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# Counselor Preferences of White University Students: Ethnicity and Other Important Characteristics

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Yi-Ying Lin entitled "Counselor Preferences of White University Students: Ethnicity and Other Important Characteristics." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Counseling.

Joel F. Diambra, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Jeffery L. Cochran, Shawn L. Spurgeon

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Carolyn R. Hodges

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Counselor Preferences of White University Students:  
Ethnicity and Other Important Characteristics

A Thesis Presented for  
the Master of Science  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Yi-Ying Lin  
August 2010

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## **Abstract**

In the last several decades, multiculturalism has become the one of the most popular research topics in psychology and counseling, and the counselor preferences of ethnic minority clients has been well researched. However, in the history of research on counselor preferences, the needs and preferences of ethnic majority clients have been neglected. This study investigated the counselor preferences of White university students.

This study examined three primary research questions: whether counselor ethnicity influenced White university students' initial counselor preferences, what were White university students' preferences for various counselor characteristics, and whether White university students preferred specific counseling styles for different problem types. A survey consisting of three parts, a demographic questionnaire, a questionnaire including three analogical counselor-client vignettes, and a Preferred Counselor Characteristics Inventory, was administered to students at a university in the southeastern United States.

With regard to preferences for counselor ethnicity, the findings suggested that counselor ethnicity generally did not affect White participants' initial counselor preferences. Aside from ethnicity, the study investigated White students' preferences for various counselor characteristics: credibility, counseling style, age, gender and race. The results indicated that the characteristics valued by the highest percentage of White students were counselor credibility and counseling style. Moreover, participants' preferences were influenced by their own gender and past experiences with counseling. Lastly, participants favored different counseling styles depending on the problem type, and gender played an important role in preference for counseling style.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In recent decades, in part due to an increasing appreciation of diversity and respect for various cultures, multiculturalism has become one of the most popular research topics in psychology and counseling. Along with this trend, professionals in these fields have also focused on the mental health needs of minority clients, including non-biased psychological assessments, increasing the cultural awareness of helping professionals, and culturally-sensitive counseling. (Grieger & Ponterotto, 1995; Sadowsky, Kuo-Jackson, & Loya, 1997; Sue & Sue, 2003; Suzuki & Kugler, 1995).

An important aspect of this research concerns the counselor preferences of minority clients. Due to the impact of culture, education level, and family on people, counselor characteristics such as gender, age, appearance, ethnicity, attitude, and cultural awareness influence the effectiveness of counseling and willingness to use counseling services among minority clients (Atkinson, 1983; Sattler, 1977; Coleman, Wampold, & Casali, 1995). These researchers have investigated the factors of effective cross-cultural counseling in order to provide better counseling services, to promote usage of counseling services by minorities, to raise the cultural awareness of psychological and counseling professionals, and to better prepare the counselor- or psychologist-in-training to enter the current multicultural world.

In the process of delving into research regarding preferred counselor characteristics, however, I found that this earlier research has focused on the preferred counselor characteristics of minority clients. There has been little research conducted on the preferred counselor characteristics of majority clients, which in the United States generally refers to White or Caucasian American clients. This is understandable, given that for a relatively long time, the development of counseling

and psychology in the United States has been based on the needs and understanding of White or Caucasian American clients. In addition, historically, most psychology and counseling professionals have been White or Caucasian American. Thus, it was natural to assume that counselors understood the needs of White or Caucasian American clients.

However, due to the gradually increasing amount of minority counselors and psychologists as well as counselors-in-training and psychologists-in-training, it has become necessary to examine the preferred counselor characteristic of majority clients. According to a recent report by American Psychological Association Center of Workforce Studies (2010), in 1998, 15.5% of doctoral degrees in psychology were awarded to minority graduates; in 2000, the percentage of minority representation was 16.7 %, and in 2008, there was a notable increase to 24%.

Understanding the needs and preferences of the majority of clients is essential for minority counselors- and psychologists-in-training to approach their majority clients properly. Yet, there is little recent research that directly addresses these issues. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- Does counselor ethnicity affect White clients' initial counselor preferences?
- What are White clients' preferred counselor characteristics?
- Do White clients' preferences for counseling styles according to problem type?

## **Literature Review**

This section will provide an overview of the extant literature regarding counselor preference. As mentioned in the introduction, recent past studies of counselor preference were primarily focused on minority clients. Although the current research focuses on the ethnic majority of the United States, it is worthwhile to review past studies in order to understand the development of research regarding counselor preferences and serve as a foundation for the current study. Thus, the

literature review has two main themes: the effect of counselor ethnicity on clients' preferences and counseling effectiveness, and client preferences for other counselor characteristics. Moreover, since the effect of cultural affiliation on clients' racial preferences for counselors was a vital portion of the research development, I will include a brief introduction of this research.

With regard to race and ethnicity, the terms used by social science researchers have changed over time. Before the 1980s, "race" or "racial" was utilized to describe an individual's phenotypic characteristics, such as appearance or skin color. In the later decades, "ethnicity" or "ethnic" was used to depict a broader concept including both culture and race. Helms and Talleyrand (1997) argued that these two terms could not be treated as the same concept and "race" was the more precise term than "ethnicity." In order to respect the original researchers and reflect the change in usage, both of the terms are used here. In the discussion of earlier research studies, "race" or "racial" is used, and "ethnic" or "ethnicity" in the later studies.

#### **Counselor preferences: Ethnicity as the most important factor.**

Looking back to the 1960's to 1980's, researchers conducted a number of studies regarding the relationship between client characteristics, counselor characteristics and counseling effectiveness. These characteristics typically referred to attributes such as race/ethnicity, gender, age, and counseling style. Many of these studies investigated whether the racial/ethnic similarities of clients and counselors influenced the effectiveness of counseling and clients' willingness to seek counseling services.

Around 1970's, researchers mainly focused on Black and White clients interacting with Black and White counselors. Ewing (1974) examined whether clients would react more favorably to counselors of the same race as compared to those of a different race. His sample consisted of

White and Black students who had had precollege interviews with either a Black counselor or a White counselor. His hypotheses were that clients would evaluate counselors of the same race more favorably than those of different races, and counselors and clients should be of the same race in order to achieve effective counseling. Ewing found little or no support for these two hypotheses. This study had a number of limitations. First, the study was conducted at one site with three Black counselors and eight White counselors. Given the uneven distribution and limited number of counselors, the backgrounds and experiences of the individual counselors might have influenced the results. Second, Ewing's results were based on clients' assessments of counselors after a single session. These assessments might differ in a longitudinal study.

Peoples and Dell (1975) investigated the effect of passive and active counseling styles in addition to racial dissimilarity between counselor and client. Their sample consisted of 28 White female and 28 Black female university students from low-income families. Each participant viewed one video clip of a counseling interview which either included a White counselor with a passive or active counseling style or a Black counselor with a passive or active counseling style. This research found that the participants preferred active counseling styles rather than passive counseling styles, regardless of race. As for their preferences of counselor race, Peoples and Dell found that participants preferred Black counselors, regardless of participants' race. However, the reasons why participants preferred the Black counselor were not clear. Because the counseling videos were made with only one Black and one White counselor, it would be difficult to generalize these findings to other populations or other situations.

Thompson and Cimolic (1978) investigated whether counselors' race influenced students' use of counseling services at a university counseling center. Black students who came to the center with vocational-educational or personal problems were given a choice between a White or Black

counselor. The results showed that regardless of the type of problem, Black students chose Black counselors first, and seeing a counselor of the same race also increased their willingness to use counseling services. Thompson and Cimboric suggested that in order to increase the utilization of counseling center of Black students, it might be helpful to let them know that there were Black counselors in the counseling center.

Bernstein, Wade, and Hofmann (1987) examined the relationship between clients' race and their preferences of counselor's race, influence of problem type on preferences for counselor race, and the strength of client preferences for counselor age, sex, and experiences compared to counselor race. Their study found no significant relationship between clients' race and their preferences of counselor's race. Among client participants who expressed preferences for counselor race, clients preferred Black counselors, whether they were Black or White. As for problem type, in most cases, clients did not reveal any preference for the counselor's race. For problems with regards to a lover or spouse, however, White clients either preferred Black counselors or did not express a preference; Black clients were evenly distributed in their preferences for Black counselors, White counselors, and no preference. Moreover, a high percentage of participants preferred female counselors, and most participants valued counselors' experiences over age, sex, and race, regardless of participants' race. Bernstein et al. argued that the underlying circumstance explaining White participants' preference for Black counselors was that they conducted their survey in a large urban city with many Black students and staff, so White participants would expect to see a Black counselor. Also, White participants who agreed to join the survey might also be more willing or open to Black professionals.

As can be seen, research studies investigating clients' racial preferences for counselors have uncovered mixed results. Various meta-analyses have come to similar conclusions. In the meta-

analysis conducted by Sattler (1977), he included five analogue preference studies which were published from 1970 to 1973, as well as 20 questionnaire and interview preference studies, the majority of which were published in the early of 1970s. Sattler (1977) concluded that though an unequivocal answer cannot be given, Black participants typically prefer Black counselors, and they preferred competent White professionals to less than competent Black professionals.

Moreover, the attitude and counseling style of counselors are more important to Black participants than is race. White clients did not show preferences for White or Black counselors. However, the studies included in the review showed that White participants from Appalachian regions in the United States were more likely to choose a counselor of the same race than White participants from Northern regions. Considering participants' socioeconomic status, middle-class Black participants had similar attitudes toward therapy as middle-class Whites.

Atkinson (1983) conducted a meta-analysis which reviewed twelve studies regarding counselor preferences published from 1970 to 1981. Atkinson concluded that Black participants preferred counselors of the same race. As for other ethnic groups, due to lack of data and controversial outcomes, no conclusions could be drawn. Sattler (1977) and Atkinson's (1983) reviews demonstrated that there was no easy answer to the question of client preference for counselors' racial background. Moreover, these studies mainly investigated counselor preferences of ethnic minority groups, especially Black, and did not investigate White client participants' preferences. Although some of these studies also investigated the counselor preferences of a White sample for comparative purposes, there were no consistent findings.

### **Counselor preferences: From ethnicity to other characteristics.**

Researchers looked at counselor characteristics other than ethnicity which might play significant roles in therapeutic relationships. Aside from investigations of various characteristics,

researchers also began to explore the relationship of preferences for counselor ethnicity to problem type.

Atkinson, Furlong, Poston (1986) argued that aside from participants' preferences of counselor race, other counselor characteristics should be considered. Therefore, they utilized the paired-comparison methodology to compare Black participants' preferences for counselor race with preferences for other counselor characteristics including counselor sex, religion, educational background, socioeconomic background, attitudes and values, personality and age. They also investigated the relationship between level of commitment to black culture and preferences for counselor race among Blacks. The results showed that though Black participants preferred Black counselors to non-Black counselors, they valued other characteristics more. For example, Black subjects preferred counselors who were older and had a higher education level than they did, and had similar attitudes and personalities more so than their race. However, due to insufficient data, it was not possible to conclude if Black participants' level of culture commitment influences their preferences of counselor race.

Atkinson, Poston, Furlong (1989) extended the research by Atkinson et al. (1986) to other ethnic groups including Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, and Whites. In Atkinson et al.'s (1986; 1989) research, these four groups displayed similar rankings of preferred counselor characteristics. In these two studies, participants all ranked education as their primary priority and other characteristics, such as similar attitudes, older age, and similar personalities as secondary. However, discrepancies were also found between ethnic groups. Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, and Whites preferred counselors of the same gender, whereas Blacks did not demonstrate this preference. Asian Americans and Caucasian Americans revealed preferences of counselors from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Atkinson et al. (1989) stated that if it were

necessary for participants to choose between counselors with the same or different ethnicity, they would choose counselors of the same ethnicity. However, they also claimed that participants from these four ethnic groups all valued counselor expertise more than ethnic similarity.

Bennett and BigFoot-Sipes (1991) adopted the paired-comparison methodology used by Atkinson et al. (1986; 1989) to examine preferences for counselor characteristics among Native American and Caucasian American clients. They also explored whether these preferences were different for different types of problems. The results indicated that, regardless of ethnicity, participants regarded similarity in attitudes to be the most important. More education and similar personality were also considered as higher priorities than ethnicity. Furthermore, counselor preferences differed depending on the type of problem. Regardless of ethnicity, more dissimilar counselor characteristics were chosen when facing academic problems, such as an older and more educated counselor. As for personal problems, participants preferred similar characteristics, such as the same gender and similar attitudes. Regardless of problem type, Native Americans seemed to value counselors of the same ethnicity more than Caucasian Americans, especially with academic problems; this characteristic was ranked second just below education. The authors speculated that this finding may be because Native American subjects assumed counselors with the same ethnicity would easily understand the difficulties they faced in academic areas.

Bichsel and Mallinckrodt (2001) investigated the preferred counselor characteristics of Native American women living on the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Spring Reservation in central Oregon. The participants of the study preferred counselors with following characteristics: female, Native American, aware of Native American culture, and use of non-directive counseling styles. In addition, according to the research, a culturally sensitive counselor was valued by Native American participants regardless of whether participants were seeking help for personal or

vocational problems, though cultural sensitivity was more important when seeking help with personal problems.

Duncan and Johnson (2007) examined the relationship among Black self-consciousness, socioeconomic status, gender, prior counseling experience, cultural mistrust, counselor preference and different types of concerns – personal, vocational/educational, and environmental concerns. They argued that their findings supported the conclusion that the race of counselors was a significant factor for Black students seeking counseling. Other characteristics, such as gender and racial consciousness, also play important roles. However, socioeconomic status did not appear to be significantly correlated with preferences for counselor ethnicity.

Atkinson et al. (1998) utilized the paired-comparison methodology in order to understand the most favorable counselor characteristics among Asian Americans as well as to examine the interplay of participants' sex/gender, level of acculturation, and preferences of counselor characteristics. The study found that the counselor preferences of Asian American participants varied according to problem type. For example, while seeking help for career/vocational problems, an older counselor was the second-favorite characteristic; however, in personal problems, this characteristic was ranked sixth. Moreover, female participants preferred a same-sex counselor whether they sought counseling for personal or career problem. Male participants preferred a counselor of the same sex for career problems, but preferred counselors of the opposite sex for personal problems. They also found that participants favored a counselor with similar attitudes and values more than a counselor with the same ethnicity.

Previous studies showed that aside from counselors' ethnicity, counselors' other characteristics were also important to clients. Besides ethnicity, clients considered counselors' attitudes and values as the most important variables. Furthermore, a counselor's sex/gender, age,

expertness were also important to clients. Although correlations of these characteristics and clients' preferences were not clear, researchers have made headway in examining clients' preferences of multiple counselor characteristics.

### **Counselor preferences: Cultural affiliation.**

In the following section, I introduce some basic concepts regarding effects of cultural affiliation on counselor preferences. Although cultural affiliation is not the focus of the current study, it is introduced to acknowledge it as one important chapter of research of counselor preferences and to serve as a vital portion of foundation to extend this current study for future research.

Aside from the research foci regarding counselor preferences, researchers (Atkinson, 1983; Coleman et al, 1995; Helms, 1985) argued that more subtle factors should be considered in studies of counselor preference in order to find a more precise answer. In response, researchers looked at differences between clients of the same ethnic group. For example, researchers examined the effects of within-group differences on clients' preferences for ethnically similar or dissimilar counselors.

Within-group differences were typically distinguished by cultural affiliation that represents cultural commitment, acculturation, racial identity, and cultural sensitivity (Coleman et al., 1995). Researchers utilized level or type of cultural affiliation to explain clients' decision or preferences regarding counselors. Whether these variables referred to psychological or sociological aspects of cultural affiliation, all of them addressed the degree to which participants associate with their groups of origins (Coleman et al. 1995). In short, researchers tried to use the level of cultural affiliation to investigate the effect of within-group differences on clients' counselor preferences.

Various studies found that clients who were more committed to their own original cultures

preferred counselors with similar ethnicity (e.g., Atkinson, Ponce, and Martinez, 1984; Sanchez & Atkinson, 1983; Bennett and BigFoot-Sipes, 1991; Bichsel and Mallinckrodt, 2001 ); however, the studies regarding level of acculturation and racial identity did not obtain a consistent conclusion. The relationships between the level of clients' acculturation and clients' preferences of counselor ethnicity were examined. Results of studies regarding the level of acculturation did not reveal consistent findings (e.g., Atkinson, Wampold, Lowe, Matthews, and Ahn, 1998; Kim and Atkinson, 2002). Moreover, racial identity also plays an important role in determining the within-group differences. Researchers assumed that participants would show certain preferences regarding similar or different-ethnic counselors along with different degrees or levels of racial identity. However, like research results which only considered racial-ethnic influences on clients' preferences, there was no evidence to support the preceding assumption (e.g., Helms and Carter, 1991; Want, Parham, Baker, and Sherman, 2004 ; Duncan and Johnson, 2007).

From the brief review of studies regarding cultural affiliation, it was clear that it is difficult to tell what kind of correlation exists between these variables (e.g., acculturation, racial identity, and cultural commitment) and clients' preferences of counselors with similar or dissimilar ethnicities (Coleman et al., 1995). However, it was no doubt that variables of cultural affiliation could be viewed as a key element to clients; preferences of counselor ethnicity.

### **Summary.**

In the last several decades, researchers have conducted numerous studies in order to understand clients' counselor preferences. The match of counselor-client ethnicity was the most popularly researched factor, yet there was no easy answer to the question of client preference for counselors' racial background. Researchers also expanded their investigation from focusing on counselor ethnicity to including multiple counselor characteristics in order to deepen their level of

understanding of client preferences.

In the end, what was the answer to the counselor preferences of ethnic minorities? In the meta-analytic reviews by Coleman et al. (1995), they stated that, in general, ethnic minorities were likely to favor ethnic similar counselors and to rate them more positively than Caucasian counselors. Due to inconsistent findings and mixed results, however, the answer to the posed question above remains vague. On a positive note, researchers have identified a number of key counselor characteristics that matter to clients.

Although an extensive review of literature related to counselor preference was conducted, it was difficult to find information regarding White clients' preferences for counselor ethnicity or other characteristics. Studies involving White participants typically included the White participants as control groups; primary research foci were not on White participants. When professionals talk about multi-cultural counseling, they typically focus on the model of White counselors with ethnic minority clients. Thus, the research and professional focus assumes that the needs of White clients are well-known. Are they? It is difficult to answer this question, and due to the lack of studies focused on White clients, research evidence doesn't provide an adequate answer.

This study was needed for several reasons. First, these racial-ethnic preference studies were conducted several decades ago. Over time, people continue to wrestle with and embrace people with different ethnicity; history may have helped to change perspectives. Second, it has been difficult to draw clear conclusions from the various studies conducted. Third, the lack of supportive data for counselor preferences of White clients gives us another reason to examine this topic again.

As Coleman et al. (1995) stated, no matter what kind of methodology used to examine clients'

preferences, the underlying premise of these studies was planted in positive counseling outcomes. In this same spirit, positive counseling outcomes serve as one of the reasons to conduct this study. It is wise to better understand clients, regardless of their race or ethnicity, including those who belong to the ethnic majority. Thus, the current study examined a random sample of White university students from a large university in the southeastern United States to investigate: 1) preferences for and perceptions of counselors as a function of counselor ethnicity, 2) preferred counselor multiple characteristics; and, 3) preferred counseling style according to problem type.

## Chapter 2

### Method

This section provides an overview of the methodology utilized in the study. At first, participants included in this study are described. In successive sections, research design, instruments, procedure, and analysis are discussed in order to provide a foundation for understanding the current study.

#### Participants

Study participants were undergraduate and graduate students at a large university in the southeastern United States. Students were randomly selected by a computer system without consideration of their academic status. Although the interests of this study were White students' counselor preferences, all students, regardless of their race or ethnicity, could have been selected as part of the random sample. Therefore, students who were not White also had the chance to receive the invitation and participate in the survey. Selected students received an email which invited them to participate in the online survey (See Appendix A). A random drawing for a \$50 Visa gift card among those who completed the survey served as incentive to encourage students to participate. Participation was voluntary.

The survey was sent to 1,249 students via the university email system and a total of 236 (19%) participants participated in this survey. Of these, 158 participants completed the survey successfully, including 60 (38%) males and 98 (62%) females. The respondent rate was 12%. The racial/ethnic distribution was composed of 137 (86.7%) White/Caucasians, eight (5.1%) Black/African Americans, two (1.3%) Hispanics, seven (4.4%) Asian/Asian Americans, one Native American (0.6%), one Pacific Islander (0.6%), and two (1.3%) others. With regard to the White participants (Appendix D, Table 1), 40.1% ( $n = 55$ ) were male and 59.9% ( $n = 82$ ) were

female. The participants' ages ranged from 17 to 72 years, but most were between 18 and 23 years (70.8%). The mode was 19 years, and the mean age was 22.9 years. Among the 137 White participants, 21.2% ( $n = 29$ ) participants had previously seen a counselor at the university counseling center at least once and 40.1% ( $n = 55$ ) participants had previously seen a counselor outside the university.

### **Research Design**

In the last several decades, researchers utilized several different methods to conduct studies regarding clients' counseling preferences. These methods included evaluating perceived stimuli, such as a clip of video, pictures of counselors, or audio tapes, and giving counselor ratings (e.g., Atkinson et al. 1984), reading vignettes and rating counselors (e.g., Bichsel & Mallinckrodt, 2001); reading scenarios and rating counselors (e.g., Thompson & Cimboric, 1978); reading descriptions of counselors and rating them (e.g., Want et al. 2004); and experiencing a real counseling session and rating counselors (e.g., Ewing, 1974).

In the current survey, I adopted analogical vignettes to help disguise the independent variable. Three vignettes were developed according to most popular reasons of seeking counseling of university students. Manipulating the ethnicity of the counselor depicted in the vignettes made it possible to compare and examine the effect of counselor ethnicity on clients' perceptions and preferences of counselors across different problem types.

### **Instruments**

The survey packet consisted of a three instruments (Appendix C): a demographic questionnaire, counselor-client vignettes, and the Preferred Counselor Characteristics Inventory (PCCI). The researcher created the demographic questionnaire, designed the counselor-client vignettes, and adapted the PCCI from a previously existing instrument.

### **Demographic questionnaire.**

The first part of this instrument is a demographic questionnaire which asked respondents to give basic information. Participants were also asked if they had any prior experience using counseling services at the university counseling center or outside the university, and the frequency of this usage.

### **Counselor-client vignettes.**

The researcher developed three counselor-client vignettes with follow-up Likert-type scale and open-ended questions to obtain information regarding respondents' counselor preferences and willingness to disclose information. This instrument contained three counselor-client vignettes. These counselor-client vignettes were written by the primary investigator for the purpose of the current study. The three vignettes involve issues regarding depression/general anxiety, academic problems, and relationships, situations which university students often face (Balmert, 2008).

A short description of the counselor appears before the vignettes. Each respondent saw one of two possible counselor descriptions. One described a Caucasian American counselor, the other an Asian American counselor. The two counselor descriptions were identical apart from counselor ethnicity and name, which was chosen to fit the ethnicities depicted.

The subject pool was divided randomly in half. One half received the questionnaire depicting the Caucasian American counselor and the other half the Asian American counselor. Each respondent saw only one counselor description. In these vignettes, questions regarding initial counselor preferences were asked. Initial counselor preference included the following dimensions: client judgment of counselor competence, clients' willingness to disclose information to the counselor, and clients' perception of their comfort level with the counselor. After reading each vignette, the respondent was asked to rate the counselor's competency, his/her level of comfort

with the counselor, and level of willingness to disclose information to this counselor.

The three questions following each vignette were used with different vignettes in a previous study by Bichsel and Mallinckrodt (2001). The questions are the same, however the response scale was changed from a 10-point to a 6-point Likert-type scale so that participants were forced to express their preferences. After reading each vignette and answering the questions, respondents were asked one final question: *from the preceding vignettes, do you feel there are topics you could not discuss with this counselor?*

### **Preferred counselor characteristics inventory.**

The third part of this survey packet was derived from an existing instrument: the Multi-Ethnic Preferred Counselor Characteristics Inventory (MEPCCI). Based on earlier research by Bernstein et al. (1987), the MEPCCI was created by Wetsit (1992) to examine Native American students' preference of counselor characteristics across six different scenarios. These six scenarios include personal, vocational, and academic problems.

The MEPCCI was later revised by Bichsel and Mallinckrodt (2001) to examine client preferences for four counselor characteristics: gender, ethnicity, counseling style, and cultural awareness. In the current study, these scenarios were not included; respondents were simply asked to choose their preferred counselor characteristics. Likert-type scales were used to assess the extent to which participants valued certain counselor characteristics. Five characteristics were rated: age, race/ethnicity, sex/gender, counseling styles, and credibility. With regard to counseling style, examples were given in order to know whether respondents preferred different counseling styles for various types of problems.

In order to test the consistency, logical flow, and reasonableness of this derived instrument, a pilot test was conducted. The survey was completed by three Counselor Education program

faculty members at this same university, three graduates of the Mental Health Counseling program, and two graduate students at other universities. Based on their feedback, three vignettes were selected out from the original six and several minor revisions were made.

## **Procedure**

An email was sent to all students in the email system. The email introducing the study (Appendix A) included an electronic link to the Information Sheet (Appendix B) and research survey packet (Appendix C). Participants were given the opportunity to read the information sheet and to accept or decline to participate in the study.

Once a participant “accepted” to participate, s/he was automatically connected to the research survey packet (see Appendix C). If the participant chose to “decline” participation, s/he was electronically linked to a “thank you” page and the survey process terminated. Participants who completed the entire survey became eligible for a random drawing to win a \$50 visa gift card. Those who entered the random drawing were asked to provide their email address.

Respondent emails were used to contact the winner; emails were not used in conjunction with the data collected. Therefore, survey responses were not connected to email addresses. One winner was randomly chosen and contacted by email, and her/his mailing address requested. The Visa gift card was sent out via surface mail within two weeks after the final survey was completed.

## **Analysis**

The primary techniques used for data analysis in this study were analysis of variance (ANOVA), multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and multi-dimensional chi-square tests. Since General Linear Models (GLM) can be used to perform both ANOVAs and MANOVAs (Brace, Kemp, & Snelgar, 2009), GLMs were used to conduct ANOVAs and MANOVAs. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS software.

ANOVA, the most popular statistic technique in psychological research, deals with differences between or among sample means. It can be used to compare the influences of several independent variables or one specific independent variable (Howell, 2007, p.298). In this study, sample means between different groups (participants assigned to an Asian or a Caucasian counselor) were compared to examine whether counselor ethnicity as an independent variable affect initial counselor preferences. Aside from counselor ethnicity, participant gender, experience of seeking counseling at university counseling center, experience of seeking counseling outside of the university center were also examined as independent variables using separate univariate ANOVAs.

Similar to ANOVA, MANOVA is the other useful statistic technique to compare difference between sample means. However, MANOVA can deal with more than one dependent variable (Howell, 2007, p.480). In the current study, the dependent variables were the means for the questions following each scenario. Therefore, MANOVA was used to examine the effect of the independent variables on the participants' answers to each of the questions.

The chi-square test can deal with associations or differences between two categorical variables which are independent of each other (Brace et al., 2009). In this study, chi-square analyses were conducted to examine whether participants' preferences of various counselor characteristics were related to their demographic background (e.g., gender and experiences of seeing counseling).

In this study, the main focus was on quantitative research. However, in order to better understand how counselor ethnicity impacted White university students' counselor preferences, open-ended questions were also asked to serve as the basis for additional qualitative research. For example, after choices regarding *preferred counseling style for work-related issues*, there was

one item as *other, please explain* that gave participants a chance to express their thoughts and also provide the researchers an opportunity to understand participants' deeper thoughts. As Searle (1999) stated, qualitative research could be used in conjunction with quantitative research to expand and illustrate findings (p.192). In this study, the content of these responses were analyzed and various themes were identified and counted.

As Silverman (2000) stated, when dealing with text, some researchers tried to understand participants' categories and to view how these factors worked in actual activities. During this process, these researchers were more concerned about portraying the "reality" depicted in texts, rather than actual truth or falsehood. The responses to open-ended questions in this survey were analyzed based on this theoretical orientation.

The final question in the vignette section was: *from the preceding vignettes, do you feel there are topics you could not discuss with this counselor?* Participants who did not answer "definitely not" were given a chance to reply the following question: *what are those topics, and why?* There were marked differences between the responses of participants in the two counselor ethnicity conditions. Issues they were not willing to discuss with the counselor were categorized and frequencies were listed. If one individual answered that there were two topics she/he could not discuss with the counselor, those two topics were both counted. Responses that were categorized as "unspecified topics" included: "I don't know" or "I am not sure what topics," with reasons why they could not talk with the counselor.

## Chapter 3

### Results

The results of the current study will be discussed in this section. First, I report results from the counselor-client vignettes focused on White participants' initial counselor preferences. Next, I present the participants' ratings of the importance of various counselor characteristics, followed by the indicated preferences for these counselor characteristics. Lastly, I review White participants' preferred counseling styles by problem type.

#### Initial Counselor Preferences

This section addresses the first research question: *Does counselor ethnicity affect White clients' initial counselor preferences?* Initial counselor preference included the following dimensions: client judgment of counselor competence, clients' willingness to disclose information to the counselor, and clients' perception of their comfort level with the counselor. Including only complete questionnaire responses and White participants in the section of counselor-client vignettes, 48% ( $n = 66$ ) of the valid responses were for the Asian counselor vignette and 52% ( $n = 71$ ) were for the Caucasian counselor vignette. Aside from counselor ethnicity, participants' gender, experiences of seeking counseling at the university counseling center, and experiences of seeking counseling outside of the university center were examined separately in order to investigate the influences of the preceding factors.

Repeated ANOVAs and MANOVAs were conducted in order to examine the interaction of the vignette given counselor ethnicity and participants' initial counselor preferences. There was no statistical significance regarding the questions of counselor-client vignettes (refer to Appendix D, Table 2), except for the first question in the third vignette (relationship problem): *How competent was this counselor?* This specific item,  $F(1, 135) = 5.511, p = 0.020$ , indicated that White

participants deemed that the Asian counselor was more competent than the Caucasian counselor in responding to the presented relationship problem. Statistical significance was only found in the first question of the third vignette; therefore, given the lack of statistical significance, counselor ethnicity did not affect White participants' initial counselor preferences.

The results varied for the fourth question from counselor-client-vignettes section of the survey, *from the preceding vignettes, do you feel there are topics you could not discuss with this counselor*. I discuss more details regarding this question in the Discussion section. In addition, gender, experiences of seeking counseling at the university counseling center, and experiences of seeking counseling outside the university counseling center were also examined as independent variables, and no significant effects were found.

### **Preferred Counselor Characteristics**

This section examines the second research question: *What are White clients' preferred counselor characteristics?* Likert-type scales were used to assess the extent to which participants valued certain counselor characteristics. Five characteristics were rated: age, race/ethnicity, sex/gender, counseling styles, and credibility. Participants were asked to rate the importance of each item from one to six, with one being not important at all, and six being very important. For each characteristic, participants were considered to have valued that characteristic if they gave it a rating greater than four. Therefore, after summing up point four to six in each item, the ranking of importance of characteristics was as follows: credibility (92.7%,  $n = 83$ ), counseling style (86.1%,  $n = 14$ ), age (60.5%,  $n = 57$ ), gender (41.6%,  $n = 118$ ), and race (10.2%,  $n = 129$ ) (Table 3).

General linear models were used to examine whether White participants' gender, experiences of seeking counseling at the university counseling center, and experiences of seeking counseling outside the university counseling center affected participants' valuation of various counselor

characteristics. A statistically significant interaction was found between previous experience with counseling at the university counseling center and the importance of counseling styles to the participants. Participants who did not have any experience with counseling at the university counseling center considered counseling style an important characteristic ( $F[1, 129] = 5.074, p = 0.026$ ). In addition, the effects of participants' gender as well as experiences of seeking counseling outside the university counseling center were explored with importance of counseling style, the result ( $F[1, 129] = 5.225, p = 0.024$ ) showed that males who did not have any experience seeking counseling outside the university counseling center were more likely to consider counseling style as a critical counselor characteristic than males who had experience with counseling outside the university.

With regard to actual preferences, White participants generally preferred counselors who were older (Table 4). As for counselor's gender/sex, around 40% ( $n = 55$ ) of participants preferred a same-sex counselor and over 50% of participants responded that it did not matter. For counselor race/ethnicity, 16.1% ( $n = 22$ ) participants preferred a counselor with the same race/ethnicity, 83.9% ( $n = 115$ ) did not think it mattered, and no one expressed a preference for counselors of a different race/ethnicity. Moreover, White participants appeared to rely on their own feelings (56.9%,  $n = 78$ ), rather than just trust a counselor's professional credential (13.1%,  $n = 18$ ) or others' recommendations (23.4%,  $n = 32$ ), to judge a counselor's credibility.

Chi-square tests were also conducted in order to distinguish the effects of gender, experiences of seeking counseling at the university counseling center and experiences of seeking counseling outside the university on client preferences. White participants' preferences of counselor ethnicity differed according to their experiences of seeking counseling at the university counseling center. Participants who had previously seen a counselor at the university counseling center tended to feel

that counselor ethnicity was not important,  $\chi^2(1, 137) = 4.34, p = 0.037$ (Table 5). Participants who had not had counseling experience at the university counseling center, however, preferred counselors of the same ethnicity. With regard to counselor gender/sex, both males and females said that they preferred female counselors ( $\chi^2[2, 137] = 18.752, p = 0.000$ ; Table 6). Lastly, male and female participants' manner of judging a counselor's credibility were significantly different; female participants tended to trust a counselor's professional credentials and males tended to rely more on word of mouth ( $\chi^2[4, N=137] = 9.843, p=0.043$ ; Table 7).

### **Preferred Counseling Styles Based on Problem Type**

The third research question was: *Do White clients' preferences for counseling style vary based on problem type?* Regardless problem types, *work with me to help me explore my options*, was the most popular choice among the six different types of client problems offered in the vignettes. These included academic, work-related, family, emotional, relationship and financial issues. For work-related and financial client problem issues, around 25% participants chose, *lists options and lets me decide*, as their preferred counseling style. Moreover, on emotional issues and financial issues, around 10% of participants preferred *tells me what to do* (Table 8).

Chi-square tests were conducted to determine the effects of participants' gender, experiences of seeking counseling at university counseling center, and experiences of seeking counseling outside university on preferred counseling styles. No significance was found with regard to academic, work-related, family and financial issues. However, statistical significances were found on emotional and relationship client issues relating to participants' gender. On emotional problems, participants' gender was significant to the counseling styles,  $\chi^2(4, 137) = 12.827, p = 0.012$  (Table 9). Results suggest that female participants tended to like counselors who *work with me to help me explore my options*; however, male participants preferred counselors who *list options and lets me*

*decide* or think *it doesn't matter*. On relationship issues,  $\chi^2(4,137) = 13.767, p = 0.008$ , female participants tended to favor *tells me what to do*. Male participants thought counseling style did not matter (Table 10).

Do White clients favor certain counseling styles according to their problem types? The results indicated that this was the case, and that differences also existed across gender. In addition, even though the difference was not significant, according to the frequency of responses, it is possible that on work-related and financial issues, White participants seemed to prefer more direct counseling styles.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Discussion**

The results of this survey indicated that counselor ethnicity generally did not influence White university students' initial counselor preferences. When White participants were asked to indicate the importance of race as a counselor characteristic, they did not rate it very highly. Rather, counselor age, gender, counseling style, and credibility were valued by White university students. Moreover, the results suggest that White university students preferred different counseling styles depending on problem type. This preference was especially clear in terms of relationship and emotional problems. In the following section, I review possible explanations for these findings, relevant issues, and implications for the future of counseling and counselor education. Specifically, results are discussed in the following order: counselor ethnicity, other important counselor characteristics, implications of counseling and counselor education, and limitations and recommendation for future research.

#### **Does Counselor Ethnicity Matter?**

In the current survey, three counselor-client vignettes regarding emotional, academic, and relationship scenarios were utilized. I only found one significant difference among the three scenarios. If we only consider the statistical results of the PCCI and counselor-client vignettes, the findings suggest that counselor ethnicity did not affect White participants' initial counselor preferences. However, if we consider the qualitative data, we may consider a different conclusion.

With regard to the relationship scenario, the Asian counselor was rated more competent than the White counselor. The reasons for this result were not clear. Here I offer one possible explanation. In the relationship scenario, the participant reported that arguments between the client and his or her significant other bothered him or her. In this scenario, the client's emotions were

anger, frustration, and disturbance; all these feelings related to agitation. However, when participants imagined that the counselor was an Asian, it is possible that they projected their thoughts regarding stereotypes of Asians, such as passivity and calmness, on the counselor. Then, they might feel calm, consoled, and peaceful. In addition, the indirect counseling style the counselor used also matched this image. Therefore, in this specific scenario, the White participants rated the Asian counselor higher.

The final question in the vignette section was: “*From the preceding vignettes, do you feel there are topics you could not discuss with this counselor?*” Participants who did not answer “definitely not” were given a chance to reply the following question: *What are those topics, and why?* There were marked differences between the responses of participants in the two counselor ethnicity conditions.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, participants who answered “definitely not” did not need to answer the final question of vignette section. Therefore, for the Caucasian counselor condition, there were 26 participants who did not need to answer this question. Of those who were asked this question, there were 13 did not answer, and 32 participants who did answer this question. Participants who were given the Caucasian counselor vignettes responded that the topics that they could not discuss were sex ( $n = 4$ ), drugs ( $n = 1$ ), serious personal and life issues ( $n = 15$ ), relationships ( $n = 10$ ), religion ( $n = 2$ ), and male related issues ( $n=1$ ). As for reasons why they could not share these topics with the counselor, only 15 participants replied. Reasons why they were not willing to discuss these issues were as follows: participants felt that they did not need counseling ( $n = 3$ ); participants did not want to share things with someone they did not know ( $n = 3$ ); counselor was not helpful ( $n = 3$ ); participants simply did not want to share ( $n = 2$ ); participant was afraid of being judged ( $n = 1$ ); counselor was not competent ( $n = 1$ ); counselor

did not have enough empathy ( $n = 1$ ); and counselor seemed to assume things with other meanings ( $n = 1$ ). Although the preceding sample was too small to make any definite conclusions, it might not be wrong to state that while facing a counselor with the same ethnicity, White participants might be concerned with sharing personal, life, and relationship issues with a counselor. These reasons for not sharing information with the counselor did not surprise me; it was understandable that some participants did not think counseling was helpful. As for respondents who were not satisfied with the counselor's performances in the vignettes, it might be due to weaknesses in the design of the vignettes.

As for the Asian counselor condition, there were 21 participants who did not need to answer this question 14 who did not answer this question, and 31 participants who did. The topics that participants could not discuss with the Asian counselor were issues regarding personal life ( $n = 2$ ), depression ( $n = 4$ ), death and grief ( $n = 4$ ), relationships ( $n = 7$ ), family ( $n = 2$ ), school stress ( $n = 3$ ), inner thoughts ( $n = 2$ ), religion ( $n = 1$ ), and unspecified topics (e.g., "not sure") ( $n = 7$ ). It should be noted that, although depression as well as death and grief were counted as separate items, both scenarios appeared in the first vignette. Moreover, the appearances of these two items were unexpected, since they did not be mentioned in responses of Caucasian counselor vignettes. Responses that were categorized as "unspecified topics" were statements like "I don't know" or "I am not sure what topics" and then respondents gave reasons why they could not talk with the counselor. It is noteworthy that unspecified topics did not appear in the free-text responses of vignettes for the Caucasian counselor condition.

Reasons why participants could not discuss these topics with the counselor were as follows: participants did not like to share personal issues ( $n = 5$ ); the counselor did not have enough empathy ( $n = 3$ ); participants felt that they did not know the counselor ( $n = 6$ ); participants felt

that they did not need to use counseling ( $n = 4$ ); participants felt that there was something they cannot share with the counselor ( $n = 2$ ); participant had difficulties sharing feelings ( $n = 1$ ); the counselor did not share the same religion background ( $n = 1$ ); the counselor was coercive ( $n = 2$ ); participants felt embarrassed to share feelings ( $n = 1$ ); the counselor was not competitive ( $n = 2$ ); and participants did not like the counselor's counseling style ( $n = 2$ ). As can be seen, the reasons for not sharing information in the responses to the Asian counselor vignettes were more diverse than for the Caucasian counselor. It was unexpected that participants would like to have more information in order to decide whether they could trust this counselor. Furthermore, it seemed that more participants were not satisfied with counselor's performance as depicted in the vignettes.

Due to limitations in the design of these vignettes, the role of counselor in these vignettes perhaps did not show enough empathy. Nevertheless, the responses toward these two counselors with different ethnicities were varied. The responses of participants given the Caucasian counselor vignettes reflected the considerations of private life, illegal issues, and especially relationship problems. In contrast, many of the responses toward the Asian counselor were with regard to discussing depression and death. The reason for this tendency was not clear. Although in the scenario depicting an emotional problem, the setting was about the client's depression and the death of the client's grandmother. None of the participants who saw the Caucasian counselor vignette identified death or depression as an issue they could not discuss the issue with that counselor. Moreover, in the Caucasian counselor condition, no participant stated that the counselor was dominating or that there was not enough information to judge whether they could share everything with this counselor. In response to the Asian counselor vignette, however, a number of individuals responded in this manner.

One possible explanation for these results is that due to lack of understanding of Asians, White university students were not sure whether they could trust the Asian counselor and wanted to have more information to judge the situation. Moreover, due to the influence of stereotypes, they might assume that the Asian counselor should be more indirect. In addition, lack of understanding and perhaps then, lack of trust, may also explain why White participants would not choose to reveal their deepest feelings and show their weakness to an Asian counselor when dealing with depression or the passing of someone important.

As the results of Preferred Counselor Characteristics Inventory (PCCI) show, counselor race/ethnicity was not rated as important as other counselor characteristics. In addition, over 80% White participants stated that counselor race/ethnicity *did not matter* to them. Furthermore, when participants' counseling experiences were examined together with preferences for counselor ethnicity, the results showed that White participants with no counseling experience at the university counseling center preferred a counselor of the same ethnicity.

If it was not true that counselor ethnicity did not affect White university students' initial preferences, what caused them act in this way? According to Helms (1984), since it was rare for White potential clients to meet Black (minority) counselors, it was not an issue for Whites to actually consider their preferences of counselor ethnicity. Moreover, social desirability might also play an important role. Abreu and Gabaraib (2000) examined the influence of social desirability on the counselor preferences of Mexican Americans and found that Mexican American participants revealed much stronger preferences for Mexican American counselors than Caucasian American counselors when social desirability was not a consideration. However, when social desirability was a factor, preference for counselor ethnicity was no longer significant. Although the population of previous study was not Whites, it was conceivable that similar results might happen with any

other ethnic group. Lastly, due to the rise of racial awareness and social justice of minorities, White participants may not feel that it is politically correct to state that they favor counselors of the same ethnicity.

### **Preferences for Other Counselor Characteristics**

The participants' responses to PCCI suggest that individuals place different value on various counselor characteristics. Counseling style and counselor credibility were rated more important than the other characteristics. Counselor age and gender was important to a certain extent. Race was not important at all. When participants' gender, experiences of seeking counseling at the university counseling center, and experiences of seeking counseling at the university were considered together, some significant differences were found.

First, the results indicated that White university students who did not have any experience using counseling services at the university counseling center viewed counseling style as more important than those who did. Similarly, White male participants who did not have any experience of seeking counseling outside the university valued counseling style. These results suggested that White participants without counseling experience thought that different counseling styles would influence therapy outcome. However, people who had had counseling experiences realized that other factors, such as counselor personality or harmony between client and counselor, were more important than counseling styles.

As for the results of the paired-comparison items, most participants preferred a counselor who was older. Since the ages of White participants in this survey ranged from 18 to 23 years, it was reasonable that they preferred an older counselor who seemed more accountable and had more life experiences. In addition, even though half of White participants thought counselor gender did not matter, 40% participants preferred counselors of the same gender. In addition, the results also

indicated that regardless of participants' gender, White participants preferred female counselors. It might be due to the stereotype of females as being nurturing and supportive.

### **Preferred Counseling Styles Based on Problem Type**

White university students were asked about their preference for counseling styles with regard to different problem types. The results showed that for most questions, White university participants preferred an indirect approach in which counselors worked with them to explore possible options. For some specific problem types, such as work-related and financial issues, they preferred counselors to use more solution-focused approaches. Moreover, while facing emotional and relationship problems there were gender differences between participants' preferences of counseling style. For White males, when facing emotional and relationship problems, they preferred solution-focused approaches, and some did not care what kind of counseling approach counselors used. As for White females, while facing emotional and relationship problems, they seemed to seek advice and solutions from counselors. These differences between males and females seemed to be consistent with the general conception of dealing with feelings for different genders. For example, Belle (1991) stated that females tended to value emotional intimacy and also spent more energy on maintaining social relationships more than males. Therefore, the results of this study suggest that it might be beneficial for counselors to adopt different counseling approaches based on problem types and gender.

### **Implications for Counseling and Counselor Education**

There are numerous ways to integrate the results of this current study into counseling and counselor education. First, although the primary results of this study indicated that counselor ethnicity did not influence White university students' initial counselor preferences, free text responses suggest that counselor ethnicity did influence participants. Considering that one of the

possible reasons that White participants might not trust minority counselors is a lack of understanding, it is reasonable for minority counselors to properly utilize self-disclosure. It might be better for minority counselors to practice disclosure at an earlier stage of counseling therapeutic relationship. Disclosed information might include personal experiences which relate to clients' present experiences or problems and discussions of culturally-related experiences in order to help White clients understand minority counselors and related to the minority counselors well.

As for counselor education, it is better to inform minority counselors-in-training of possible barriers between minority counselors and White clients early so that they can prepare themselves for potential difficulties. Minority counselors-in-training should also be aware the differences between their own cultural background and their clients' backgrounds. Lastly, they should also be taught proper ways to disclose information.

In addition, the results suggest that previous experience with counseling would also reduce the effects of counselor ethnicity on initial counseling experiences. Although it was not clear whether this decrease was due to contact with minority counselors or simply the experience of receiving counseling, it might be useful to popularize counseling and to encourage White university students to use counseling services so that they could gradually accept minority counselors.

In the study, most White university students preferred indirect counseling styles for most problem types. This result fits with the present understanding of White clients and there is no need to change the core counselor training curriculum or the utilization of therapy in practice. However, it would be beneficial to address subtle differences in preferred counseling style based on gender and problem type. For example, it might be useful for counselor to adopt a more direct approach to help White male clients to deal with emotional problems.

## **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

Because the current study received a low response rate (19%) and was conducted in the southeastern United States with a predominantly White student body, the results might not be representative of White university students in this or other areas. In addition, the reliability and validity of the instruments used in this study have not been demonstrated. Therefore, additional research is needed in order to confirm the results of the current study. Moreover, although three vignettes were designed to depict three of the most common reasons for university students to seek counseling and pilot-tested with a number of individuals, there is always the possibility that participants may not feel that the scenarios are reflective of everyday life. In addition, these vignettes only provide one scenario for each question type and the scenario might not be representative of specific problem types. Therefore, it might also be necessary to conduct a study on a larger sample in order ensure that these vignettes properly represent White university students' situations and also resemble a normal counseling session. In addition, although this study examined White university students' preferred counseling styles based on problem type, these differences might be investigated at a more granular level with more detailed scenarios and more specific questions regarding counseling style.

In order to better understand the effects of counselor ethnicity on White university students' initial counselor preferences, it would be beneficial to conduct studies concerning the effects of White racial consciousness or identity as well as social desirability. Although some researchers had already looked at these factors (e.g. Helms & Carter, 1991), there are still relatively few studies on these topics, and in the future it may be worthwhile to conduct studies in this area.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

### Email to the Students at the University

*Dear Student,*

*We are requesting your assistance in conducting a research study focused on university students' counselor preferences and attitudes. Below is a link to an online survey. We have received IRB approval for this research project from the UTK Office on Research.*

*It should take about 10 minutes to complete this survey. Responses will be anonymous and all information gathered will remain confidential. All participants who complete the survey will have an opportunity to earn a \$50 Visa gift card. More information regarding this study will be provided when you access the link provided.*

*If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me via email at [ylin14@utk.edu](mailto:ylin14@utk.edu) or at [jdiambra@utk.edu](mailto:jdiambra@utk.edu).*

*Thank you for considering our request.*

*Sincerely,*

*Yi-Ying Lin, Master's Student*

*Dr. Joel F. Diambra, Associate Professor*

*University of Tennessee – Knoxville*

## **Appendix B**

### **Information Sheet**

#### *“University Students’ Counselor Preference”*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study is to investigate university students’ preferred counselor characteristics.

#### **INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY**

Students who voluntarily give their consent to participate in this study will be given a three-part survey to complete:

- (1) A demographic questionnaire to collect data, including age, race, years in school, etc.
- (2) Three written counselor-client vignettes, followed by open-ended and Likert-type scale response questions.
- (3) A Likert-type scale questionnaire asking respondents to indicate their preference of counselors’ characteristics.

#### **RISKS**

There are no anticipated risks associated with this study since the questions are self-report surveys. In addition, the researchers will not utilize risky experimental methods in conducting this research. If you desire counseling for any reason following your involvement in this study, you may identify a licensed professional counselor (LPC) in your area by connecting to the following website: <http://health.state.tn.us/licensure/index.htm>

#### **BENEFITS**

Results will make counselors better aware of the need and welfare of university students. This information will also help counselor educators better prepare counselors-in-training to effectively counsel university students as clients.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information in the study records will be collected anonymously and kept confidential. After participants have completed the survey, we will store the results onto a password secured PC in Dr. Joel Diambra’s locked UTK office, CC449. Data on hard copy will be stored in the same locked filing cabinet in the same UTK office. Data will be stored for a minimum of three years and then destroyed. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study by name. Three years after completion of the research project, the data will be

destroyed.

This study, when completed, will be published and/or presented in a public forum (e.g., a professional refereed journal and/or professional conference). By clicking “accept” and completing the survey, you are consenting to participate in the study and agree that the aggregate data can be used in professional publications and/or presentations.

## **PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will not be used and will be destroyed. Clicking “accept” and completing the survey constitutes your consent to participate.

Should you elect to participate and complete the entire survey, you will be given the opportunity to enter a computer generated random drawing where one winner will receive a **\$50 Visa gift card**. If you desire to enter the drawing, you will be asked for your email upon completion of the survey packet. Your email will NOT be connected to or used in conjunction with your survey responses. All survey responses will remain anonymous and confidential. The winners will be contacted by email and then asked to provide a surface mailing address to which the gift certificate will be mailed. Your email will not be used for any other purpose.

If you have questions please ask. You may contact Yi-Ying Lin at [ylin14@utk.edu](mailto:ylin14@utk.edu) or Dr. Joel Diambra at [jdiambra@utk.edu](mailto:jdiambra@utk.edu) or 865 974-8774. If you call and do not reach either of us, please leave a message and one of us will respond to you as soon as possible.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance at 865-974-3466.

We have received IRB approval for this survey from the University of Tennessee – Knoxville, Office on Research. If you elect to participate, please indicate by clicking “**accept**”. If you prefer to decline participation, please indicate by clicking “**decline**”.

Thank you for considering our request to participate.

## Appendix C

### Survey Packet

#### § Personal Information §

##### 1. Gender

- Male
- Female

##### 2. Age

Years \_\_\_\_\_

##### 3. Status

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Master's
- Doctoral
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

##### 4. Race/Ethnicity

- White/Caucasian
- Black/African American
- Hispanic
- Asian/Asian American
- Native American
- Pacific Islander
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Have you ever seen a counselor at the Counseling Services Center at the University of Tennessee?**

- Yes
- No

**5-1. If yes, how often do you use counseling services?**

- Less than once a year
- Once a year
- Once every six months
- Once every three months
- Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Have you ever seen a counselor outside of the University of Tennessee?**

- Yes
- No

**6-1. If yes, how often do you use counseling services?**

- Less than once a year
- Once a year
- Once every six months
- Once every three months
- Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

### **§ Vignettes §**

**The following section consists of three counseling vignettes. Please read each vignette and then select the statements that best fit each situation. A description of the counselor follows below:**

**The counselor's name is Mary Russell. She is a 35 year-old licensed Caucasian counselor who holds a master's degree. She has worked at a university counseling center for seven years. She is of average height and weight and always has a warm smile. As usual, she politely greets the client at the door and invites the client to sit down. Then, she asks the client, "What brings you in today?"**

**The counselor's name is Yi-Chun Chen. She is a 35 year-old licensed Asian counselor who holds a master's degree. She has worked at a university counseling center for seven years. She is of average height and weight and always has a warm smile. As usual, she politely greets the client at the door and invites the client to sit down. Then, she asks the client, "What brings you in today?"**

**--Vignette I--**

**Client: I have been feeling sad recently and I do not know why.**

**Counselor: Can you tell me more about your situation? When do you notice that you were feeling sad?**

**Client: Well, I think I started to notice that I was sad a couple weeks ago. In the mornings, I don't want to wake up and sometimes I hope morning never comes. In the afternoon, I feel so sad that I want to cry, and I cannot help it. And at night, I can't sleep. I think about my life and feel like my life has no meaning. I don't know....I just...I don't know why... (The client begins to cry.)**

**Counselor: You seem very sad and frustrated.**

**Client: I don't like myself like this...**

**Counselor: Um, it sounds like you are worried, and you really don't like it. Did something important happen to you in these past few months?**

**Client: No, I don't think anything important happened to me. (The client falls into deep thought). You know, now that I think about it, my grandmother died two months ago.**

**Counselor: Tell me more about her.**

**Client: She was 90 years old. We were very close, but I didn't cry at the funeral. Before she died, she was very sick and I thought it was a good thing for her. You know, death was not a totally bad thing for her. I think I was a little happy for her and I thought I could handle it because I didn't think dying was a bad thing for her.**

**Counselor: You are strong and you feel like you can handle it.**

**Client: Yes, but I miss her a lot.**

**Rate this counselor in the following areas:**

**I-1. How competent was this counselor?**

**Not at all Competent 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Competent**

**Level of Competency**

**I-2. How willing would you be to see this counselor?**

**Not at all willing 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very willing**

**Level of Willingness**

**I-3. How comfortable would you be with this counselor?**

**Not at all comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very comfortable**

**Level of Comfort**

**--Vignette II--**

**Client: I cannot decide what I want to do in the future.**

**Counselor: I think you decided your major last semester; if I remember correctly, it's accounting, right?**

**Client: Yes, but I don't want to be in the business field anymore. I don't like numbers or the intense competition...I don't like this stuff.**

**Counselor: Well, it seems that you are pretty sure this field is not for you.**

**Client: Yeah, I know it. I always knew it.**

**Counselor: Umm, okay... tell me what caused you to choose accounting as your major before.**

**Client: Well, it is a long story.**

**Counselor: That's okay. That's why I am here.**

**Client: Okay. You know, my father is an executive manager in a food company. He likes his job, has good pay, and enjoys the prestige which he earns from his job. Not only am I the oldest in our family, but I'm also his favorite. I've always performed well academically, so, he really wants me to enter this field. He knows he can help me find a great job. He wants me to choose accounting and then get an MBA. That's it.**

**Counselor: So you chose accounting because your father wanted you to, and not because you wanted to. It sounds like that you really care about your father's opinion.**

**Client: Yeah...I really want to make him happy, but I don't want to do something I really don't like.**

**Counselor: It seems that you have something in mind that you want to do. Could you tell me what is it?**

**Client: I like art.**

**Rate this counselor in the following areas:**

**II-1. How competent was this counselor?**

**Not at all Competent 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Competent**

**Level of Competence**

**II-2. How willing would you be to see this counselor?**

**Not at all willing 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very willing**

**Level of Willingness**

**II-3. How comfortable would you be with this counselor?**

**Not at all comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very comfortable**

**Level of Comfort**

**--Vignette III--**

**Client: We argued again. It's just so hard for us to discuss our problems peacefully. I don't like to argue with my mate, but I just can't stand it.**

**Counselor: It seems that you are upset and feel a bit regretful.**

**Client: Um, we have been together since high school. In the past, we understood and cared about each other. I even thought that we would get married after graduation. But, right now, it's impossible. We argue all the time.**

**Counselor: I'm sorry to hear this. I think you said that you can't stand it. Tell me more.**

**Client:** Sure. When we argue, my mate will say something very mean to me. At first, I wouldn't say anything back, but after awhile I got angrier and angrier and started saying something very awful to my mate.

**Counselor:** It sounds like you two hurt each other by your words and it is getting worse and worse.

**Client:** Yeah...it is.

**Counselor:** If it is possible, could you tell me what caused your mate or you to first say something very mean?

**Rate this counselor in the following areas:**

**III-1. How competent was this counselor?**

Not at all Competent 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Competent

Level of Competence

**III-2. How willing would you be to see this counselor?**

Not at all willing 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very willing

Level of Willingness

**III-3. How comfortable would you be with this counselor?**

Not at all comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very comfortable

Level of Comfort

**4. From the preceding vignettes, do you feel there are topics you could not discuss with this counselor?**

- Definitely not
- Somewhat not

- Somewhat yes
- Definitely yes

**4-1. What are those topics, and why?**

---

**§ Preferred Counselor Characteristic Inventory §**

**1.If you were to decide to seek help from university counseling center, please rank the importance of these counselor traits to you:**

Not Important 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Important

Age

Race/Ethnicity

Sex/Gender

Counseling Style

Credibility

**For each of the following, please select the type of counselor you would prefer.**

**2.Age**

- Older than me
- Younger than me
- Same age as me
- Doesn't matter

**3.Race/Ethnicity**

- Same race/ethnicity as me
- Different race/ethnicity as me
- Doesn't matter

#### **4. Sex/Gender**

- Same sex as me
- Different sex as me
- Doesn't matter

#### **5-1. Preferred Counseling Style for academic issues**

- Tells me what to do
- Works with me to help me explore my options
- Lists options and lets me decide
- Doesn't matter
- Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

#### **5-2. Preferred counseling style for work-related issues**

- Tells me what to do
- Works with me to help me explore my options
- Lists options and lets me decide
- Doesn't matter
- Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

#### **5-3. Preferred counseling style for family issues**

- Tells me what to do
- Works with me to help me explore my options
- Lists options and lets me decide
- Doesn't matter
- Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

#### **5-4. Preferred counseling style for emotional issues**

- Tells me what to do
- Works with me to help me explore my options

- Lists options and lets me decide
- Doesn't matter
- Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

**5-5.Preferred counseling style for relationship issues**

- Tells me what to do
- Works with me to help me explore my options
- Lists options and lets me decide
- Doesn't matter
- Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

**5-6.Preferred counseling style for financial issues**

- Tells me what to do
- Works with me to help me explore my options
- Lists options and lets me decide
- Doesn't matter
- Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Credibility**

- I would trust the counselor's professional credentials
- I would trust the counselor if someone I trusted said she/he was a good counselor
- I would rely on my own feelings to decide if I trusted the counselor
- Doesn't matter
- Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

Thanks very much for your help.

## Appendix D

### Tables

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

| Demographic Item    | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------|-----------|---------|
| <u>Gender</u>       |           |         |
| Male                | 55        | 40.1    |
| Female              | 82        | 59.9    |
| Total               | 137       | 100.0   |
| <u>Age in years</u> |           |         |
| 17                  | 1         | .7      |
| 18                  | 10        | 7.3     |
| 19                  | 27        | 19.7    |
| 20                  | 21        | 15.3    |
| 21                  | 18        | 13.1    |
| 22                  | 12        | 8.8     |
| 23                  | 9         | 6.6     |
| 24                  | 4         | 2.9     |
| 25                  | 5         | 3.6     |
| 26                  | 7         | 5.1     |
| 27                  | 3         | 2.2     |
| 28                  | 5         | 3.6     |
| 29                  | 2         | 1.5     |
| 30                  | 5         | 3.6     |
| 31                  | 2         | 1.5     |
| 32                  | 1         | .7      |
| 35                  | 1         | .7      |

|       |     |       |
|-------|-----|-------|
| 39    | 2   | 1.5   |
| 45    | 1   | .7    |
| 72    | 1   | .7    |
| Total | 137 | 100.0 |

Year in School

|           |     |       |
|-----------|-----|-------|
| Freshman  | 34  | 24.8  |
| Sophomore | 28  | 20.4  |
| Junior    | 20  | 14.6  |
| Senior    | 18  | 13.1  |
| Masters   | 26  | 19.0  |
| Doctoral  | 9   | 6.6   |
| Other     | 2   | 1.5   |
| Total     | 137 | 100.0 |

Ever seen a counselor at the Counseling Services

Center at the University

|       |     |      |
|-------|-----|------|
| Yes   | 29  | 21.2 |
| No    | 108 | 78.8 |
| Total | 137 | 100  |

Frequency of counseling service usage at the University

|                         |    |      |
|-------------------------|----|------|
| Less than once a year   | 10 | 7.3  |
| Once a year             | 3  | 2.2  |
| Once every six months   | 3  | 2.2  |
| Once every three months | 3  | 2.2  |
| Other, please explain   | 10 | 7.3  |
| Total                   | 29 | 21.2 |

|   |     |       |
|---|-----|-------|
| Missing   | 108 | 78.8  |
| Total   | 137 | 100.0 |
| <u>Ever seen a counselor outside the University</u>                 |     |       |
| Yes   | 55  | 40.1  |
| No  | 82  | 59.9  |
| Total   | 137 | 100.0 |
| <u>Frequency of counseling service usage outside the University</u> |     |       |
| Less than once a year   | 28  | 20.4  |
| Once a year   | 2   | 1.5   |
| Once every six months   | 2   | 1.5   |
| Once every three months   | 10  | 7.3   |
| Other, please explain   | 13  | 9.5   |
| Total   | 55  | 40.1  |
| Missing   | 82  | 59.9  |
| Total   | 137 | 100.0 |

Table 2. One-way MANOVA of Counselor Ethnicity

| Dependent Variable  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F     | Sig.  |
|---|----------------|----|-------------|-------|-------|
| Level of Competency : I-1. How competent was this counselor?                  | .009           | 1  | .009        | .006  | .936  |
| Level of Willingness : I-2. How willing would you be to see this counselor?   | 1.339          | 1  | 1.339       | .562  | .455  |
| Level of Comfort : I-3. How comfortable would you be with this counselor?     | .400           | 1  | .400        | .239  | .625  |
| Level of Competence : II-1. How competent was this counselor?                 | .056           | 1  | .056        | .034  | .854  |
| Level of Willingness : II-2. How willing would you be to see this counselor?  | .531           | 1  | .531        | .279  | .598  |
| Level of Comfort : II-3. How comfortable would you be with this counselor?    | 1.558          | 1  | 1.558       | .897  | .345  |
| Level of Competence : III-1. How competent was this counselor?                | 10.312         | 1  | 10.312      | 5.511 | .020* |
| Level of Willingness : III-2. How willing would you be to see this counselor? | 4.088          | 1  | 4.088       | 1.937 | .166  |
| Level of Comfort : III-3. How comfortable would you be with this counselor?   | 1.773          | 1  | 1.773       | .950  | .332  |

\*p<.05

Table 3. Importance of various counselor characteristics

|                     | 1<br>Not<br>Important | 2         | 3         | 4         | 5         | 6<br>Very<br>Important | Total<br>Participants | Mean |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|-----------------------|------|
| Age                 | 22(16.1%)             | 14(10.2%) | 18(13.1%) | 45(32.8%) | 25(18.2%) | 13(9.5%)               | 137(100%)             | 3.55 |
| Race/<br>Ethnicity  | 77(56.2%)             | 28(20.4%) | 18(13.1%) | 8(5.8%)   | 2(1.5%)   | 4(2.9%)                | 137(100%)             | 1.85 |
| Gender/Sex          | 40(29.2%)             | 18(13.1%) | 22(16.1%) | 19(13.9%) | 28(20.4%) | 10(7.3%)               | 137(100%)             | 3.05 |
| Counseling<br>Style | 5(3.6%)               | 1(.7%)    | 13(9.5%)  | 17(12.4%) | 35(25.5%) | 66(48.2%)              | 137(100%)             | 5.00 |
| Credibility         | 2(1.5%)               | 0(0.0%)   | 8(5.8%)   | 20(14.6%) | 34(24.8)  | 73(53.3%)              | 137(100%)             | 5.21 |

Table 4. Client preferences for counselor characteristics

Age

|                | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|
| Older than me  | 110       | 80.3    |
| Same age as me | 9         | 6.6     |
| Doesn't matter | 18        | 13.1    |
| Total          | 137       | 100.0   |

Race/Ethnicity

|                                | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Same race/ethnicity as me      | 22        | 16.1    |
| Different race/ethnicity as me | 0         | 0       |
| Doesn't matter                 | 115       | 83.9    |
| Total                          | 137       | 100.0   |

Sex/Gender

|                     | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------|-----------|---------|
| Same sex as me      | 55        | 40.1    |
| Different sex as me | 11        | 8.0     |
| Doesn't matter      | 71        | 51.8    |
| Total               | 137       | 100.0   |

Credibility

|   | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| I would trust the counselor's professional credentials                            | 18        | 13.1    |
| I would trust the counselor if someone I trusted said she/he was a good counselor | 32        | 23.4    |
| I would rely on my own feelings to decide if I trusted the counselor              | 78        | 56.9    |
| Doesn't matter  | 1         | .7      |
| Other, please explain   | 8         | 5.8     |
| Total   | 137       | 100.0   |

Table 5. Preference for counselor race/ethnicity and previous experience seeking counseling at the university

|                   |                           | 5. Have you ever seen a counselor at the<br>Counseling Services Center at the University? |    | Total |
|-------------------|---------------------------|---|----|-------|
|                   |                           | Yes   | No |       |
| 3. Race/Ethnicity | Same race/ethnicity as me | 1   | 21 | 22    |
|                   | Doesn't matter            | 28  | 87 | 115   |

$\chi^2=4.340$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.037$

Table 6. Preference for counselor sex/gender and participants' gender

|               |                     | 1. Gender |        | Total |
|---------------|---------------------|-----------|--------|-------|
|               |                     | Male      | Female |       |
| 4. Sex/Gender | Same sex as me      | 13        | 42     | 55    |
|               | Different sex as me | 10        | 1      | 11    |
|               | Doesn't matter      | 32        | 39     | 71    |
| Total         |                     | 55        | 82     | 137   |

$\chi^2=18.752$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.000$

Table 7. Judgment of counselor credibility and participants' gender

|                |   | 1. Gender |        | Total |
|----------------|---|-----------|--------|-------|
|                |   | Male      | Female |       |
| 6. Credibility | I would trust the counselor's professional credentials                            | 3         | 15     | 18    |
|                | I would trust the counselor if someone I trusted said she/he was a good counselor | 18        | 14     | 32    |
|                | I would rely on my own feelings to decide if I trusted the counselor              | 31        | 47     | 78    |
|                | Doesn't matter  | 1         | 0      | 1     |
|                | Other, please explain   | 2         | 6      | 8     |
| Total          |   | 55        | 82     | 137   |

$\chi^2=9.843$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.043$

Table 8. Preferred counseling styles based on problem type

Academic issues

|   | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Tells me what to do                         | 8         | 5.8     |
| Works with me to help me explore my options | 103       | 75.2    |
| Lists options and lets me decide            | 19        | 13.9    |
| Doesn't matter                              | 5         | 3.6     |
| Other, please explain                       | 2         | 1.5     |
| Total                                       | 137       | 100.0   |

Work-related issues

|   | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Tells me what to do                         | 5         | 3.6     |
| Works with me to help me explore my options | 89        | 65.0    |
| Lists options and lets me decide            | 33        | 24.1    |
| Doesn't matter                              | 8         | 5.8     |
| Other, please explain                       | 2         | 1.5     |
| Total                                       | 137       | 100.0   |

Family issues

|   | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Tells me what to do                         | 7         | 5.1     |
| Works with me to help me explore my options | 89        | 65.0    |
| Lists options and lets me decide            | 23        | 16.8    |
| Doesn't matter                              | 13        | 9.5     |
| Other, please explain                       | 5         | 3.6     |
| Total                                       | 137       | 100.0   |

### Emotional issues

|   | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Tells me what to do                         | 15        | 10.9    |
| Works with me to help me explore my options | 81        | 59.1    |
| Lists options and lets me decide            | 20        | 14.6    |
| Doesn't matter                              | 16        | 11.7    |
| Other, please explain                       | 5         | 3.6     |
| Total                                       | 137       | 100.0   |

### Relationship issues

|   | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Tells me what to do                         | 8         | 5.8     |
| Works with me to help me explore my options | 92        | 67.2    |
| Lists options and lets me decide            | 21        | 15.3    |
| Doesn't matter                              | 13        | 9.5     |
| Other, please explain                       | 3         | 2.2     |
| Total                                       | 137       | 100.0   |

### Financial issues

|   | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Tells me what to do                         | 19        | 13.9    |
| Works with me to help me explore my options | 69        | 50.4    |
| Lists options and lets me decide            | 39        | 28.5    |
| Doesn't matter                              | 9         | 6.6     |
| Other, please explain                       | 1         | .7      |
| Total                                       | 137       | 100.0   |

Table 9. Preferred counseling style for emotional issues and participants' gender

|  |   | 1. Gender |        | Total |
|--|---|-----------|--------|-------|
|  |   | Male      | Female |       |
| 5-4. Preferred counseling style for emotional issues | Tells me what to do                         | 3         | 12     | 15    |
|  | Works with me to help me explore my options | 27        | 54     | 81    |
|  | Lists options and lets me decide            | 12        | 8      | 20    |
|  | Doesn't matter                              | 11        | 5      | 16    |
|  | Other, please explain                       | 2         | 3      | 5     |
| Total  |   | 55        | 82     | 137   |

$\chi^2=12.827$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.012$

Table 10. Preferred counseling style for relationship issues and participants' gender

|   |   | 1. Gender |        |       |
|---|---|-----------|--------|-------|
|   |   | Male      | Female | Total |
| 5-5. Preferred counseling style for relationship issues | Tells me what to do                         | 0         | 8      | 8     |
|   | Works with me to help me explore my options | 35        | 57     | 92    |
|   | Lists options and lets me decide            | 8         | 13     | 21    |
|   | Doesn't matter                              | 10        | 3      | 13    |
|   | Other, please explain                       | 2         | 1      | 3     |
| Total   |   | 55        | 82     | 137   |

$\chi^2=13.767$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.008$

## **Vita**

Yi-Ying Lin was born in Taiwan. She spent her childhood in Tainan, Taiwan, and grew up in Taipei, Taiwan. She received dual bachelor degrees in Business Administration and Law from National Taipei University in 2003. After spending a number of years in the business field, she returned to academia in 2007 to pursue a Master's degree in the Mental Health Counseling program at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville.

Yi-Ying graduated with her Master of Science degree in Counseling with a concentration in Mental Health in 2010 from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. In the same year, she was accepted into the Ph.D. program in Counseling and Counselor Education at the University of Rochester, New York.