome to decide to disclose to a counselor. Laxson (2014) also found out that some undergraduate students had a fear of having others see them struggle and expose their difficulty coping with their struggles and felt that exposure of their struggles would jeopardize their independent competency. Also, admitting the need for help was admitting a loss of control which was viewed as weak and shameful. Negative views are associated with counseling as a result of stigmas that revolve around counseling. The stigmas were viewed as weaknesses and damage to one's character.

In all the studies mentioned above, the findings suggest that the attitudes toward seeking counseling of students, both undergraduate or graduate students supports Atzen and Fishbein's (1980) theory of reasoned action to understanding help-seeking decisions. The theory suggests that the intent to seek counseling is based on the individual's attitude toward a behavior. A predictor of help-seeking willingness is the individual's attitude toward the counseling process. In other words, if an individual has a negative attitude or perception about how others will perceive him or her seeking counseling, that individual may be less likely to be willing to seek counseling.

In summary, stigma is still a factor that may prevent individuals from seeking counseling. In both undergraduate and graduate students self and social stigma remains an issue. Some of the graduate students in the field of counseling also experience the shame, fear and embarrassment associated with stigma associated with counseling,

especially as a result of being in the profession. However, this view was not shared by majority of the participants.

5.6.2 WILLINGNESS TOWARD COUNSELING

In the current study, majority of the participants (5 out of 6) reported being open and ready to receiving counseling. Positive attributes such as encouragement, resourcefulness, very important and non-exclusivity were used to describe an individual that sought counseling for psychological problems. The majority of the participants expressed positive views about the idea of seeking counseling despite some expressing some hindrances which may deter them. In a study with undergraduate students, Laxson (2014) also revealed that all participants (129) reported positive experience with counseling as a helping resource in a study that examined students' level of stress and attitudes toward help-seeking behavior and counseling services in an effort to understand at which point students choose counseling as a resource. The similarity between these two groups in terms of willingness to seeking counseling is that most share a positive view or perception of the use of counseling for psychological and academic concerns despite some expressing the idea that some hindrances may be a reason for reluctance to seeking counseling. This is further supported by Leech (2007) indicated that having a positive attitude toward counseling increases a person's willingness to seek counseling.

5.6.3 ENCOURAGEMENT

In the current study with graduate students in counseling, encouragement occurred as a category underneath positive attributes used to describe an individual that sought counseling for psychological problems. Participants #1, #2, #3 and #6 supported

others to seek counseling to cope with psychological problems. The participants thought that everyone should get counseling, it should be encouraged a lot more and that it could benefit everyone whether it was for minor issues or major trauma. More people should go for counseling and those that do are making good decisions for themselves. In a study with undergraduate students that focused on the barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking for young elite athletes: a qualitative study, Gulliver, Griffiths and Christensen (2012) found encouragement and the positive attitude of others to be a major theme. Some participants believed that encouragement and positive attitude of others, that is, from family, friends and especially from the coach to seek psychological help was important for a person to seek help. Similarly, Laxson (2014) in another study involving undergraduate students, reported participants advocating for help- seeking behavior among their peers and encouraged the use of counseling.

In summary, stigma, both self and social stigma, willingness toward seeking psychological help and encouragement of others to seek counseling were the similar themes that occurred between the current study using graduate students in counseling and studies that involved the use of undergraduate students in previous studies in chapter 2. The next section will discuss the differences in the themes that occurred in past studies between the two groups.

The following are the differences of the themes discovered from graduate students in counseling versus themes discovered in previous studies with undergraduate students:

5.6.4 MONEY AND TIME

In the current study with graduate students in the field of counseling, time and money were discovered as other sub themes under reluctance to seeking counseling. The

participants reported that insufficient money was a significant reason for not seeking counseling. Participants also reported inability to get off work to attend counseling and just feeling that there is no time to do it. However in the study conducted by Gulliver, Griffiths and Christensen (2012) with undergraduate students' money and time did not come as significant factors. Lack of time and money was not considered as problems in seeking counseling.

5.6.5 OTHER THEMES

In the studies of undergraduate students that involved the hindrances or barriers to seeking counseling, the other themes that were discovered were the desire to handle problems without help; problems had to be severe to seek psychological help (Laxson 2014). Gulliver, Griffiths and Christensen (2012) found lack of knowledge of psychological issues and symptoms of mental disorders, and not knowing when to seek help as significant themes with undergraduate students whereas these were not factors in the current student with graduate students in counseling. In the current study, the researcher recruited graduate students in the field of counseling; specifically students in the Ed.S program at a CACREP- accredited university. The participants were in the final stage of their education with internship. The participants have gone through extensive training. Hence they are more knowledgeable and well-informed of the phenomenon of study. Themes that were discovered with undergraduate students in this section were not discovered with graduate students in counseling. However, a deviant perspective such as independence in dealing with psychological problem was reported by a single participant.

5.7 WHAT THE CURRENT STUDY TELLS US

This section discusses information about what was learned from the current study, and what the data did not tell which creates a foundation for ongoing studies.

5.7.1 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

First, the current study reveals demographic characteristics of the participants in the study. In the beginning of the individual interviews, the researcher asked each participant demographic questions such as gender, race and whether the participants received counseling before. The current study showed that five females and one male participated in the study. This means that females outnumber the male as participants. The researcher mentioned earlier in chapter 3 that the total number of students enrolled in the Ed.S program with internship was 19 females and 3 males. The outcome of the difference in the ratio in regards to gender was expected. Dearing, Maddux and Tagney's (2005) study of predictors of psychological help seeking in counseling and psychology graduate students revealed a higher number of female participants (76.7%) to male participants. Leech (2007) study of Cramer's model of willingness to seek counseling for master's counseling students had 427 female participants and 86 male participants. McCarthy, Bruno and Sherman's (2010) study that explored the help-seeking attitudes of graduate students had 130 females and 37 males. Kumari's (2011) study of personal therapy as a mandatory requirement for counseling psychologists in training had 7 females and 1 male participant. Previous studies have revealed higher numbers of female participants to male participants. The current study however, does not explore issues about why there are a higher number of female participants to the male participants.

Also, in terms of race, the current study shows that there are greater numbers of White/European American participants. There were 5 White participants and 1 Latino. The Ed S program had a total of number of 21 White students and 1 Latino student enrolled with internship. No other ethnicity was represented. The researcher obtained information to show demographic characteristics and did not further explore the factors why there are a higher number of White students in comparison to the other races and why some races are not represented in the program. Previous studies with graduate students reveal a higher number of white participants. Kumari's (2011) study had 7 White participants out of a total of 8 participants. Bryne and Shufelt's study about factors for personal counseling trainees had 87% White participants. Proseck et al (2013) had 67% White participants.

The last demographic question asked participants if they had received counseling. Each of the 6 participants responded with a "Yes". The participants further revealed the issues in which they sought counseling for adjustment, time management, stress, roommate conflict, relationship issues and transition to life at university level in the individual interviews. The current study further reveals that most of the participants (5 out of 6) have a positive view of the idea of seeking counseling for psychological problems. The participants had previous experience with counseling. They were open and ready to seek counseling. They believe that it is important in a university setting; they encourage others to seek counseling, they use positive attributes to describe an individual that seeks counseling for psychological problems. However, the current study also shows that the participants still have fears as a result of self and stigma, unethical practices such as breach of confidentiality, and a Counselor being judgmental. Despite these views,

most have a positive perception of counseling and are willing to seek counseling for their psychological issues. However, the current study did not explore whether the previous experience the participants had of counseling was viewed positively or negatively. Also, the current study did not also find out whether their past experience with counseling had any impact on their responses in the individual interviews.

5.7.2 POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE

The current study revealed that majority of the participants view the idea of seeking counseling positively. This is supported by Leech's (2007) study that counseling students reported positive attitudes toward counseling and are willing to seek counseling services. Proseck et al (2013) suggested that even if counseling was not mandatory, counseling students may be more likely to seek counseling than the norm graduate students. McCarthy, Bruno and Sherman (2010) suggested that graduate students training to become professional counselors have more favorable attitudes toward help-seeking than graduate students from various academic programs. Bryne and Shufelt's (2014) study which indicated that overall, counselor trainees believed that counseling was beneficial, significantly improved developmental concerns such as self-concept, personal growth, career and sexual identity, adjustment, relationship issues, new living situations and new circumstances. However, for some of the participants they also reported having the fear of dealing with things from the past, fear of revealing deep emotional issues, discussion about sex and unethical counselor practice such as breach of confidentiality and a judgmental counselor. Despite these concerns, the study revealed that each of the participants had previous counseling experience. This shows that the participants still sought counseling for their problems, even though there were presences of these fears.

Further studies could explore more about the reasons why some participants still decide to seek counseling even though there were still fears associated with counseling.

5.7.3 HINDERANCES TOWARD SEEKING COUNSELING

In the current study, the participants identified hindrances toward counseling. Money/cost occurred as a reason by three participants, followed by time, and then fear of uncovering something about self due to self and social stigma. The study also revealed that each of the participants had received counseling before. Therefore, it is possible that what was considered a hindrance to counseling did not affect their perception of seeking counseling or what considered a hindrance at the time of seeking counseling was no longer a hindrance after receiving counseling. The result of the current study is supported by Dearing, Maddux and Tagney (2005) which reported the top three potential obstacles to counseling by graduate students in the field of counseling as cost, time and confidentiality. Lozois (2013) also reported confidentiality, financial burden, lack of time, and fear of exposure as inhibiting factors to enter counseling for counselor trainees. More research is needed to know the effects of the hindrances mentioned toward seeking counseling.

5.7.4 DEVELOPMENT OF COPING SKILLS

Most of the participants (4 out of 6) reported that counseling helped to develop coping skills to deal with psychological issues from every day to day situations, high stressful situations, working with clients to prevent countertransference, adjustment to new developments, to adjustment to transition at the university level. The development of coping skills was suggested as benefit of seeking counseling. Counseling was referred

to as a “toolbox” that was in given to apply in various areas of life challenges. The result of the current study is supported by Kumari’s (2011) study that concluded that counseling was an experience that improved participants’ self-awareness and had a positive impact on personal lives. Also, Proseck et al (2013) study showed that counseling students reported fewer psychological problems, decreased symptoms of depression and anxiety as a result of engaging in counseling. Furthermore, Loizos (2013) emphasized that counseling is a positive experience which may facilitate the process of training of professional counselors. This is in accordance with the report given by Participant #1 who stressed that counseling is important to deal with daily stress in order to prevent countertransference on clients. The participant was in internship and saw clients as a requirement for the program. Further research could explore more deeply about how counseling helped participants to develop coping skills and specifically find out how counseling prevented countertransference on a client.

5.7.5 FEAR OF COUNSELOR MALPRACTICE

In the current study, participants were asked what they viewed as a potential harm from them seeking counseling. The question was developed to obtain information about what each participant perceived as the drawbacks of seeking counseling. Apart from fear as a result of self and social stigma, the other reason that emerged was unethical counselors. Three participants discussed this issue. Participant #3 mentioned breach of confidentiality or boundaries as a potential harm to seeking counseling. Participant#4 discussed a judgmental counselor who lacked warmth and empathy and participant #6 mentioned confidentiality as the biggest harm. This suggests that even though the participants are in the field of counseling and are trained and aware of the ACA

guidelines in regards to confidentiality and professional responsibility, still there is that fear of counselor malpractice. The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) clearly sets the standards for respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the clients. Code B.1.b discussed information about counselors only to request for information from clients only when it is helpful to the counseling process. Code B.1.c focused on confidentiality for counselors to safeguard information of prospective and current clients. Counselors were asked to disclose information only when necessary with the consent or sound legal and ethical reasoning. Section C of the code of Ethics discusses the guidelines for professional responsibility that addresses the issue of how counselors should treat clients.

In regards to previous studies done with graduate students in the field of counseling, the issue of confidentiality as a barrier to seeking counseling was supported by Dearing, Maddux and Tagney's (2005) study that revealed confidentiality as the third highest obstacle to seeking counseling among the participants. Lozois (2013) also mentioned confidentiality as the first inhibiting factor to seeking personal counseling by counselors in training and professionals in the study of personal therapy for future therapists: reflections on a still debated issue. The current study revealed that each of the participants had previous counseling experience, yet some of them still had fears concerning the issue of confidentiality. Future studies could look more into finding out more information about why some of the students still have the fear of breach of confidentiality and fear of unprofessionalism by the counselor.

In summary, this section has discussed information about what the data from the study tells. Namely, demographic characteristics of the participants, the overall positive perception of the idea to seek counseling which is supported by previous studies, the

development of coping skills as a benefit of seeking counseling and issues about the fear of counselor malpractice due to breach of confidentiality and unprofessionalism (judgmental counselor).

Again, the goal of this study is to create awareness and knowledge about how graduate students in the field of counseling perceive the idea of seeking counseling for themselves. The result of this study has answered the research questions which are: What are the reasons graduate students in counseling would be willing or reluctant to counseling? What are the perceived benefits of counseling? And what are the perceived drawbacks of counseling? As a result of the outcome of this study, more ideas have been generated for ongoing study for other research studies. There is more information needed about whether previous experience with counseling has an impact on the perception of counseling, why despite some participants have sought counseling despite having some reluctance, how counseling helps to develop coping skills and prevent countertransference on clients, and why some participants still have the fear of breach of confidentiality and other unprofessional behavior (lack of warmth, empathy) by a counselor.

5.8 PROFESSIONAL APPLICATION

The results of this study indicate that personal counseling is highly valued by counselor trainees. It is seen as important for personal and professional development of the graduate students as counselor trainees and future practitioners. However, there are some hindrances of seeking counseling expressed by the participants as well. The suggestions for the hindrances expressed by the participants in the current study are addressed under suggestions for Counselor Education Programs.

5.8.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

In the training of students, counseling may be used as an instrument for self-awareness by counselor education programs (McCarthy 2008). Faculty in counselor education programs are encouraged to give opportunities for self-growth as standards of the counseling profession. Counseling is viewed as the start of a lifelong process of personal development that impacts personal life in a positive way. Counseling involves facing personal issues, deeper understanding of self and self-awareness (Kumari 2011). CACREP (2016) & ACA (2014) ensures the quality and continuous enrichment of counselor education programs through established standards developed for students to practice and master knowledge and skills. The standards encourage students to be involved in activities of self-growth and personal development both personally and professionally. All counseling students, despite, emphasis or track of study are expected to possess the skills and practice necessary to address a wide variety of issues for their professional identity.

Bryne and Shufelt (2014) suggested that research about counseling students' perception on counseling has both positive and negative effects. It is believed that there are still many unanswered inquiries concerning the perspectives of counselor trainees towards personal counseling. Counseling students who have never experienced counseling themselves may be insincere to the profession as they are in a position of recommending services to clients that they may not understand which makes them unprepared as practitioners. The counseling students may not be able to connect with the client's outlook. As opposed to other professionals, Counselors/Counselors in Training are held in high regard when it comes to professionalism. According to the ACA (2014),

code “C.2.g”. “Counselors monitor themselves for signs of impairment from their own physical, mental, or emotional problems and refrain from offering or providing professional services when impaired. They seek assistance for problems that reach the level of professional impairment, and if necessary, they limit, suspend, or terminate their professional responsibility until it is determined that they may safely resume their work”. (p.9). Furthermore, Norcross (2010) stressed the importance of personal therapy and recommended for personal counseling for all mental health practitioners. Personal counseling was particularly suggested for beginning counselors. Counseling trainees are likely to experience frustrations, challenges and successes involved in the counselor-client relationship process. There is also an expectation of increased patience and tolerance for ambiguity on the part of trainees. As a result, counselors are expected to have empathy for clients. Counseling facilitates the therapeutic process by enhancing self-knowledge and promoting heightened awareness of feelings, helps prevent client harm through self-knowledge and also helps to avoid the imposing of one’s own beliefs, values and attitudes on the client.

The present study has identified the positive perceptions and hindrances that graduate students in counseling have towards seeking counseling as counselors-in-training in the contribution to national development. Effective counselors will be used to tackle the growing number of psychological problems in college students, in the adult population and also in the nation as a whole.

5.9 SUGGESTIONS FOR COUNSELOR EDUCATION PROGRAMS: Most of the participants in this study believe that personal counseling is very beneficial and important to their personal and professional development as future counselors. There is significant

value placed on the issue of seeking and encouraging others to seek counseling. Participant #1 wished that counseling was required in order to be able to engage in the process. Participant # 2 and #3 mentioned that all students needed somewhere to go and experience their transition issues whether they are an undergraduate or graduate student. Time consistently came up as a factor that contributed to the reluctance of the students in seeking personal counseling. Some of the participants believed that they do not have the time away from work and academics to receive counseling. However if personal counseling could be made an option in the curriculum or part of the academic program, many students who have the need will be able to have access due to the location where the counseling service is situated on campus. Thus students would be able to engage in counseling and also derive benefits from the process. Norcross (2010) suggested that Counselor Education curriculum is the ideal setting for teaching the importance of self-care through personal counseling.

Also, another factor that came up as a hindrance to seeking counseling is money (cost). According to other studies such as Dearing, Maddux and Tagney (2005) & McCarthy, Bruno & Sherman (2010), this seemed to be a well-known reason for preventing students from seeking counseling. It was indicated in the current study that money was a significant reason for not seeking counseling. Half of the participants believed that counseling was viewed as expensive, unaffordable especially with no insurance per session. However, the university counseling center does provide ten free counseling sessions to students, which seems that most are not aware of this situation. Counselor Education departments could also help to disseminate information about the

free services to the students as a way of promoting their professional and personal welfare.

Also, Counselor Education programs could embark on collaborative or exchange programs with other CACREP accredited institutions within the community. For instance, the University of South Carolina could have graduate students in Counselor Education provide free counseling services to graduate counseling students at Columbia International University and Webster University. In turn the graduate students in counseling at the University of South Carolina could also benefit by receiving free counseling services provided by students in the counseling field at those institutions.

In terms of tackling the issue of stigma, and fear of uncovering issues, training program and faculty should work collaboratively to communicate as a whole department about encouraging students to seek counseling when necessary. The issue of seeking counseling should be made an agenda in faculty meetings as suggested by Dearing, Maddux and Tagney (2005). Issues of discussion in the meeting should include questions such as: Is there a formal policy about encouraging counseling to students? Are there referral sources available to the students? Is there any formal discussion with the students about the potential benefits of counseling in the context of course work or supervision? Are there procedures in place about maintaining the confidentiality of the students? Finally, are there formal policies in dealing with students who may have a psychological problem?

5.10 SOCIAL CHANGE

The results of the current study could be helpful to curriculum developers in designing and in the review of their curricula, to check on students' willingness and reluctance as factors that may contribute to or that may hinder the accessibility of seeking counseling in higher educational institutions. This could be achieved by developing a sound curriculum that caters to the general development for counselors in training. It is suggested that Counselor Educators train and educate students that are capable and have the knowledge, skills and practice that are best to promote client welfare as mandated by the ACA code of Ethics (Patel, Hagedorn & Bai 2013). Counselor educators are responsible for instilling the skills. This involves the practice of gatekeeping, which implies counselor educators being involved in the current state of the counseling profession and holding a working knowledge of current and innovative practices in counseling. This will in turn enhance training and educational processes.

Also, publishers of learning and teaching materials will benefit from the findings and recommendations of this study, as they publish or periodically edit and review their products for dissemination to the public. Bryne and Shufelt (2014) stated, "As the research on this topic continues to emerge across the helping professions, it will remain important for counselors to stay involved in efforts to better understand trainees issues, such as developing an appreciation for the work we do, identifying with our clients' experiences, and finding ways for training programs to best respond to the needs of the students" (p.188). The outcomes of the current study have generated more information specifically regarding the perceptions of graduate students in the field of counseling

about receiving counseling themselves. This has contributed to the few studies available about this particular topic of interest.

5.11 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The researcher makes the following recommendations for future studies:

First, the current study involved only two peer reviewers from a single department which is from the Department of Physical Education and Athletics. The intent of the researcher was to recruit more peer reviewers from two other departments within the College of Education in order to obtain a more diverse perspective on the interpretation of the analysis and to obtain a deeper check of accuracy and validity of the study. However, only one department was responsive to the invitation for participation. The researcher therefore suggests that more departments related to the counseling field such as the Department of Social Work and the Department of Psychology be included in the selection process for the peer reviewing process.

Also, the current study struggled in the area of recruiting participants from diverse backgrounds to obtain different perspectives for the study. The idea was to include as much participants from different backgrounds based on race and gender, but due the unavailability of the diverse pool within the target population, the researcher was unable to recruit a high degree of participants with diverse backgrounds. Thus, it is recommended that future researchers expand the participant pool by using more than one location or institution to collect data and specifically recruiting participants from programs or institutions with a higher rate of diverse students.

In addition, to increase the number of participants for the study, it is recommended that incentives be involved in the recruitment process. The study is a small scale qualitative study which does not really require a high number of participants. The current study possesses an adequate number of participants. However, it took some time before the researcher was able to obtain volunteers for the study. By introducing the idea of incentives, there could have been a quicker response by volunteers to participate. The researcher however, was limited in terms of financing the idea.

Also, the researcher recruited participants who have had experience receiving previous counseling before. In all they have sought counseling at some time in their lives. The researcher was not able to recruit participants who have not sought counseling or have never received counseling. The researcher was not able to recruit participants with no counseling experience. Participation was done through volunteerism in the current study. For future studies, the researcher recommends that participants who have never received counseling should be considered in order to obtain information from this group of students. Perhaps new information may be derived from their responses.

The researcher discovered the issue of lack of congruence in the current study. Deviant perspectives such as location, theories and techniques and independence were mentioned by one participant. They did not occur repeatedly in the data as factors that hindered participants from seeking counseling. In the benefits of seeking counseling, a participant gave therapeutic benefit as a factor. In the perceived drawbacks of counseling, a single participant raised the issue of work related social stigma. The viewpoints mentioned were not in congruence with the majority views of the participants. However,

the researcher shared information about these deviant perspectives in the current study as topics for investigation in future studies.

Finally, the current research study did not include information about what impact previous counseling experience had on the perception of the participants toward seeking counseling. Ongoing research could be done to focus as a major topic on this issue. More time would be needed to do further research into when the participants sought counseling, whether the experience was a negative or positive experience and to ask questions whether the past experience had any effect on their response(s). More information is also needed to investigate why the participants still sought counseling despite having some reluctance in relation to money, time, and stigma. More questions could be developed for the participants in order to obtain information. Some of the participants discussed how counseling helped to develop coping skills to deal with psychological and day to day problems. There is more information needed to find how counseling actually helped those participants to develop those skills and how those skills were used to deal with psychological problems. This could be further studied as a major topic of interest. In regards to the issue of fear due to breach of confidentiality and unprofessionalism (lack of warmth and empathy), more information is also needed to find out why some of the participants have this perception despite being in the field of counseling and having awareness of the ACA code of ethics. Future researchers could take it as a major topic of study and find out if the participants have experienced this problem and what impact it has on their perceptions.

5.12 RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS

The researcher was interested in doing a research project that will primarily be of importance and benefit to specifically graduate students in the counseling field. There is much attention to studies that focus on bringing awareness to the psychological issues of the general population student population (De Vries & Valdez 2006). A lot of studies have also been done on undergraduate students (Haberstroh 2010; Hayes, Youn, Castonguay, Lock, McAleavey and Norberg 2011, and Tse, Wantz and Firmin 2013; and Laxson 2014). Past studies rarely focus on graduate student therapists-in-training (Dearing, Maddux & Tagney 2005). As a Counselor Education student, I bring awareness to this issue and through this study have generated more information or knowledge in this topic area for this specific population.

As a Counselor Education student, the researcher was concerned with bias in interpreting the results of this study by the researcher, as a result of the education and training in the field of Counselor Education towards the view of perceiving counseling positively. Consequently, the strategies adopted as measures to avoid this situation, were: the use of member checking process, peer reviewers and triangulation to check for accuracy and validity of the results. In the member checking process, all the participants agreed with each of their transcriptions. The researcher also used direct quotes from the participants. The peer reviewers also agreed with the themes generated from the responses of the participants. In triangulation, both the responses of the participants through member checking process and the feedback received from the first peer reviewer and the second peer reviewer were in accordance with the analysis of the results for

study. The strategies used in enhancing the trustworthiness of the study removed the fear of bias.

The participants have provided information for the phenomenon of this study. According to previous studies done with graduate students that involved the perceptions and attitudes towards seeking counseling (McCarthy, Bruno & Sherman, Kumari 2011; Von-Haenisch 2011), it is assumed that the participants as graduate students in counseling would have a positive perception toward receiving counseling, which in fact is an outcome for the study. In the current study, most of the participants responded positively towards the idea of receiving counseling. The participants were ready and open to the idea of seeking counseling and all the participants have received counseling before. Counseling was viewed as important, helpful and beneficial. Only one of the participants was uncertain about seeking counseling.

This study has also brought about awareness as to how the participants perceive the benefits of seeking counseling. Counseling was perceived to be a therapeutic process in which the participants believe that counseling enables them to express feelings and thoughts to another person who is not related to them. The coping skills that are developed in the process of receiving counseling help to deal with psychological problems experienced in the field such as countertransference, stress, adjustment issues, roommate conflict, relationship issues and transition to life at a university level. The reasons for reluctance towards seeking counseling were money, time, self/social stigma, location, theories and techniques as well as independence. As a researcher it was particularly interesting to find out that money is a significant factor hindering the participants from seeking counseling since the university counseling center does offer

free counseling sessions to all students with the student health insurance plan as publicized on the university counseling center website. The student health insurance plan is mandatory for all students unless there is another health plan that can be a replacement. It seems that most of the participants were not aware of this as money was stated by most for the reluctance to seek counseling.

In terms of the drawbacks of seeking counseling, fear of uncovering something about self, social stigma as well as theories and techniques were mentioned. These reasons simply show that reasons the participants give are in accordance with the reasons any other students would give about the fears in seeking counseling. Stigma still remains a significant problem for all students despite their field or level of knowledge. As a graduate student in counseling, one would tend to believe that the issues mentioned above cannot occur, but the issue still remains a problem.

5.13 SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the research study and information about why the research study was done. The summary of the interpretations and findings were discussed as they relate to literature review in chapter 2. The implications for social change, suggestions for Counselor Educators and Professional Practice, as well as the reflections of the researcher are also included in this chapter. The reflection of the researcher as well as possible bias and values is mentioned.

The results of this study suggests that most of the participants perceive seeking counseling as a positive way of dealing with psychological problems. The participants were open and ready to seek counseling. All the participants have experience with

receiving counseling. Time, money, stigma, and fear of uncovering issues about the self were viewed as hindrances which would make them reluctant to seek counseling.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of graduate counseling students towards receiving counseling. In doing so, information regarding the willingness or reluctance toward receiving counseling is gathered. The study has developed more information regarding this particular topic and the targeted population, which will help to answer the problem of insufficient studies in this specific group towards seeking counseling. The study has also found out the perceived benefits derivable from the readiness and the drawbacks to seeking counseling by graduate students in counseling. The findings emanating from this study are capable of contributing to literature in the topic area.

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APPENDIX A- ATTITUDES TOWARD SEEKING PROFESSIONAL
PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP–SHORT FORM

Gender: ___ Male ___ Female

Race: ___ African American

 ___ Asian/Asian American

 ___ White/European American

 ___ Latino/a

 ___ Arab/Middle Eastern

 ___ Other: Please specify _____

Directions: Please circle the item that best fits your response to each question.

1. If I believed I was having a mental break down, my first inclination would be to get professional attention.

- Agree
- Partly Agree
- Partly Disagree
- Disagree

2. The idea of talking about problems with a psychologist strikes me as a poor way to get rid of emotional conflicts.

- Agree
- Partly Agree
- Partly Disagree
- Disagree

3. If I were experiencing a serious emotional crisis at this point in my life, I would be confident that I could find relief in psychotherapy.

- Agree
- Partly Agree
- Partly Disagree

-Disagree

4. There is something admirable in the attitude of a person who is willing to cope with his or her conflicts and fears *without* resorting to professional help.

-Agree

-Partly Agree

-Partly Disagree

-Disagree

5. I would like to get psychological help if I were worried or upset for a long period of time.

-Agree

-Partly Agree

-Partly Disagree

-Disagree

6. I might want to have psychological counseling in the future.

-Agree

-Partly Agree

-Partly Disagree

-Disagree

7. A person with an emotional problem is not likely to solve it alone; he or she *is* likely to solve it with professional help.

-Agree

-Partly Agree

-Partly Disagree

-Disagree

8. Considering the time and expense involved in psychotherapy, it would have doubtful value for a person like me.

-Agree

-Partly Agree

-Partly Disagree

-Disagree

9. A person should work out his or her own problems; getting psychological counseling would be a last resort.

-Agree

-Partly Agree

- Partly Disagree
- Disagree

10. Personal and emotional troubles, like many things, tend to work out by themselves.

- Agree
- Partly Agree
- Partly Disagree
- Disagree

APPENDIX B- INVITATION MESSAGE

Dear Students,

My name is Toyin Adeyemi, I am a Doctoral Student in the Department of Counselor Education and Supervision at the University of South Carolina-Columbia. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project titled “Investigating the Receptivity of Counseling Graduate Students towards Receiving Counseling”. The purpose of the research is to find out the perceptions of graduate students in counseling towards receiving counseling.

Your input will be greatly appreciated in an individual interview. The interview will be scheduled at an agreed time and location. Please be ready to allocate a maximum of about one hour for the interview. An audiotape will be used obtain information which will be transcribed, analyzed and interpreted.

Your information will be kept confidential. Information received will not identify the participant nor will any information be traced back to any of the participants. One of the benefits of this study is that the participants are provided an opportunity to be a part of a study that promotes attention to graduate counseling students. Another potential benefit of the study to the participants is that this study may be provided a therapeutic element to the participants as a result of engaging in discussion about their experience with counseling in the interview process. This study poses no physical harm to the participants. The potential risk to the participants is that participants may have changes in

thought processes and emotion. Such changes may either be a positive or negative association connected with reflecting on perceptions regarding the values and drawbacks of personal counseling and/or the idea of a previous experience in counseling. However, any psychological risk is minimal and temporary. You may choose to withdraw or decline from participation at any time. The findings of the study may be published or presented for professional development.

For questions, please feel free to contact me at 574-261-9789, adeyemio@email.sc.edu, or my faculty advisor, Prof. Joshua Gold at 803-777-1936, josgold@mailbox.sc.edu If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at 803-777-7095.

Thank you very much.

Warm regards,

Toyin Adeyemi, MSE, Counselor Education
Doctoral Student
Counselor Education and Supervision
University of South Carolina-Columbia
574-261-9789
adeyemio@email.sc.edu

APPENDIX C- INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Student,

My name is Toyin Adeyemi, I am a Doctoral Student in the Department of Counselor Education and Supervision at the University of South Carolina-Columbia. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project titled “Investigating the Receptivity of Counseling Graduate Students towards Receiving Counseling”. The purpose of the research is to find out the perceptions of graduate students in counseling towards receiving counseling.

Your input will be greatly appreciated in an individual interview. The interview will be scheduled at an agreed time and location. Please be ready to allocate a maximum of about one hour for the interview. An audiotape will be used obtain information which will be transcribed, analyzed and interpreted.

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connected with reflecting on perceptions regarding the values and drawbacks of personal counseling and/or the idea of a previous experience in counseling. However, any psychological risk is minimal and temporary. You may choose to withdraw or decline from participation at any time. The findings of the study may be published or presented for professional development. For questions, please feel free to contact me at 574-261-9789, adeyemio@email.sc.edu, or my faculty advisor, Prof. Joshua gold at 803-777-1936, josgold@mailbox.sc.edu If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at 803-777-7095.

A copy of this form will be provided upon request. Your signature below indicates that you have decided to participate in this research study and that you have read and understood the information provided about the study.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Thank you very much.

Warm regards,

Toyin Adeyemi, MSE, Counselor Education
Doctoral Student
Counselor Education and Supervision
University of South Carolina-Columbia
574-261-9789
adeyemio@email.sc.edu

APPENDIX D- INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Questions

1. Gender: ___ Male ___ Female
2. Race: ___ White/European American
 ___ Latino/a
3. Have you received counseling before? Yes ___ No ___

Questions regarding perceptions about seeking counseling (Research Question 1).

4. What are your thoughts about a person who engages in counseling to cope with a psychological issue?
5. How important is the use of counseling in university settings?
6. What are your thoughts about counseling as the only effective way for you to deal with a psychological problem?

Questions regarding the willingness/ reluctance in seeking counseling (Research Question 2)

7. What are your thoughts about your readiness in seeking counseling?
8. What are the reason(s) you would be reluctant to seeking counseling?

Questions regarding the potential benefits of seeking counseling (Research Question 3):

9. What do you think are the benefits of you engaging in counseling especially at the university level?

Questions regarding the potential drawbacks of seeking counseling (Research Question 4):

10. For what reasons may counseling not be an effective means for you to cope with psychological problems?
11. What do you view as a potential harm that could emanate from you seeking counseling?