HOW COUNSELING STUDENTS RESPOND TO RECEIVING SUPERVISION LETTERS FROM THEIR PRACTICUM INSTRUCTOR

A dissertation submitted to the Kent State University College of Education, Health and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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The purpose of this research was to explore how practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor and what aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees. Participants were five master’s students enrolled in a mental health practicum course and their instructor. The instructor wrote four supervision letters to each student.

Two questions guided the research. The first question was how do practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor? In response to the first question, four common themes emerged: (a) students valued receiving letters and looked forward to receiving them, (b) students desired more feedback from letters, (c) students experienced emotional reactions that varied among letters and each other, and (d) students recognized the influence letters had on counselor development.

The second research question was what aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees? In response to the second question, four common themes emerged: (a) individualized/personalized feedback was “evidence” of instructor paying attention, (b) specific words and writing style stood out, (c) being in writing and the ability to reread letters, and (d) additional instructor perspective and feedback was another form of support.
In addition to themes that emerged from the two research questions, a supplemental theme emerged that may have related to student responses to letters: stress levels and expectations during the semester were considered unique. The results and interpretations are explained. Contributions to current literature, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research are discussed.
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Research Question One

Theme one: Students valued receiving letters and looked forward to receiving them

Theme two: Students desired more feedback from letters

Theme three: Students experienced emotional reactions that varied among letters and each other

Theme four: Students recognized the influence letters had on counselor development

Confidence

Anxiety

Supervision relationship

Identity
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

People have written letters to family, friends, loved ones, and strangers for thousands of years (Gibson & Morrison, 2007; How, 2003; Saintsbury, 1922). Letters have existed since the first moment someone was able to write them, and their influence is profound (Garfield, 2013; Whyman, 2009). From the first letters written on clay tablets sometime between 2700 and 1000 Before Common Era (BCE) to letters being written on computers today, letter writing has gone through many changes, such as the type of paper, writing utensils, and writing style, (Child, 1985; Finlay, 1990; Freeman, 2009; Gabel & Wheeler, 1990; Hall, 2000; Harris, 2009; Lander & Graham-Pole, 2008; Walker, 2007). Regardless of how or when letters were and are written, they have connected and can connect people in ways talking by itself cannot (Bannet, 2005; Mallon, 2009; Schneider, 2005).

After World War II, the increased use of the telephone caused a decrease in letter writing, but the letter’s influence has continued (Bannet, 2005; Garfield, 2013; Schneider, 2005; Williams, 2012). In recent years, there has been an increased interest in writing letters as a way of connecting to others in a style considered more personal, and at times as a form of art (Harris, 2009; Mehta, 2008; O’Shea, 2007; Shepherd & Hogan, 2008). The use of email, which is seen by many as just a new format for writing letters, has contributed to this renewed desire to write letters, particularly on paper (Freeman, 2009; Harris, 2009; Walker, 2007).
The influence a letter has provided and can provide in relationships led to its use as a support in counseling (Pyle, 2006; Sax, 2008). Literature on the use and benefits of letters in counseling and psychotherapy has existed since at least 1965 (A. Burton, 1965). It has been documented that Sigmund Freud wrote therapeutic letters in the early 1900s, and Alfred Adler wrote letters to clients in the 1960s when he had a hard time talking due to laryngitis (Bell, Moules, & Wright, 2009; V. E. White & Murray, 2002). Even though counselors do not need to follow any specific theoretical counseling approach to write therapeutic letters to clients (Steinberg, 2000), narrative therapy (M. White & Epston, 1990) has increased awareness of the benefits letter writing can have for clients taking part in counseling (Beels, 2001; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Madigan, 2011; Payne, 2000; Pyle, 2006).

One therapeutic letter to a client can have the same influence as up to three face-to-face counseling sessions, and over the last several years, more and more counselors have written letters to clients for therapeutic reasons (Bell et al., 2009; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Pyle, 2006). Those letters have strengthened therapeutic relationships in ways such as adding a more personal connection to the therapeutic relationship, and those letters have facilitated positive change in ways such as pointing out positive changes in writing to clients (Bastien & Jacobs, 1974; France, Cadieax, & Allen, 1995; Moules, 2009a; Pyle, 2006, 2009; M. White & Epston, 1990). In addition to letters having had a positive influence in therapeutic relationships, it has been suggested letters can be helpful in the supervision and training of counselors in ways such as helping supervisees think more about their
work with clients and by providing the opportunity to reread letters outside of supervision sessions (Desmond & Kindsvatter, 2010; Hoffman, 2008; Koltz, 2008; Sax, 2008).

**Research Question**

The research questions for this study were:

1. How do practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor?

2. What aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees?

**Purpose and Rationale**

The purpose of this research was to explore how practicum students respond to receiving letters from their practicum instructor. Counseling students entering practicum encounter many stressors, and their supervisors are influential in reducing those stressors and in supporting student development (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 1993; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003a, 2003b; Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998; Watkins, 1995, 2012; Weatherford, O’Shaughnessy, Mori, & Kaduveltoor, 2008).

Various types of letters have had a significant influence on humanity and relationships since people could write them (Earle, 1999; Freeman, 2009; Gibson & Morrison, 2007; Trapp, 2003; Walker, 2007; Yates, 2000). The occurrence of letter writing since ancient times and the exponential increase in social uses throughout history has led people to automatically recognize a letter’s format and to expect connecting,
sharing information, or both, when writing and receiving a letter (Trapp, 2003). The development of technology has contributed over time to less letter writing on paper, but there has recently been a renewed interest in letter writing on paper and as a manner of expression (Harris, 2009; Mehta, 2008; O’Shea, 2007; Shepherd & Hogan, 2008).

The longevity of letter writing, the influence letters have had, and the many uses of letters contributed to them being used effectively as a therapeutic tool in counseling and psychotherapy (Bell et al., 2009; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Moules, 2009a, 2009b; Pyle, 2006). Because of the value of letter writing as a therapeutic tool, it has been suggested letter writing can be valuable to counselor training and supervision (Desmond & Kindsvatter, 2010; Hoffman, 2008; Koltz, 2008; Sax, 2008). The idea of letters as a tool in supervision is directly related to the use of therapeutic letters in counseling and psychotherapy (Desmond & Kindsvatter, 2010). Letter writing as part of counselor training and supervision is also likely a good fit because of the reflective and collaborative focus of counselor training and supervision (Hoffman, 2008).

Student experiences during practicum, the role supervisors have in supporting student development, the historical influence of letters, the renewed interest in letter writing, the effective use of therapeutic letters in counseling and psychotherapy, and suggestions that letter writing can be helpful in the training and supervision of counseling students were all rationale for this study. An additional rationale for this study was that it began to fill a gap in the available literature on letter writing and supervision. Although therapeutic letters have been used and have been shown to be beneficial, there is an apparent absence of research on letter writing within counselor supervision and training
The results of a literature search by the researcher on the topic of letter writing in counseling supervision resulted in a minimal amount of available literature suggesting the use of letter writing in counseling supervision, and no available literature on experiences of supervisees receiving letters from a supervisor or instructor during practicum supervision.

Letters for this study were written with intent similar to that of a therapeutic letter and in a style common with a personal letter. Letters were similar in intent to therapeutic letters because letter writing in supervision has been informed by therapeutic letter writing (Desmond & Kindsvatter, 2010). Letters were similar in style to a personal letter because a more personalized letter during supervision could benefit the training and supervision of counseling students due to being more informal and focusing more on the supervision relationship (Hoffman, 2008). The definition of a therapeutic letter and a personal letter is reviewed in the next section. The letters also addressed areas related to counselor development that were consistent with common struggles experienced by practicum students during practicum supervision. Because the letters were from a practicum instructor who also provided supervision of students, the letters are referred to in this paper as “supervision letters.”

**Definitions**

As with any topic of review and research, definitions assist the reader to better understand areas of discussion. Before reviewing relevant literature related to letter writing and counseling supervision, the following terms are briefly defined.
**Epistolary:** Anything written that relates to a letter or is in the form of a letter is considered *Epistolary* (Gibson & Morrison, 2007; Mallon, 2009). Epistolary writing is different from other types of writing such as diaries or journals because epistolary writing is directed toward a receiver, even if the intended receiver never reads the letter. Diaries and journals typically include personal thoughts meant only for the writer; epistolary writing is intended to connect with others (Milne, 2010).

**Epistle:** An epistle is a letter, either real or fake, with the purpose of providing information, educating, convincing, or even entertaining (Decker, 1998; Mallon, 2009). An epistle can be written to one person, but it can also be published in a book to tell a story or in a newspaper or newsletter to deliver a message, convince others of something, or share opinions with a larger group of people (Decker, 1998; Gibson & Morrison, 2007).

**Letter:** A letter is a written message from one person to another person or group (Milne, 2010; Watson, 1958). It is different from a note because it has information that is more personal and takes someone longer to write and read it (Shepherd & Hogan, 2008). A letter is still limited in length though, and it contains a salutation to the receiver at the beginning and a complimentary close from the sender at the end (Gibson & Morrison, 2007; Mehta, 2008; Trapp, 2003). Traditionally, the parts that are needed in a letter for it to be considered a letter includes dateline, salutation, body of the letter, complimentary close, signature, and possibly postscript, enclosure, or copies (Baugh, 1991; Watson, 1958; Williams, 2012). A letter can be handwritten on paper, typed on a computer and printed, or typed on a computer and emailed (Freeman, 2009; Harris, 2009; O’Shea,
2007; Shepherd & Hogan, 2008). It is addressed to someone or labeled so an intended reader can receive it, although it may never be delivered to anyone or ever be read (Gibson & Morrison, 2007). The letter’s purpose is to connect with someone (or several people), and to share whatever information it is the writer wants the reader to know (Hoffner, 2009; Mehta, 2008; Milne, 2010; Poster, 2007b; Walker, 2007).

The reasons for writing letters are diverse, and for each reason for writing them, they are written in different ways (Bly, 2004). Throughout history, letters have been separated into various categories (Poster, 2007b). Bly (2004) separated letters into categories such as personal, career and employment, general business, internal company, customer service, sales and marketing, credit and billing, and vendor related. Harris (2009) discussed letters as being either personal or practical. Personal letters are for social reasons, and practical letters are anything related to work or business. During the 4th century Common Era (CE), Julius Victor discussed in a book entitled Ars rhetorica that letters should be classified into the broad categories of (a) personal letters and (b) official letters (Poster, 2007b).

**Personal letter:** Personal letters are intended to support another person, begin a relationship, or strengthen a relationship (Bly, 2004). According to Ars rhetorica, personal letters strengthen relationships by connecting to someone through a more genuine, caring, writing style (Poster, 2007b). Personal letters especially have the potential to strengthen relationships if “written straight from the heart” (Bly, 2004, p. 33). “Letters from the heart,” according to Bly (2004), are those that are warm, kind, and caring. Letter writing is often viewed as an art when written with the purpose to connect
a writer and receiver, and the personal letter is part of the “art of connecting” (Shepherd & Hogan, 2008, p. 3).

The personal letter is considered informal because it is often written to someone the writer already knows or with whom he or she is at least familiar, reflects more of the writer’s personality, has a caring tone, and has a relaxed pace (Bly, 2004). Although providing information is often not the main goal of personal letters, they can include facts (Bly, 2004). An example of a personal letter intended to share knowledge is called a “formal information letter” (Bly, 2004, p. 47). This can be to a stranger or someone the writer knows, but with whom he or she is not very familiar (Bly, 2004).

The format of a personal letter is more informal than the official letter, which is defined below. Although a personal letter may contain personal letterhead of the writer, it does not need to (Bly, 2004). The salutation in a personal letter is followed by a comma (K. Wilson & Wauson, 2011), and the content can be handwritten, typed and printed, or emailed (Bly, 2004). Spelling and grammar is not as important in the personal letter as it is in the official letter because the main goal of a personal letter is to connect with the reader (Guideposts, 1995).

Official letter: According to Ars rhetorica, official letters are written for business or professional purposes, and they should be more serious in tone, use direct language, and follow a style more like giving a speech (Poster, 2007b). The business letter is one version of an official letter, and it is an important part of communication in both the business world or in any professional environment (Worth, 2002). O’Shea (2007) stated there are “an infinite number of reasons for writing a business letter” (p. 143). Even
though the specific reasons can be as diverse as the individual writer or situation, business letters often have a goal of convincing the reader of something or providing facts to the reader (Bly, 2004). They are also intended to maintain a strict, professional relationship, address something more serious in nature, and sometimes even intentionally create distance between the writer and the intended receiver (Bly, 2004).

Business letters are more formal, more impersonal, and are often written to strangers, but they can be written to a person someone knows (Bly, 2004). K. Wilson and Wauson (2011) discussed that business letters often follow a specific format. This format can include a letterhead or the address of the writer, a subject reference line, an address of the recipient, a possible attention line if a personal name of the receiver is not known, a salutation followed by a colon, a signature block that includes the writer’s full name and title, and typed content (K. Wilson & Wauson, 2011). The writing style of a business letter usually adheres to proper grammar or spelling, states the purpose of the letter right away, and ends with a request for a next step (K. Wilson & Wauson, 2011).

*Therapeutic letter:* This letter is intended to help clients make positive changes or to reflect on aspects of their life that may be helpful (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Steinberg, 2000; M. White & Epston, 1990). Typically, a therapist writes them to a client, but a client can write a letter to a therapist as a response to a letter from the therapist (Steinberg, 2000). Therapeutic letters are written for any number of reasons; the situation or issue they address is open to the therapist’s creativity and client goals the therapist wants to write about (Freedman & Combs, 1996).
Pyle (2006) discussed that letters from a therapist can be separated into the two types of administrative letters and therapeutic letters. Administrative letters may be to other professionals summarizing treatment or offering clinical judgment, or they may be for informing a client of his or her file being closed. Therapeutic letters are intended to contribute overall to client therapeutic change and to strengthen the therapeutic relationship (Pyle, 2006). Moules (2009a) also discussed that the goal of a therapeutic letter is to strengthen a relationship, but additionally, its personal and warm style is intended to create/reinforce collaboration with the client. Steinberg (2000) suggested therapeutic letters could benefit from being informed by narrative therapy. The therapeutic letter, as well as its connection to narrative therapy, are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

**Review of the Literature**

This literature review explores some significant influences of letter writing and the use of letters in counselor training and supervision. It is intended to show four aspects related to letter writing in counselor training and supervision. The first is letters have influenced humanity since the first ancient letter to a letter being mailed or emailed today. The second aspect is the struggles counseling students experience when they initially begin meeting with clients and further develop as counselors. The third aspect is the uses of the letter as a therapeutic tool. The fourth aspect is a review of suggestions on letter writing as a way to help counseling students navigate change and development as counselors. This chapter reviews those four aspects within the two areas of (a) letter writing influences and (b) counseling supervision and letter writing.
Letter Writing Influences

Letter writing has been around for nearly 5,000 years (Daniels, 1985; Earle, 1999; Fromkin & Rodman, 1993; How, 2003; Poster, 2007a). It has had an effect on nearly all cultures, all countries, and all possible human experiences (Barton & Hall, 2000; Kadar, 2010; Williams, 2012). With an influence covering the entire span of recorded history (Earle, 1999; Whyman, 2009) and a presence throughout the world, a complete review of letter writing is impossible (Garfield, 2013).

It is important though to review some areas of significant historical influence to help the reader better understand letter writing’s “distinguished place in our history” (Pyle, 2006, p. 17) in connection with the benefits therapeutic letters have had and can have in counseling (Pyle, 2006). The occurrence of letter writing throughout history has influenced the use of therapeutic letters; Moules (2009a) stated, “Letters arrive in therapy and nursing with a tradition and history that are deeply embedded in their influence; we cannot overstep their shadows” (p. 102). Since the history and longevity of letter writing has informed therapeutic letter writing (Moules, 2009a; Pyle, 2006), and since the suggested use of letters in supervision has been informed by the use of therapeutic letters in counseling (Desmond & Kindsvatter, 2010), a review of some areas of significant historical influence will be beneficial. This review is limited primarily to letter writing in England and America. It is also limited to letter writing considered personal or informal because the letters written for this study were intended to be more personal and informal. This review includes the areas of (a) relationships, (b) access to history, (c) public information, (d) secret communication, (e) literature, (f) love and war, and (g) email.
Relationships. Letters have influenced relationships immensely (Bannet, 2005; Mallon, 2009; Milne, 2010; Trapp, 2003). People have always wanted to overcome the barriers of physical and emotional distance between them (Freeman, 2009; Garfield, 2013; Milne, 2010; Standage, 2013; Trapp, 2003; Williams, 2012). Freeman (2009) stated, “Ever since humans emerged from Plato’s cave, we have tried to communicate with each other” (p. 20). Standage (2013) suggested we are innately social and we continually try to reduce what separates us by starting and maintaining connections through socializing and exchanging information. Words are one of the most powerful things people have to connect and socialize with other people (Gladwin, 1970), and sharing those words through letter writing can potentially have more impact on someone than talking only (Bannet, 2005; Mallon, 2009; Schneider, 2005).

Letter writing has been a human need since the ability to read and write (Earle, 1999; Rosenmeyer, 2001; Singer, 1963). Earle (1999) reported that the author Rudyard Kipling even suggested the idea of letters existed before people knew how to read and write and written language was created so people could then write letters. The first known letter was written sometime between 2700 and 1000 BCE in ancient Egypt (Lander & Graham-Pole, 2008; Trapp, 2003). Many of these first letters included wedge shaped marks made on a piece of wet clay with a stylus (cuneiform) and then left out in the sun for hours to dry (Garfield, 2013). In addition, some of these other earliest letters were written on pottery or bowls, and they were frequently buried with deceased family members to tell them surviving family still loved them or to advocate for their loved ones to have a good afterlife (Hoffner, 2009; Lander & Graham-Pole, 2008). These kinds of
letters were sometimes called “letter-prayers” (Hoffner, 2009, p. 3), and family members left them near a statute of a god or in a temple for that god to read.

Although some of the earliest letters were written to connect to family members, many of them were written for political reasons by rulers to keep maintenance over their empires (Trapp, 2003). Letters designed for a more personal connection began to be written around 500 BCE when Atossa, who was the daughter of Cyrus the Great and later the Queen of Persia, began to write letters to build and strengthen relationships (Mallon, 2009; Saintsbury, 1922; Trapp, 2003). Philosophic and theoretical thoughts on the influence letters could have on people began to be written about during the 2nd century BCE in Greece (Sullivan, 2007; Trapp, 2003). Trapp (2003) reported that as early as the 2nd century BCE, epistolary theory described letter writing having the three goals of (a) connecting people together, (b) reflecting the personality of the writer, and (c) beginning or strengthening relationships. It was discussed around this time that letters should reflect the personal characteristics of the writer, and the friendlier the letter was, the better the relationship between the sender and receiver would be (Poster, 2007b). Around the 12th century CE, letter writing began to be described as Ars dictaminis, or as a form of artistic expression (G. Burton, 2007).

Harris (2009) suggested people would never stop writing letters in some form or another as long as people want to relate to each other and share information. Barton and Hall (2000) reported that a 1998 study on the writing activities of a small town in England showed, at least for the residents of that town, writing letters was the most common writing people did. For the purposes of this study, relationship experiences of
Letter writing are categorized into the areas of (a) connecting, (b) materiality, and (c) identity.

**Connecting.** People have searched for better, faster ways to connect since they were able to communicate, and letters have and continue to influence relationships by connecting people together (Freeman, 2009; Garfield, 2013; Hall, 2000; Harris, 2009; Standage, 2013; Walker, 2007; Yates, 2000). L. D. Green (2007) referred to the letter as a “Mercurial Messenger” (p. 106) because the reader and writer connect emotionally. Letters initially connect people in this way by simply being addressed to someone (Milne, 2010; Trapp, 2003). The fact of receiving a letter, even if the content is negative or the letter is poorly written, helps the receiver feel the writer thought enough about them to write a letter (Gibson & Morrison, 2007; Mallon, 2009; Milne, 2010; O’Shea, 2007; Schneider, 2005; Trapp, 2003; Williams, 2012).

How (2003) discussed how letters, particularly those sent through the post office, creates an “epistolary space” (p. 4). How (2003) proposed that in this epistolary space, people benefit from being united together in an unbreakable connection. Similar to the epistolary space discussed by How (2003), Nystrand (1986) suggested writers and readers create a meaningful experience because there is a mutual expectation that a social connection will happen. This expectation has existed socially and in epistolary theory for such a long period in human history it has become a natural expectation for people when receiving a letter (Nystrand, 1986). Schmandt-Besserat (1990) proposed that the understanding between two people in writing began long before letters were written to
anyone. The connection is an ancient one that dates to sometime between 60,000 and 25,000 BCE when symbols were first used to communicate (Schmandt-Besserat, 1990).

Once a letter is opened, Trapp (2003) suggested a connection is automatically made because there are themes and an “epistolary formulae” (p. 34) almost all people recognize. Some common familiar themes are letters eliminate distance; they complete, continue, or begin a conversation; and they nearly always influence the relationship (Trapp, 2003). This familiarity is theorized to connect and benefit people because of the place in antiquity the letter holds. Similar to what Nystrand (1986) suggested, Trapp (2003) discussed that along with letters being written for thousands of years, people have written about letter writing since at least the 2nd century BCE. Since that time, a letter, at least one written with a more personal goal, is automatically accepted socially as a more personal form of writing that will connect with the reader in an emotional way (Trapp, 2003).

The epistolary formula mentioned by Trapp (2003) is that a letter contains an introduction/salutation, a complimentary close, and “epistolary tenses” (p. 36). The introduction/salutation and the complimentary close assists in connecting because it is the most recognizable aspects of a letter, whereas the epistolary tense reinforces an understanding that there is a gap in time between when a letter was written and when it is read (Trapp, 2003). This gap is always closed though when the writer and reader of a letter imagines the presence of each other when writing and reading a letter (Milne, 2010; Trapp, 2003). Milne (2010) referred to this connecting as “rhetoric of immediacy” (p.
54) because the writer feels immediately linked to the intended reader while writing and
the reader immediately feels connected to the writer by opening and reading the letter.

Nystrand (1986) further discussed the social process in writing, reading, and
sending a letter. Nystrand (1986) suggested this process is a matching between the
writer’s purpose for writing, the content of the letter, and what the reader needs, wants, or
will benefit from knowing. Nystrand (1986) referred to this process as the Reciprocity
Principle, or a “mutual co-awareness” (p. 48), and it occurs in every social act or
conversation. There is reciprocity between a reader and writer when language shared is
understood, with one important reason for this understanding being the reader and writer
taking their respective turns reading and writing (Nystrand, 1986).

Another way letters connect people, according to Milne (2010), is the writer is
always present in the letter by writing “I” and including their name in the closing, and the
receiver is always present in the letter because of the use of “you” and their name in the
salutation. Milne (2010) referred to the overall connecting process through a letter as
“deixis” (p. 58). This includes the factors of the time difference between when a letter is
written and read, the personal investment a writer and reader have in the letter, and the
language used to reference the writer and reader while writing and reading the letter. All
of this combines to create a meaningful relational experience for both the writer and the
receiver (Milne, 2010).

Maybin (2000) studied the connections felt through letters by 56 male prisoners
on death row in the United States and one from Jamaica. All inmates were between the
ages of early 20s to late 60s. The letter writers were from England and were part of an
organization called Lifeline. Of participants, 90 were women and 14 were men. Participants wrote letters ranging from 3 months to over 8 years. Based on a 1-hour interview with participants and responses to a questionnaire, Maybin (2000) concluded letters were valuable because they were a form of social connection that helped inmates feel accepted. One inmate reported that through letters he had the closest relationship he had ever had (Maybin, 2000).

Maybin (2000) theorized that when reading a letter, the reader thinks about the writer’s words and intent, leading to a personal inner conversation with the content. Maybin (2000) also discussed that as readers read through letters, they make meaning from the content, and this interaction with letters then becomes a “dialectical relationship” (p. 172) between their thoughts about letters and the social and interpersonal components of them. Participants in the study by Maybin (2000) reported believing letters helped strengthen relationships because, after reading a letter, they had time to reflect on the relationships, including when they reread a letter (Maybin, 2000).

A. Wilson (2000) also researched letter writing in prison by writing over 300 letters to prisoners in England and Scotland over an 8-year period. Based on face-to-face interviews with participants, A. Wilson (2000) reported prisoners felt connected to others because of the letters. Participants reported they looked forward every day to receiving letters, and if they did not receive new letters, they often reread the letters they already had (A. Wilson, 2000). The rereading of letters by prisoners was believed by A. Wilson (2000) to “not only enact but to re-enact a social practice associated with their day-to-day personal and human lives” (p. 182).
Connecting through letters can also happen for those with little awareness of what letters look like or what they typically contain. Ahearn (2000) investigated the introduction of letter writing with people who had little experience with letters: the inhabitants of a Junigau, Nepal village. The study consisted of 1,250 people and was an ethnographic study on social changes and the effect love letter writing had on villagers. Prior to 1980 in the Junigau village, love letters were rarely written, most women could not read, and prior to 1982, 73% of marriages were arranged (Ahearn, 2000). A high school opening in 1983 changed that by providing the opportunity for an education. People began writing letters alone or in a group with friends or family members of the same sex. Ahearn (2000) reported groups supported each other in writing letters by combing their experiences to help each other write letters or to reference manuals on writing love letters.

Upon reviewing over 200 love letters exchanged during the village courting process, Ahearn (2000) concluded that letters changed the way couples connected. For generations, couples met and got married quickly, with little love being expressed, but letter writing changed the courting process from villagers avoiding the expression of love to looking for love in a longer courtship, and love letters were an important piece of that more romantic process (Ahearn, 2000). Recipients of letters reported rereading them so much and sharing them with close family and friends so often, that the paper became worn out and the writing faded. One couple shared they had a courtship lasting over two years in which they preferred to write love letters to each other, even though they lived only around a 10 minute walk apart (Ahearn, 2000).
Hall, Robinson, and Crawford (2000) also introduced letter writing to participants who had little to no experience with it. Hall et al. (2000) studied a class of 5-year-old children to see if they would agree to write letters to strangers. Writing the letters was not a requirement for class, and the children could choose to not write letters; the overall intent was to see if the children socialized through the letters when it was not a class expectation (Hall et al., 2000). Thirty children took part in the study. One researcher wrote half of the letters and another wrote the other half. Both wrote identical letters except for the child’s name on it. The letters included four general letter-writing strategies of (a) pointing out something in common, (b) writing something about themselves, (c) asking questions about the child, and (d) expressing a desire to be friends (Hall et al., 2000). Every child responded to the first letter. By the fifth letter, most children ended the letter, “with love.” By the 12th letter, most of them gave their complete address (Hall et al., 2000).

The children reportedly wrote letters and connected with the researchers easily, but they seemed to struggle with the format of the letters, such as a dateline or a salutation (Hall et al., 2000). The letters even got longer by the end of the study; Hall et al. (2000) explained this was partly because the researchers modeled writing longer letters as well as because a “sense of audience” (p. 145) developed between them in which they were thinking about who would receive the letters while they were writing them. According to Hall et al. (2000), the children presented with “audience awareness” (p. 146) at a young age. Hall et al. (2000) theorized the children responded so well because they saw a letter as another form of socialization, something they had already
practiced and had been aware of orally. Already developed social skills showed in the letters, something Hall et al. (2000) stated as, “not an exercise, but the adaptation of print to their life strategies. For them, writing was not different to living; it was a means of extending living” (p. 146).

The children shared their letters with family and friends who were not part of the study, and many of them asked if they could receive letters too (Hall et al., 2000). The researchers even got letters from the children’s siblings. At the completion of the study, 22 out of the 30 children reported wanting to keep connected or liking the idea of writing and receiving letters (Hall et al., 2000). The researchers interviewed the children 2 years later, and many children reported keeping the letters and putting them somewhere they felt kept them safe. Hall et al. (2000) theorized the reasons the children responded so well and so early was because they became aware of letters at a young age from seeing family and others writing them, reading them, or delivering them. Hall et al. (2000) also suggested social expectations and history creates an automatic recognition of a letter. This suggested recognition is similar to the automatic awareness discussed by Trapp (2003) and Nystrand (1986).

Although letters connect people, it is important to point out this connecting and sharing is not always positive (Carruth, 2004; Mallon, 2009; Milne, 2010). O’Shea (2007) reported words can be comforting, but they can also cause distress. Good-bye letters and “Dear John” letters can be hard to read (Harris, 2009; O’Shea, 2007; Shepherd & Hogan, 2008). “Dear John” letters began around WWII, and although they started as letters to soldiers deployed or in training, they can be written to anyone to inform a
partner in an intimate relationship that the writer wants to end the relationship (O’Shea, 2007).

An example of one of the most difficult letters to write and read is the sympathy/condolence letter (O’Shea, 2007). According to Harris (2009), what makes it so hard to write is because it is intended to provide support and express sadness while at the same time recognize the reader has lost someone. Because of this challenge, Shepherd and Hogan (2008) suggested it should be written as a draft first. But even though these letters are hard to write and difficult to read, a letter to someone during a time of sadness in their life connects positively by showing them others are thinking of them and they do not need to struggle alone (Harris, 2009; O’Shea, 2007; Shepherd & Hogan, 2008; Whyman, 1999).

**Materiality.** Letters also have an influence on relationships because they are physical objects. L. E. Watson (1958) reported that receiving a letter on paper is like getting a visit from the writer. People as long ago as ancient Greece were aware of materiality when they occasionally shared the stains in a letter were tears that landed on the paper as they wrote (Rosenmeyer, 2001). Along with what is written in a letter, physically touching a letter helps make the reading and rereading of letters valuable (Harris, 2009; A. Wilson, 2000) because holding a letter, even as a printed email, can take the place of the sender (Gauthier, 1999; Gibson & Morrison, 2007; O’Shea, 2007). Ross (2009) suggested a personal letter on paper is such a part of human history and culture that people automatically give emotional value to anything in the form of a letter. A letter is received by most people as evidence (Schneider, 2005); most people realize a
letter was created for them by another person, which is seen as a symbol of connection (Carpenter, 1978; Lander & Graham-Pole, 2008), especially a letter written on paper (A. Green & Lambert, 2013).

In the study by Maybin (2000) involving death row inmates discussed previously, Maybin (2000) reported that one of the reasons letters were important to prisoners was because they were physical proof they still mattered to someone outside the prison. The concrete aspects of receiving letters for the prisoners stood out to them. Maybin (2000) discussed how one man reported the squeak of the mail cart every week caused him to anticipate and hope the mail cart might have a letter for him. Letters were also reported to be replacements of physical things the prisoners no longer had access to, such as nature, especially if someone described the object in detail in the letter (Maybin, 2000).

In addition, in the previously mentioned study by A. Wilson (2000), it was reported prisoners became excited when they saw what they referred to as the “fancy letter bag” (p. 183) because they knew the bag contained letters and there might be a letter in the bag for them. A. Wilson (2000) also reported that for many prisoners, a letter was a physical “icon” (p. 192) of status that showed they had a social life and were connected to someone outside of the prison. Many prisoners requested to keep letters somewhere safe when they accumulated too many to keep in their cell, and prisoners intended to take all letters with them when they were released (A. Wilson, 2000).

A. Wilson (2000) theorized the material value given to letters by the prisoners was because of a relationship with the five senses. A. Wilson (2000) referred to this as “paraliteracy features” (p. 182). Sight would include seeing the letter or seeing an aspect
related to the letter, such as the bag potentially containing a letter. Sight can also occur as part of writing and reading a letter because of visuospacial activity when words and the person connected to those words are visualized (Olive & Passerault, 2012). Smell might include scents that may have been around the person writing a letter such as cigarette smoke, perfume, baking scents, or it might include a smell the recipient may never even have the chance to experience or letters from one prison having a different smell than another (A. Wilson, 2000). Speech could include reading a letter aloud, or it could include excited anticipation caused when prisoners heard their name called when mail arrived for them (A. Wilson, 2000).

**Identity.** In addition to connecting people together and having physical worth, letters influence relationships by revealing and building identity (Almasi, 2010; Bannet, 2005; Milne, 2010). Letters become evidence of identity, particularly when a writer expresses his or her personality in the letter (Gibson & Morrison, 2007; Watson, 1958). Bannet (2005) discussed that letters, whether handwritten or typed, offer the reader an image of the writer when he or she wrote the letter. Almasi (2010) reported that in Greece around the 3rd or 4th century BCE, one of the first known letter writing manuals, written by Demetrius, suggested giving a letter was like offering a piece of who someone is at their core. In addition, the content, emotions, tone, and handwriting can offer a positive or negative image of the writer (Bannet, 2005; Gibson & Morrison, 2007).

Hartley (1999) reported that Elizabeth Bowen discussed people losing their identity during World War II and writing letters was one way people were able to rebuild it. Steele (2009) discussed Margaret Fuller’s view of letter writing being a way for
people to get to know themselves better. Writing often requires much more thought and reflection than speaking does (Horowitz & Samuels, 1987). Writing to friends, family, or loved ones can increase self-awareness by revealing aspects of identity that Margaret Fuller believed was constantly being shaped by reflecting while writing letters and while reading letters (Steele, 2009). Sometime between the 15th and 17th century CE, humanistic ideas and values became more prevalent (Almasi, 2010; G. Burton, 2007). Letter writing around that time began to focus more on individuality and a straightforward style; because of this, letters and the process of writing them can help build one’s image and help someone reflect on self, life, and relationships, both while writing a letter and while reading a letter (Almasi, 2010).

Burgess and Ivanic (2010) discussed that general writing influences identity in both the writer and the reader. Burgess and Ivanic (2010) discussed an ethnographic study that investigated the shaping of identity in adult literacy classes located in England. Three classes took part in the study, including 6 to 8 students, with 5 students attending class on a regular basis. All of the students were women. The researcher collected data over the course of 4 months by regularly observing the 3 hour classes once a week, conducting semi-structured interviews with participants and a tutor working with the students, reviewing various drafts of 11 writing samples by the students, and reviewing teaching materials for the classes (Burgess & Ivanic, 2010). Themes that evolved out of the data reflected that identity is shaped from writing and reading (Burgess & Ivanic, 2010). This includes what Burgess and Ivanic (2010) described as the identity of the writer, the identity of the reader, how the writer perceives his or her self, and how the reader perceives the
writer. According to Burgess and Ivanic (2010), the writer always includes pieces of who he or she is when writing, and a reader always brings pieces of who he or she is when reading. Additionally, rereading something from a writer can recreate how the reader views the writer each time its read (Burgess & Ivanic, 2010).

In the study by Maybin (2000) involving death row inmates discussed previously, participants who received letters from the inmates reported reading the letters caused them to reexamine meaning in their lives. Maybin (2000) theorized that identity is shaped by the personal experiences between people, and what is shared then becomes each person’s private thoughts, which then continue constructing or reconstructing the identity of the person (Maybin, 2000). A. Wilson (2000) also reported something similar based on his research on inmates discussed earlier in this chapter; he reported letters can be reread, and each reading can continue to recreate perceptions of self, society, and even one’s place in society (A. Wilson, 2000). Additionally, in the study by Ahearn (2000) discussed previously, it was reported the love letters between Junigau villagers led to a shaping of their identity as a romantic partner, in society, and as an individual (Ahearn, 2000). The content, emotions, tone, or length can provide the reader with an idea of what the writer thinks of them, which can influence the reader’s image of himself or herself in a negative or positive way (Bannet, 2005; Gibson & Morrison, 2007).

**Direct access to history.** Whether written in 2700 BCE or 2016 CE, letters influence our connection with the past (Garfield, 2013; Hartley, 1999; Montgomerie, 2005; S. Richardson, 1986; Schneider, 2005; Trapp, 2003). Letters provide intimate
thoughts and emotions of people who experienced different situations (Hewitt, 2009; Schuster, 1968), and they help better understand moments in history (O’Shea, 2007).

Because of the letters of upper social class women in Egypt from 332 BCE to the end of the late 8th century CE, readers can read about daily household activities, and readers can learn about women managing business aspects, such as taxes and being involved in occasional local politics (Bagnall & Cribiore, 2006). Through the letters between Alexander the Great and King Darius III of Persia, readers get to better understand the relationship and arguments between two rulers who both took power in 336 BCE and fought for control of the world (Schuster, 1968).

Due to the letters of Michelangelo, readers get to see the life of an artist who influenced the world (Parker, 2010). With his first letter in July 1496 to the last one 4 days before his death on Feb. 18, 1564, Michelangelo collected 1,400 letters and wrote at least 500 letters to over 225 different people over the course of 67 years (Parker, 2010). His letters showed his complex personality and an artistic change in his philosophy that was reflected in his handwriting. Prior to 1500, he mainly combined print and cursive, but after 1500, he wrote only in cursive because he viewed it as more elegant (Parker, 2010).

Through the letters of John Brown, readers get to see how he helped end slavery in the United States (Trodd, 2009). After his arrest for capturing the town of Harper’s Ferry and encouraging slaves to revolt and declare their freedom, Brown wrote more than 100 letters to his wife and family for 6 weeks before his execution on December 2, 1859. They were published in newspapers for others to read, and they influenced the view
people had of slavery (Trod, 2009). In addition, because of the nearly 200 letters between Rebecca Primus and Addie Brown between 1859 and 1868, readers get to experience the emotions and thoughts of two free northern African-American women of different social status living during the United States Civil War (Grasso, 2009).

Because of having letters, readers can learn about mental health care and the development of psychotherapy (Abraham & Freud, 1965; Benjamin, 2006; Freud, 1960, 1970; Glatzer & Mendez-Flohr, 1991; Meng & Freud, 1963; Wannell, 2007). Through the letters of family and friends of patients at the York Retreat Asylum at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, readers get to know how staff treated patients, dealt with families, and managed mental hospitals during that time (Wannell, 2007).

The letters of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung are some of the most read letters in the history of psychotherapy (Benjamin, 2006; McGuire, 1974), and because of their letters, readers are able to learn about the thoughts of two men who were instrumental in the foundation of psychotherapy. They wrote letters from 1906 to 1913 until their friendship ended due to a letter from Jung that suggested Freud might struggle more with mental illness than the patients he worked with. Sigmund Freud had other important correspondence that influenced the development of psychoanalysis (Abraham & Freud, 1965; Freud, 1960, 1970). Meng and Freud (1963) discussed important letters from 1909 to 1937 that Freud wrote to and received from Oskar Pfister, a Protestant pastor in Switzerland. Although Freud was not considered a religious person (Meng & Freud, 1963), he admired Pfister, and Pfister overall accepted the concept of psychoanalysis (Meng & Freud, 1963). In their letters, they expressed a common goal: to help people
who were suffering. Freud later acknowledged that Pfister’s letters influenced him in the development of psychoanalysis (Meng & Freud, 1963).

**Public information.** Letters influence public opinion by being available to many people at the same time, whether that information is factual or not (Almasi, 2010; Garfield, 2013; Schneider, 2005). Beginning in the 1st century CE, letters intended to be publicly shared were vital to the development of Christianity (Blanton, 2006; Gabel & Wheeler, 1990; Saintsbury, 1922). Over 9,000 letters have been discovered; of the 27 books in the New Testament, 21 are letters, and sections of Acts and Revelation contain letters (Trapp, 2003; Saintsbury, 1922). Many of the letters were written by Paul between 45 to 65 CE (Trapp, 2003). Paul’s letters consist of 13 letters divided into four groups that correspond with books from the Bible (Gabel & Wheeler, 1990). His letters showed the New Testament was forming during this time, and since it did not exist prior to his letters, the Bible and Christianity as a religion would not exist as it does today without Paul’s letters (Gabel & Wheeler, 1990; O’Shea, 2007). Several years after Paul, Augustine shared sermons in the form of letters during the 4th century CE in which he continued many of Paul’s thoughts and shared his own thoughts on meaning in life, relationship with God, and social issues of the time (Blanton, 2006). Several other Christians wrote letters similar to the letters of Paul and St. Augustine, including James, Peter, Jude, St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. Jerome (Trapp, 2003).

The invention of the printing press in 1450 expanded the use of letters, and by the early 1500s, letters, as epistles, often became religious sermons, news, and political propaganda (Milne, 2010; Schneider, 2005). Intended to take the place of a sermon, the
sermon letter was extremely popular in England from the first half of the 16th century through the end of the 17th century. Schneider (2005) discussed that because they were so popular, there are too many to ever be able to count. Letters were also printed as news beginning around 1549 (Schneider, 2005). These sold extremely well, especially after the 1620s when there was demand for any kind of news at all (Schneider, 2005). Letters were also written as epistles to and from imaginary people. These were written for many reasons, including political propaganda, swaying public opinion, and creating inaccurate views of a foreign country in order to make them appear to be an enemy when they were not (Bannet, 2005). What made them so effective was that most people had no way of knowing if they were real or fake (Bannet, 2005; Mallon, 2009; Schneider, 2005).

The influence of real and fake public letters led to the first newspaper being almost exclusively letters to the editor; the “Athenian Mercury,” published in London from 1690 to 1697, contained almost all letters to the editor (Whyman, 1999). Writing letters to the editor of newspapers expanded and became even more popular during the 1700s when people discovered how writing letters and having them published gave opportunities to offer opinions, share their views, and give advice to others (Mallon, 2009). Florence Nightingale wrote public letters from 1853–1856 expressing anger with what she saw as a lack of humane medical care for soldiers during the Crimean War (Mallon, 2009). She provided advice to nurses on how they could advocate for injured soldiers and treat them with more kindness and compassion than was common at the time (Mallon, 2009).
Advice and opinion letters continued to increase in popularity into the 1930’s when there was an increase of advice giving through letters, some real and some epistles (Mallon, 2009). In the 1950s, Ann Landers became popular providing advice to others through letters she wrote in response to letters she received asking for her advice (Mallon, 2009).

The books *Open Letters to a New Generation of Therapists*, by Irvin Yalom (2002), and *Letters to a Young Therapist*, by Mary Pipher (2005) provided advice to beginning therapists. Yalom’s (2002) letters shared his experiences as a therapist and offered advice around interpersonal and existential themes. His letters, which were epistles to the reader of the book, offered advice on the client-therapist relationship, the use of self-disclosure, focusing on existential concerns, addressing dreams, and the hazards and the privileges of being a therapist (Yalom, 2002). Pipher’s book included real letters written to a graduate student named Laura from December 2001 to December 2002. She organized the letters into four seasons, and they revolved around lessons learned from her experience as a therapist. Her letters shared her accomplishments and difficulties with clients and offered advice on approaches to take and not to take with clients (Pipher, 2005).

**Secret communication.** Letters have not only influenced communication by what was available for all to read, their use as secret communication has also had significant influence (Bannet, 2005; Gibson & Morrison, 2007; Mallon, 2009; Whyman, 2009). By the late 17th century, letter writing became part of a typical day for most people (Mallon, 2009; Milne, 2010). Even if someone could not read, letters were an
aspect of nearly every part of life, including social status (Mitchell, 2007; Whyman, 1999). With an increase in the popularity of letters (Milne, 2010), the more personal content of letters (Almasi, 2010; Burton, 2007; Dierks, 2000; Steedman, 1999), and the growth of the public postal systems (Milne, 2010), there was an increased need for secrecy in letters (Mallon, 2009; Whyman, 2009).

Secrecy in letters can be found as early as the 5th century BCE when the Greek city-state of Sparta was at war with the city-state of Athens (Rosenmeyer, 2001), but the practice of cryptology was used extensively during the 17th and 18th centuries (Mallon, 2009). People valued the ability to include secret messages in letters (Bannet, 2005; Mallon, 2009; Whyman, 2009). Books such as Mercury; or the Secret and Swift Messenger by John Wilkins in 1641, Cryptomenyisis Paterfacta by John Falconer in 1685, and The Young Man’s Companion in 1695 by William Mather instructed how to include secrecy in letters (Bannet, 2005). In response to the Stamp Act in 1766, Benjamin Franklin wrote secret letters under the fake female name Silence Dogood where he warned about excessive taxing of America through stamp costs (Bannet, 2005). Ciphers and cryptology had a significant effect on the meaning of letters and the influence letters had, and secret messages were written extensively in letters during the American Civil War and during World War II (Bannet, 2005).

**Literature.** Letters have influenced the development of literature and the novel (Milne, 2010; Schneider, 2005). Although some historians consider a letter itself to be the first form of literature (Bryce, 2003; Saintsbury, 1922; Trapp, 2003; Whyman, 2009), and the earliest presence of a letter or reference to a letter in literature was around the 8th
century BCE when Homer wrote about letters in *The Iliad* (Rosenmeyer, 2001). Also, in the 5th century BCE, Euripides embedded letters in several of his plays; *Hippolytus*, written in 428 BCE, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, written in 412 BCE, and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, written in 405 BCE, all contain letters (Rosenmeyer, 2001). In addition, the book *Chion of Heraclea*, which is the earliest still existing example of an epistolary novel, was written in 49 BCE and contains 17 letters by Chion, the main character, writing to his parents, his friends, and Plato, his teacher at the time (Rosenmeyer, 2001).

The letter as a form of literature on its own (the epistolary novel) began evolving sometime around 1720 (Ditz, 1999; Milne, 2010; Schneider, 2005; Schuster, 1968; Whyman, 1999). Novels written in the form of letters or containing letters became best sellers during the 18th and 19th centuries (Bannet, 2005; Black, 1969; Steedman, 1999; Wyman, 2009); they entertained, modeled letter writing, expressed political views, and shared historical perspective (Black, 1969; Whyman, 2009).

In a review of epistolary literature between the years 1740 and 1840, Black (1969) reported 816 books were published. Black’s (1969) review began in 1740 because one of the earliest popular epistolary novels, *Pamela*, was published in 1740. It included mostly letters between Pamela and her parents (Black, 1969; Singer, 1963). A few other notable epistolary novels in history include *Poor Folk*, by Fyodor Dostoevsky in 1846 (Bannet, 2005; Mochulsky, 1967), *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker in 1897 (Bannet, 2005; Hughes, 2000), *Kempton-Wace Letters*, by Jack London in 1903 (Singer, 1963), and *84, Charing Cross Road* (Mallon, 2009). Published in 1970, *84, Charing Cross Road* consisted of the real letters over a 20 year period between Helene Hanff of New York City and employees.
from Marks and Co., a London bookseller. The primary person Helene corresponded
with was Frank Doel. Helene and Frank never met.

**Love and war.** Letters have influenced love and war (Hartley, 1999; Mallon,
2009; Montgomerie, 2005; Newbold, 2007; O’Shea, 2007; Schneider, 2005). The love
letter is the most well-known and used letter of all time (Mallon, 2009; O’Shea, 2007;
Schneider, 2005), and it is written so much during times of war that historians suggest it
shows people cannot have war without showing love at the same time (Hartley, 1999;
Mallon, 2009; Montgomerie, 2005).

A Prussian military officer in the late 1800s reported that a love letter for soldiers
was proof someone loved them (Hammerle, 1999). During WWI, General Smedley D.
Butler discussed the need for three things in order to succeed war. These three things
were (a) ammunition to fight the enemy with, (b) food to provide the energy to fight the
war, and (c) letters from friends and loved ones to be reminded of the reasons to fight
(Watson, 1958). Winston Churchill wrote and received dozens of letters to and from his
spouse Clementine during WWI (Mallon, 2009; Soames, 1999). The German army sent
so many letters during the First World War (28.7 billion) that the military tried to limit
the amount of mail sent because they could not handle the amount (Hammerle, 1999).

During World War II, writing letters to soldiers was considered a patriotic duty
(Hartley, 1999). Letter writing manuals instructed women how to write letters to loved
ones serving in the war. They suggested women write letters that included as much detail
of daily life at home as possible, from community gossip to daily chores (Hartley, 1999).
Mothers wrote letters in a style described as “writing to the moment” (Hartley, 1999, p.
188). The writer would write about every detail of what was going on in front of and all around them as they wrote a letter, and because of this style, fathers were able to experience their children growing up (Hartley, 1999). David Hopkinson told his wife that because of the descriptions she used in her letters about their son Thomas, he felt like he was home seeing everything happen with his son (Hartley, 1999).

Letters from loved ones are so vital to morale during war, Field Marshall Montgomery had letters delivered on D-Day in June 1944 so troops could get them just prior to trying to land on the Nazi occupied beaches of France (Hartley, 1999). In addition, soldiers stationed in Africa at the beginning of WWII were having such a hard time sending and receiving letters because the mail was too heavy for efficient transport, the air graph and the air letter was invented to assist with sending and receiving letters from home (Hartley, 1999). The air graph, or v-mail, were letters written on a special form, taken to a post office, photographed, put on a film strip, and then mailed to troops (Hartley, 1999). A single film strip held around 1,500 letters and was transported in a metal container that weighed a total of 5.5 ounces instead of 50 pounds for the same number of letters (Hartley, 1999). When the strip was delivered, the letter’s content from the film strip was then put on an unsealed piece of paper 3 inches wide by 4 inches high (Hartley, 1999). The first air graph, written by Queen Elizabeth of England, took place in August 1941; 350 million air graphs were sent until it was replaced by the air letter shortly after because the air letter offered privacy, something the air graph did not (Hartley, 1999).
Email. Letters have influenced relationships, access to history, public information, secret communication, literature, and love and war (Garfield, 2013; Whyman, 2009), with the largest number of typed or handwritten letters in history being written between the 18th century Common Era (CE) and the end of World War II (Ditz, 1999; Mehta, 2008). Letter writing during this period was so important to people in Europe and America that writing a letter was the most popular social activity (Bannet, 2005; Chartier, 1997; Dierks, 2000, 2009; O’Shea, 2007; Saintsbury, 1922). Much of this was due to improvements in letter-writing technology, improvement in the postal systems, having more affordable postal rates, and an increase in literacy (Mallon, 2009; Milne, 2010). So much value was given to letters there was an expectation that nearly everyone would write and read letters or have them written or read for them (Chartier, 1997; Hoffner, 2009).

After World War II though, letter writing began to decline because of the increased use of the telephone (Mallon, 2009; Milne, 2010). The use of email, especially since the 1990s, has led to a renewed interest in letter writing on paper, primarily because it is seen as more tangible and as a different way of connecting (Walker, 2007). The number of emails is astronomical (Freeman, 2009). Between the years 1997 and 2000, the number of emails increased from 2.7 trillion to 7 trillion a year (Yates, 2000). Thirty-five trillion emails were sent in 2007 (Freeman, 2009), and approximately 1 billion people use email (Freeman, 2009; Harris, 2009; Walker, 2007).

It is evident email today is more common than handwritten letters (Milne, 2010; Walker, 2007; Yates, 2000), but writing on paper still holds value for people. D. J.
Cohen, White, and Cohen (2011) investigated the writing activities over 2 days of 400 adults 20 years and older by collecting diary accounts of everyday writing behaviors. Everyday writing was defined as anything from an academic paper to writing down a phone number, and the researches compared writing done on paper to writing done through electronic means (D. J. Cohen et al., 2011). After evaluating participant diaries of writing activities, one area researchers concluded was the group as a whole spent a similar amount of minutes per day writing on paper than through electronic devices. There were some variations though; younger adults and those with more education wrote more on electronic devices, while older adults and those with less education wrote more on paper (D. J. Cohen et al., 2011).

Along with the study by D. J. Cohen et al., (2011) showing writing on paper still holds value for some, the continued use of paper, the sale of pens, and an interest in calligraphy shows people still want to communicate and artistically express themselves with handwritten letters (Shepherd & Hogan, 2008). Even though the total volume of mail handled by the United States Postal Service has decreased by around 40 billion pieces a year in the last 10 years, 160 billion pieces were still dealt with in 2012, although the number of actual letters is unknown (United States Postal Service, 2007, 2013). In the United Kingdom, the Royal Mail Group processed thousands of identified letters in the first half of 2012 alone (Royal Mail Group, 2012).

Although people still value and are still interested in writing on paper (D. J. Cohen et al., 2011; Shepherd & Hogan, 2008), some consider email a newer format for letter writing (Freeman, 2009; Hunt, Shochet, & King, 2005; Shepherd & Hogan, 2008).
How (2003) proposed that connection through “epistolary space” (p. 4) can occur with emailed letters as well. However, to others, letters written on paper are distinct from an email (Garfield, 2013). It has been suggested a computer screen with words on it can never connect people the same way holding a letter in their hands can (Hall, 2000; Milne, 2010; O’Shea, 2007; Sax, 2008; Yates, 2000). Although an email can be printed on paper and some emails include content similar to personal letters (Ross, 2009), Ross (2009) stated that in comparison to an email, there is “physical and visceral value of the letter” (p. 26). Bly (2004) suggested nearly all letters can be written or sent as an email, but although letters can be written or sent as an email, “in an age of computers and email, the old-fashioned personal letter stands out even more” (Bly, 2004, p. 33). Letters on paper are seen as being more permanent than an emailed letter (Milne, 2010), and because other technologies have led to the reduced amount of letters sent and received on paper, a letter on paper is valued even more (A. Green & Lambert, 2013). Even if an email is seen as having similar value as a letter on paper, there will always be a separate need for handwritten or even printed letters, especially when email is not appropriate, such as invitations to special occasions or to offer condolence (Decker, 1998; Hall, 2000; Mallon, 2009; O’Shea, 2007; Rosenmeyer, 2001; Yates, 2000).

Whether an email is considered a letter or not, letter writing through email and letter writing on paper may create different experiences (Hatcher, 2001; Lander & Graham-Pole, 2008; Milne, 2010; O’Shea, 2007; Pyle, 2006; Sax, 2008). It has been suggested that handwritten or printed letters are more artistic (Lander & Graham-Pole, 2008), and it has been suggested they create a stronger connection to others for reasons
such as being more permanent and the writer often being more thoughtful when writing them (Decker, 1998; Lander & Graham-Pole, 2008; Mallon, 2009; O’Shea, 2007).

Mallon (2009) expressed several concerns with email. Some of these concerns were that email misses out on the emotional connection paper can have, the subject lines can be misleading if they do not fit the actual message, and email addresses could be strange or arrogant. Mallon (2009) suggested these could create barriers to connecting before the reader even reads the email. An email can also be easy to write and send, and if written when rushed or angry, people often misinterpret it or regret sending it (Mallon, 2009; Moules, 2009b).

Counseling Supervision and Letter Writing

The review up to this point was intended to provide a brief summary of the historical influence of letter writing. The numerous and long-standing uses of letters throughout history and across cultures has influenced therapeutic letter writing (Moules, 2009a; Pyle, 2006), and therapeutic letter writing has influenced suggestions for letter writing in counseling supervision (Desmond & Kindsvatter, 2010). The remainder of this chapter focuses on the use of letter writing in the training and supervision of counselors. The reviewed areas include (a) counseling supervision, (b) change and counselor development, (c) supervisee developmental stressors, (d) supervision relationship (e) counseling and therapeutic letter writing, and (f) letter writing in counseling supervision.

Counseling supervision. Counseling supervision takes place when a licensed, more experienced counselor monitors and mentors a less experienced counselor (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Not only is supervision mandatory in counselor training (Council
for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2009), it is crucial in passing wisdom on to a supervisee (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Borders & Brown, 2005, Watkins, 2011). Supervision is intended to help supervisees strengthen clinical skills and improve their competence while being evaluated to ensure client care is appropriate and ethical and legal standards are followed (American Counseling Association, 2014; Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Hart, Borders, Nance, & Paradise, 1995). This helps supervisees develop individually, and it helps to further develop the counseling profession (Hess & Hess, 2008; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Watkins, 1990a, 1990b).

Although supervision of counseling and psychotherapy began in 1896 when Lightner Whitmer organized one of the first supervision methods in psychology (Hess, 2008; Watkins, 2011), supervision as a field separate from counseling and psychotherapy did not begin until the early 1980s (Hess, 2008). Around the same time, developmental models of supervision formed (Stoltenberg, 1981) and supervision codes of conduct began. In 1992, the American Psychological Association’s code of ethics took into account supervision (Hess, 2008).

The impact developmental models have had on counseling and supervision has been important because they provide a guide and framework for common supervisee experiences and supervisee needs (Bernard, 2005; Borders & Brown, 2005; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 1997, 2010; Taibbi, 2007; Watkins, 1990a, 1990b). Over 20 models of supervisee development address the numerous struggles beginning supervisees
experience, and those models are more alike than they are different (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Russell-Chapin & Chapin, 2012; Watkins, 1995).

**Change and counselor development.** The most difficult period in counselor training is when first meeting with clients (Watkins, 2012). Learning new things and applying them to new situations will always involve change, regardless if someone wants change to take place or not (Carr, 1912; Chung, 2000; Jones, 2008; Kritsonis, 2005; Wang, 2000; Zittoun, 2011). Although change will happen, it is not guaranteed that development will happen (Carr, 1912; Jennings, Goh, Skovholt, Hanson, & Banerjee-Stevens, 2003; Jones, 2008; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001; Wang, 2000). Development consists of change, but it is intentional change in the direction of growth (Wang, 2000), and it often takes place over a period of time and includes different stages or phases with different goals and needs (Bear & Kivlighan, 1994; Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Jennings et al., 2003; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Russell-Chapin & Chapin, 2012; Watkins, 1995).

Heppner and Roehlke (1984) conducted three studies that explored supervisee development at different periods in their development. Heppner and Roehlke (1984) concluded three primary aspects of supervisee development. The first was supervisees experience interpersonal changes during practicum and internship. The second was different supervisor choices have different effects on supervisee development. The third was supervisee perceptions change during development (Heppner & Roehlke, 1984). Ronnestad and Skovholt (2001) investigated development involving 12 therapists with an average age of 74 and with average experience of 37 years. The purpose of the study was
to investigate how therapists perceived professional development during years of working in the counseling field. Overall, participants reported positive changes as they gained experience. A few of the significant changes included less anxiety, more self-confidence, increased tolerance with treatment struggles, and less comparison of themselves to an idealized way to practice (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001). Weatherford et al. (2008) discussed a study by Ronnestad, Orlinsky, Parks, and Davis (1997) that explored therapist perceptions of development through an international survey of 975 female and 658 male therapists between the ages of 22 and 90 years of age. The results from the 370-item questionnaire entitled the “Development of Psychotherapists Common Core Questionnaire” (DPCCQ) resulted in a conclusion that development takes place as confidence and skill level increases (Weatherford et al., 2008).

**Beginning supervisee developmental stressors.** Beginning counselors struggle as they develop, no matter their age or previous experience (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 1993; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003a, 2003b; Stoltenberg, 2005; Watkins, 1995, 2012; Weatherford et al., 2008). Anxiety is the primary stressor beginning supervisees deal with (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Weatherford et al., 2008). Bernard and Goodyear (2009) discussed the need for supervisees to be able to positively cope with anxiety. Much of the anxiety is present though because supervisees have difficulty managing other stressors, and it is important for supervisors to better understand and be able to respond to the stressors students experience (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b).
Beginning supervisees often are afraid to meet with clients because their confidence in their abilities is low (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998). Supervisees also focus excessively on themselves, and they often view themselves negatively (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998). In addition, supervisees typically feel overwhelmed and confused with many responsibilities and expectations coming at them at once (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982). Supervisees also feel frustrated when trying to understand clients for the first time (Falender & Shafranske, 2004; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Stoltenberg, 2005; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998).

Bernard and Goodyear (2009) reported supervisees need to believe they are at least somewhat competent as a counselor. To help support their confidence, supervisees need support and specific suggestions (Falender & Shafranske, 2004; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Supervisees benefit from positive feedback and a focus on strengths (Falender & Shafranske, 2004; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010), especially before pointing out needed improvement (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998). Loganbill et al. (1982) suggested supervisees need their strengths pointed out often while only a few things are addressed in supervision at a time.

Ronnestad and Skovholt (1993; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b) discussed building confidence by helping beginning supervisees feel they are very good at a few counseling skills that would apply to all the clients they work with. Confidence in even one basic skill can be vital in managing anxiety (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b). Another way to
help supervisees feel more confident is to help them see they cannot make clients change; they can only shape an environment that helps support client change (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b).

Beginning supervisees soon realize that working with clients the same way they deal with friends is not good enough to help clients (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b). Struggling to adjust to this often turns into relying a lot on the supervisor, and this creates a lot of worry about the supervision process (Russell-Chapin & Chapin, 2012; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998). They fear being criticized, negatively evaluated, and being compared to other supervisees (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b; Stoltenberg, 2005). Much of this worry is because supervisees are unaware of their strengths, areas they may need to improve (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998), and the influence they have on the therapeutic relationship (Loganbill et al., 1982). They are also not sure what their roles should be and what their professional identity is (Loganbill et al., 1982; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b). Supervisees can then become unmotivated and wonder if counseling is a good professional fit for them (Loganbill, et al., 1982; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b).

Bernard and Goodyear (2009) reported beginning supervisees need to feel they fit within the counseling profession. To assist with awareness building related to roles and supervision, supervisees benefit from being included in developing goals for supervision so they can feel their input is important and to show a supervisor values supervision and the supervisee’s development (Ellis, 2006; Loganbill et al., 1982).
Supervision relationship. Creating and maintaining a positive supervision relationship is the most important part of counseling supervision (Borders & Brown, 2005; L. L. Cohen & Lim, 2008; Hess, 1987a, 1987b, 2008; Russell-Chapin & Chapin, 2012; Watkins, 2012). Shaping and maintaining a strong supervision relationship will make it easier to address areas of improvement and to evaluate supervisees (Borders & Brown, 2005; Hess, 2008). To build a good supervision relationship, several supervisor characteristics and behaviors are important (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Borders & Brown, 2005; L. L. Cohen & Lim, 2008; Falender & Shafranske, 2004; Russell-Chapin & Chapin, 2012).

Just as they are valuable in a counseling relationship, the qualities of empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard are important in supervision (Borders & Brown, 2005; L. L. Cohen & Lim, 2008; Falender & Shafranske, 2004; Liese & Beck, 1997; Russell-Chapin & Chapin, 2012). Hess (1987b) reported supervisees want a supervisor who is caring, warm, flexible, approachable, comforting, and genuinely interested in them. Based on a review of articles published over approximately a 20-year period, Falender and Shafranske (2004) reinforced aspects of flexibility and interest discussed by Hess (1987b), but they reported additional qualities of supervisors help shape positive supervision, and these include being collaborative, affirming, and committed to counseling and the supervision process. A few other supervisor qualities beneficial to supervision are being dependable, knowledgeable, ethical, trusting, respectful, humorous, personable, and skilled in counseling (Borders & Brown, 2005; L. L. Cohen & Lim, 2008; Liese & Beck, 1997; Watkins, 2011).
In addition to the qualities of how a supervisor should be to build and sustain a good supervisory relationship, various supervisor activities will assist in shaping supervision that is positive, encourages supervisee growth, and facilitates client wellness (Russell-Chapin & Chapin, 2012). Supervisors should be able to manage supervisee anxiety, role unawareness, and the supervision relationship itself (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Borders & Brown, 2005; L. L. Cohen & Lim, 2008). Supervisors should know the supervisee level of development and their needs so they do not overwhelm them at first (Hess & Hess, 1983, 2008; Russell-Chapin & Chapin, 2012). Supervisors should discuss what evaluations would be like, and they should encourage supervisees to have some input in their own evaluations (Hess & Hess, 2008). Falender and Shafranske (2004) and Hess and Hess (2008) discussed the value of a supervisor who models counseling skills whenever possible. Bernard and Goodyear (2009) discussed the importance of being able to reduce supervisee shame over mistakes by first recognizing it and then supporting supervisees by sharing examples of their own mistakes.

Hess (1987b) reported that supervisees prefer supervisors with experience. If the supervisor is still practicing, this ongoing experience strengthens the relationship by generating more credibility and confidence in the supervisor (Falender & Shafranske, 2004), especially when the supervisor uses that experience to do something supervisees prefer—being taught by real clinical examples (Hess, 1987b). Watkins (2011) explored literature since 1909 on the supervision relationship and affirmed the report by Hess (1987b) of the value of teaching on the supervision relationship. Watkins (2011) reported supervisors sometimes need to teach skills and knowledge to help reduce anxiety.
Russell-Chapin and Chapin (2012) also discussed the importance of supervisors at times being a teacher. Other important roles include coach, administrator, and mentor (Russell-Chapin & Chapin, 2012).

On-going communication with the supervisee is another important activity for supervisors to maintain because not only is it similar to the counseling process, it can model for a supervisee how to engage with clients (Anderson & Swim, 1995). Hess (1987b) discussed the importance of honesty in communication because it reinforces a more collaborative, positive relationship. Honest dialogue should not only address what took place in counseling and supervision sessions, but it should also address the supervisory relationship because the supervisory relationship is vital to supervisee development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003).

**Counseling and therapeutic letter writing.** Since the letter writing manual entitled *Letter Types* by Demetrius in the 3rd century BCE Greece (Trapp, 2003), letters have been categorized as “types” or “classes” according to the situation and purpose for writing them (Almasi, 2010; Bannet, 2005; Earle, 1999; Mallon, 2009; Milne, 2010; M. Richardson, 2007; Schuster, 1968; Sullivan, 2007). Demetrius’ manual discussed at least 12 different types of letters (Trapp, 2003). Another example from around the same time is *Epistolary Types*, by Libanius. This manual expanded the 12 letter types of Demetrius into 41 letter types (Poster, 2007b). In 1492, Francesco Negro discussed 20 letter types in the manual *Modus epistolandi* (G. Burton, 2007). In 1522, Erasmus of Rotterdam organized letters and situations into 30 types. John Hill wrote the *Young Secretaries’*
Guide in 1712; it provided 23 letter types and models for women to write (Ditz, 1999; Mitchell, 2007).

With the resurgent interest in letter writing in recent years (Harris, 2009; Mehta, 2008; O’Shea, 2007; Shepherd & Hogan, 2008), several letter writing manuals have appeared in the last 10 years or so offering instructions on how to write specific types of letters. Shepherd and Hogan (2008) discussed 19 different types of letters for specific occasions. Harris (2009) mentioned 16 letter types divided into 4 categories, including email. O’Shea (2007) discussed 13 letter types. Mehta (2008) reported 5 letter types along with examples of each. Williams (2012) discussed the art of letter writing and at least 10 types of letters for specific occasions and circumstances.

A few types of letters discussed over the past approximate 2,000 years includes love, erotic, good-bye, break-up, friendship, invitations, congratulations, recommendations, apology, sympathy/condolence, thank you, advice, political, educational, confession, complaint (G. Burton, 2007; Harris, 2009; Mallon, 2009; Mehta, 2008; Mitchell, 2007; Poster, 2007b; O’Shea, 2007; Shepherd & Hogan, 2008; Trapp, 2003; Whyman, 2009; Williams, 2012). An additional letter type that has become more prominent due to narrative therapy is the therapeutic letter (M. White & Epston, 1990). Freed, McLaughlin, SmithBattle, Leanders, and Westhus (2010) stated that a therapeutic letter is “highly personalized and meaningful to the recipient” (p. 266). SmithBattle, Leanders, Westhus, Freed, and McLaughlin (2010) reiterated this when they discussed that therapeutic letters are different from business letters because they are intended to provide support, facilitate change, build a relationship, and reinforce previous comments.
In terms of a purpose related to strengthening relationships, supporting, and helping people change, as well as being written in a manner more individual, informal, and consistent with the personal letter, the therapeutic letter is the closest “type” or “class” of letter to one from a practicum instructor to a student (supervision letter). Additionally, the therapeutic letter has informed the use of letters in counselor supervision and training (Desmond & Kindsvatter, 2010). Therefore, it is helpful to review aspects of the therapeutic letter.

Although therapeutic letters have been used in counseling since at least the early 1900s when Sigmund Freud wrote letters as part of therapy (Bell et al., 2009; Moules, 2000, 2002), literature about therapeutic letters from a therapist to a client did not appear until many years later when A. Burton (1965) discussed written communication being more helpful in therapeutic relationships than face-to-face sessions alone (Moules, 2002, 2009b; Pyle, 2006, 2009). The field of nursing has used therapeutic letters as part of treatment and for improving therapeutic relationships for many years (Bell et al., 2009; Freed et al., 2010; Moules, 2002, 2003, 2009b), and they have been used by various people practicing different theoretical approaches when working with adolescents (Goldberg, 2000; V. E. White & Murray, 2002), families and children (Rodgers, 2009; Vidgen & Williams, 2001), and adults (Alexander, Shilts, Lisco, & Rambo, 2008; Pyle, 2006). The increased recognition and use of therapeutic letter writing in counseling began in the early 1990s with narrative therapy (Moules, 2000; Pyle, 2006, 2009; M. White & Epston, 1990; V. E. White & Murray, 2002).
Even though letter writing is not exclusive to narrative therapy (Steinberg, 2000), the purposes of letter writing as a therapeutic intervention fits best with it (Sax, 2008; Steinberg, 2000; V. E. White & Murray, 2002). The basic concept of narrative therapy is that life is a story and people create meaning in their lives through the story or various stories they live and tell themselves (Amundson, 2001; Epston, 1994; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Parry & Doan, 1994; Payne, 2000; Tomm, 1989; M. White & Epston, 1990; M. White, 2007). From the narrative perspective, people need a way of interpreting and organizing what they know and what they live through, and the story analogy gives them a way to do that (Bruner, 1986; M. White & Epston, 1990). Narrative therapy uses letter writing to help people re-author their lives, especially when they get stuck or lost in their own story because of the difficulty sometimes in living life and making positive changes at the same time (Steinberg, 2000; V. E. White & Murray, 2002). Freedman and Combs (1996) and Parry and Doan (1994) both discussed the purposes of writing therapeutic letters from a narrative perspective. These purposes are summarized as:

- To make sure the therapist accurately heard what the client shared
- For the counselor to reflect on the session
- To point out and reinforce positive changes in clients
- To strengthen the therapeutic relationship
- To summarize helpful parts of a counseling session
- To encourage clients to continue changes discussed in the session
Therapeutic letters can have various benefits for those receiving them (Bastien & Jacobs, 1974; Epston, 2009; Madigan, 2011; Moules, 2000, 2002, 2009b; Pyle, 2006, 2009; M. White & Epston 1990; M. White, 2007; V. E. White & Murray, 2002). An initial benefit of therapeutic letters is they include written language, which is seen as being more permanent, having more value, and being more trusted than only spoken language (Horowitz & Samuels, 1987; Steinberg, 2000; V. E. White & Murray, 2002). M. White and Epston (1990) referred to the value people give to written language over spoken language as “occularcentrism” (p. 34). Other benefits of therapeutic letters are valuable to discuss. For the purpose of this review, the benefits of therapeutic letters are categorized as (a) benefit of relationship and (b) benefit of outcomes.

**Benefit of relationship.** Letters create and strengthen the therapeutic relationship (Moules, 2000; Nylund & Thomas, 1994; Payne, 2000; Steinberg, 2000; M. White & Epston, 1990). Letters add a more personal piece to the relationship, something clients have reported appreciating and something that can strengthen the relationship even more than it already is (Moules, 2003; Pyle, 2006, 2009). Steinberg (2000) reported that just the sight of a letter could improve the therapeutic relationship because clients feel more of a connection to the counselor. Moules (2002) explored the influence letters have on nursing relationships. Based on a study of nursing students writing 11 letters to 3 families, Moules (2002) reported written language and the tone of the words influences relationships—either positively or negatively—in a way spoken language alone cannot. France et al. (1995) discussed that reflecting by letter on the client’s story shows the counselor cares about the client beyond what they have to for their job. Based on the
results of a study in involving 15 letters—7 from clients to therapist and 8 from the therapist to clients—written over the course of 5 months, France et al. (1995) reported that clients believed the therapeutic relationship improved because of letter writing.

Rodgers (2009) discussed therapeutic letters and their influence on boundaries in therapeutic relationships. Based on interviewing 5 clients who received therapeutic letters during counseling, Rodgers (2009) reported letter writing helped reduce boundaries and power hierarchy because clients thought the counselor valued them more than counseling goals. Rodgers (2009) also reported clients felt as if they had been a guest in the counselor’s home and a letter was support in-between their sessions. In addition, Rodgers (2009) reported that through letters, therapists have the opportunity to model important qualities in the therapeutic relationship: trust and the value of sharing.

Pyle (2006, 2009) also discussed the influence of therapeutic letters on relationships. He reported on a study he conducted in 2004 where a group of nine “counselors” wrote letters to one adult male client and six adult female clients over the course of counseling. The “counselors” included seven female and two male participants, were all from Canada, and were a mixture of helping professionals, including six social workers, two psychologists, and one counselor (Pyle, 2006, 2009). The helping professional wrote letters to the clients and vice versa. The letters were analyzed, and themes summarized what clients reported as meaningful about receiving therapeutic letters. The overall themes discussed by Pyle (2006, 2009) were:

- Clients were curious about receiving a letter.
- Clients felt a stronger therapeutic relationship with the therapist.
• Letters made session content more real.
• Letters helped them make positive change.
• Letters occasionally hindered progress because they were confusing.
• Clients valued letters because they were something concrete to hold, reread, or show others.

The theme clients reported as the most helpful to them was affirming the therapeutic relationship (Pyle, 2006, 2009). This primarily helped the other themes as well, including helping to offset the reported occasional confusion generated from some letters. Two clients reported the simplest part of a letter—a handwritten signature—helped them feel more connected to their therapist (Pyle, 2006, 2009).

Freed et al. (2010) explored the reaction of patients who received letters from nursing students. Twenty-seven participants took part in a semi-structured interview, seven in a 45-minute focus group and 20 in a 15- to 30-minute individual interview. Therapeutic letter writing guidelines were offered to the nursing students, and the researchers reviewed the letters prior to them being given to patients. The guidelines included six specific aspects for the students to express in the letters in whatever order they chose (Freed et al., 2010). These were (a) show appreciation for willingness to meet with them, (b) note observed changes, (c) make positive comments that recognize efforts and successes, (d) provide encouragement, (e) mention what the writer learned from just meeting the patient, and (f) never share anything confidential, overly private, or inappropriate (Freed et al., 2010).
Four themes emerged from the data, and all four themes were related to benefits of receiving letters (Freed et al., 2010). The first was patients felt better understood and valued as a person. The second was feeling a sense of reciprocity with the students. Freed et al. (2010) equated reciprocity with feeling connected because of knowing students benefited from them as patients at least as much as the patients benefited from the students. Freed et al. (2010) reported this theme of reciprocity was significant, and the letter was “proof” (p. 269) of the students benefitting as well from the relationship.

The third theme was it motivated patients to want to take better care of themselves (Freed et al., 2010). It was reported that letters were positive regarding patient efforts to change, and this benefited them by increasing their self-motivation. The fourth theme was letters were viewed as “tangible appreciation” (p. 270). Freed et al. (2010) reported that patients reported carrying the letters around, sharing them with others, and putting letters on display. Freed et al. (2010) also reported participants noted rereading letters whenever they wanted to be reminded of their relationship with students, and the letters became a strong physical symbol of that positive relationship.

**Benefit of outcomes.** Along with strengthening the relationship, letter writing helps clients reach their outcome goals. Letters show there is a chance for more positive and often more truthful client stories (Beels, 2001; Madigan, 2011; Steinberg, 2000). Letters can help with change by pointing out unhelpful patterns in client’s lives, by being something for clients to reflect on (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Laub & Hoffman, 2002), and reinforcing resources for change that clients already have (Laub & Hoffman, 2002).
Being able to read and reread letters can help clients change because they can read the letters when they are ready to and at a speed they want (Alexander et al., 2008; M. White & Epston, 1990). Rereading letters adds concreteness to the strengths and changes therapists can write about (Alexander et al., 2008; Steinberg, 2000; V. E. White & Murray, 2002). Reading and rereading letters can also help clients reach goals because letters can point out positives from sessions, reinforce changes, and include different perspectives for clients to think about (Alexander et al., 2008; M. White & Epston, 1990).

Beels (2001) reported the value of clients reading and rereading letters is related to differences between writing/reading and talking/listening. Beels (2001) suggested that when a client reads a letter in his or her own internal voice, it changes their perspective. According to Beels (2001), because the language in the letter is being read and heard in the reader’s own voice, it creates ownership of what they are reading and it helps them be more open to what is written in the letter. Gunraj and Klin (2012) investigated the idea of an inner voice when reading, but their conclusions were different from Beels’ (2001) suggestion of an internal voice during reading. Gunraj and Klin (2012) conducted three separate studies at Bringing Young University. One study had 53 undergraduate student participants read versions of a story passage, both slow and fast. Another study included 60 undergraduate students reading a story passage aloud. A third study involved 171 undergraduate students reading a story passage while imagining the story character’s perspective during the passage. Gunja and Klin (2012) reported the results were overall inconclusive that there is an inner voice active during reading, but they did suggest a reader might read with an inner voice if more invested in what they are reading.
Various authors and researchers have studied or discussed the impact of therapeutic letters on therapeutic outcomes. Freedman and Combs (1996) reported that if a letter is written properly, it could have the same effect as 4.5 sessions. Nylund and Thomas (1994) surveyed 40 clients who received therapeutic letters, and they concluded a letter was worth 3.2 meetings with clients. Additionally, Bastien and Jacobs (1974) explored therapeutic letter writing when face-to-face sessions never took place; communication happened by mail alone, even the outcome measurement. Fourteen participants were randomly selected and randomly placed into three groups, including control groups, and a female graduate student in clinical psychology wrote the letters to participants over the period of four months (Bastien & Jacobs, 1974). Therapeutic outcomes were looked at using the Mooney Problem Check List. Bastien and Jacobs (1974) reported that the number of Mooney Problem Check List issues reported by participants in the groups that received letters declined by the end of the study.

Alexander et al. (2008) discussed letter writing to clients from a solution-focused perspective. Students in practicum wrote the letters, and clients reported that by rereading letters in-between sessions, they felt supported, that change was reinforcement, and that someone noticed their strengths (Alexander et al., 2008). Asch, Price, and Hawks (1991) discussed the overall positive reaction of clients who received summary letters after a first psychiatric appointment. Twenty-three people participated in the study, and 17 out of the 23 reported that they liked receiving a letter. Asch et al. (1991) reported that 11 participants thought letters were very helpful and six people found them quite helpful. Three participants thought letters were negative because they felt letters
violated confidentiality and the letters included things about them they did not want to accept (Asch et al., 1991). Bell et al. (2009) explored the influence letters had on patients in the Family Nursing Unit at the University of Calgary. Bell et al. (2009) reported that one therapeutic letter facilitated change similar than one face-to-face session.

In addition to the receipt of therapeutic letters helping clients reach outcomes, letters can also affect client change by their impact on the therapist who writes them (Erlingsson, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Steinberg, 2000; M. White & Epston, 1991; V. E. White & Murray, 2002). The process of writing therapeutic letters helps the therapist keep focused on goals and to reflect about clients and their treatment (Steinberg, 2000). Content in letters needs organized, and reflecting can happen when the therapist thinks about what to say in the letter (Steinberg, 2000). The process of writing therapeutic letters can help with client outcomes by reviewing what has happened in counseling, summarizing changes clients report, and pointing out changes the therapist noticed (Steinberg, 2000; M. White & Epston, 1991; V. E. White & Murray, 2002). Hatcher (2001) reported that the General Medical Council of the United Kingdom suggested letters, even through email, could help therapists keep track of changes that happen during each session. In the study discussed previously by Freed et al. (2010), the theme of reciprocity in writing therapeutic letters is beneficial to the writer because it combines knowing yourself better, letting another know you better, and getting to know another person better (Freed et al., 2010).

Erlingsson (2009) explored the influence of therapeutic letters on students in a nursing program when they used them to reflect on patients. Erlingsson (2009) reported
that because of reflecting through letter writing about a family’s situation, their wants, and what would most help them, students were more aware, understood their patients better, and were able to provide better support to them (Erlingsson, 2009). Burand and Ogba (2013) investigated the impact letter writing had on 32 students in a general chemistry class when students were asked to write a letter about laboratory results instead of writing a laboratory report. Student feedback was received through a follow-up survey. Thirty-one of the 32 students completed the survey, and the result was 94% of the students reported writing letters helped them to think about chemistry in a different and deeper manner, primarily because they thought more about how to explain class topics in letters so a reader would understand it (Burand & Ogba, 2013).

SmithBattle et al. (2010) investigated how nursing students responded to writing letters to patients. Seventy-four students took part in the study. The researchers conducted 12 focus group interviews and analyzed all 140 therapeutic letters written to patients. The groups included three to eight students and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted by one of the researchers within one week after the student stopped meeting with the patient. The study explored two things specifically: how the letter affected nursing students’ relational skills and how they thought letters affected patients. Instructions on writing therapeutic letters were provided to students. The primary instruction was that the content of the letters “would be unique to each patient’s situation” (SmithBattle et al., 2010, p. 709).

Three themes emerged from the data (SmithBattle et al., 2010). The first was the process of letter writing was frustrating, challenging, and took a lot of time to write at
first, but the included content on client strengths and what students learned from them was helpful to the students (SmithBattle et al., 2010). The second was writing the letters affected student learning by helping with relational skills, providing an understanding of patient perspective, and reflecting more on the relationship. The third was students perceived that patients benefited from receiving letters. Most of this perception was because patients informed students how much they appreciated receiving letters. Students reported this showed them that letters could have a significantly positive impact on a therapeutic relationship. It was reported that in one instance, a family member of a patient visited just to “meet the author of the letter” (SmithBattle et al., 2010, p. 712).

**Letter writing in counseling supervision.** Letter writing in counseling supervision can offer various benefits in facilitating the growth of supervisees. Based on a review of literature, Desmond and Kindsvatter (2010) suggested letters from supervisors to supervisees would help supervisees think more about how their approach with clients is helping clients or not. In addition to thinking about the influence their clinical approach has on client change, letter writing can help supervisees reflect on the effect clients are having on them, which helps supervisees then better understand how the counseling process is for clients (Desmond & Kindsvatter, 2010; Koltz, 2008). Letters can also extend supervision outside of supervision sessions by giving an opportunity for supervisees to reread letters and consider the comments, questions, and suggestions in-between supervision sessions (Desmond & Kindsvatter, 2010).

Pipher (2005) suggested letters could be models of development for supervisees by supervisors sharing their experiences with clients—the struggles and the successes.
Sax (2008) suggested letters from a supervisor can model how a supervisee can write a letter to a client, something of benefit to clients (Bastien & Jacobs, 1974; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Moules, 2009a; Payne, 2000; Pyle, 2006; M. White & Epston 1990) and counselors (Erlingsson, 2009; Steinberg, 2000; V. E. White & Murray, 2002).

In addition to suggestions of letters from a counseling supervisor to a supervisee being helpful, based on a literature review, Hoffman (2008) suggested letters from instructors to students enrolled in a counselor education course could also have benefits. According to Hoffman (2008), letters from an instructor would be particularly beneficial in smaller classes that include supervision as part of the course requirements. An example of a class like this would be practicum since the instructor is providing group supervision of the class. Hoffman (2008) also recommended four types of letters. These are letters welcoming students before they attend class, letters in-between classes to share comments on student activities, letters at the end of the course that summarize the course and student involvement, and letters with a more personal reaction to specific student activities. These types of letters could aid the learning and development of counseling students, but any of these types of letters would need to be considered within the scope of the course and the overall objectives for the course (Hoffman, 2008).

**Summary**

The current research explored how practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their practicum instructor. The review of literature has shown that letters are influential in human history, that letters are still impactful, both personally and therapeutically, that beginning counseling students experience several stressors
during their development as a counselor, and that supervision letters can affect the experience of counseling students in counseling supervision and their development as a counselor.

The research questions for the current research were:

1. How do practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor?

2. What aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees?

Letters in the current research were considered “supervision letters” because since the 3rd century BCE to present day, letters have been categorized depending on the situation or purpose for writing them. From this point on, the mention of a letter or letters is intended to reference supervision letters. The next chapter describes the research methodology followed for the current research.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Supervision is necessary in counseling and is crucial in the development of beginning counselors (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Borders & Brown, 2005; Hess & Hess, 2008; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Watkins, 2011). Practicum is a course involving supervision by an individual supervisor and group supervision by an instructor, and it is when counseling students first meet with clients as part of counselor training (CACREP, 2009). A strong supervision relationship is a vital piece of that supervision (Borders & Brown, 2005; L. L. Cohen & Lim, 2008; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 1993; Russell-Chapin & Chapin, 2012; Watkins, 2012). Counseling students struggle with various stressors and have various needs as they begin to work with clients (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Skovholt, Ronnestad, & Jennings, 1997; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 1993; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b; Stoltenberg, 2005; Watkins, 1995, 2012; Weatherford et al., 2008). Letters from a supervisor to practicum students can benefit students by helping build and reinforce a positive supervision relationship and by addressing student needs and strengths in writing (Desmond & Kindsvatter, 2010; Hoffman, 2008; Koltz, 2008; Sax, 2008). The research questions for this study were:

1. How do practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor?

2. What aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees?
This chapter addresses the methods applied to answer the research questions as well as the rationale for those methods. The areas discussed in this chapter include: (a) case study, (b) qualitative research, (c) single case study, (d) procedures, (e) credibility and trustworthiness, (f) and delimitations.

**Case Study**

A case study is designed to answer “how” and “why” questions (Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). It is a helpful research approach when wanting to explore a situation in depth from multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2007; Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). A case study is different from other research approaches because a case study is defined by the situation being investigated, not the methods of data collection (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). An important feature of a case study is the case under investigation is bound (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011a). Binding the case sets parameters around the case being investigated (Creswell, 2007; Thomas, 2011a), and it helps ensure the case is not too large (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Thomas (2016) stated, “The case study is a frame that offers boundary to your research” (p. 21). Because the focus is on the identified case, a case study can be investigated with qualitative, quantitative, or mixed research methods (Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2009; Yin 2009). This case study was conducted with qualitative data collection and analysis methods.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research primarily uses words as data (Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2009). Data in a qualitative study can be separated into the four overall forms of interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2007). Interviews can be
done face-to-face with individuals and/or groups or over distance. Observation can be done with the researcher as part of the environment or separate from the environment (Creswell, 2007). Documents could include items such as journals, diaries, personal letters, public documents, books, and medical records. Audiovisual materials could include videos, photographs, audio recordings, voicemails, e-mails, or text messages (Creswell, 2007).

Two important goals of qualitative research are to gain a deeper understanding of a selected situation and to explore what people think about those situations or events (Thomas, 2009, 2011a). Because of these goals, participants in a qualitative study are purposely chosen (Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2011a). Qualitative research is considered an interpretive research approach, with the understanding of a situation relying on how researchers interpret collected data (Schram, 2006; Thomas, 2009).

Interpretation of the data includes identifying categories, and from that, themes will emerge (Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). Thomas (2009) discussed that this pulling together large amounts of information and looking at how it relates to each other will only apply to each case being looked at; it will depend on researcher interpretation of data, and it will likely differ from other researcher interpretations (Thomas, 2011b). In qualitative research, questions are investigated in depth (Hatch, 2002; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2009), and the researcher is the primary data collector (Hatch, 2002; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2009). Because the researcher is the main collector and interpreter of data in a qualitative study,
it is important for a researcher’s position in the study to be fully acknowledged (Thomas, 2009).

**Researcher Position**

A researcher’s position in a study relates to experiences the researcher has with the research topic and assumptions about the study’s results. The researcher for this study had previously written letters to mental health counseling students in practicum courses, to individual mental health students supervised during practicum and internship, to students in lecture-type courses, and to clients. Research on receiving letters was not conducted with students or clients; however, students and clients informally reported that receiving letters was helpful to them.

Students reported a letter was additional support in the class and a letter was something they did not typically receive. Students also reported a letter was a different way to share thoughts about their performance. Several students reported letters showed them the instructor spent extra time thinking about them as students. In addition, students reported it helped them to reflect on themselves more and a letter reinforced what they were doing well. Many students reported looking forward to receiving the next letter.

Clients reported a letter was something tangible to reread if needed (one client reported carrying a letter around in a wallet, and another client reported framing a letter and hanging it on the wall). Clients also noted a letter was proof a counselor cared enough about them to spend extra time writing. Clients reported a letter provided hope that change was possible and letters reinforced their strengths in writing. Based on experience writing letters to students and clients, the researcher had several assumptions
about the current research prior to data collection. Researcher assumptions included the following:

- Students receive letters favorably
- Because less letters are sent and received on paper, receiving a letter on paper has a positive influence on students
- Letters facilitate positive changes in the students and in their therapeutic work with clients
- Letters help students reach goals they have for themselves in practicum
- Letters assist students to reflect on client progress and the counseling process
- Letters help students reflect on their training as a counselor
- Students reread the letters, reinforcing content by rereading
- Letters strengthen the supervision relationship
- Students report letters influence their growth and development as a counselor
- If the instructor shares personal developmental examples in the letters, it helps normalize struggles during development for students

Some of the above assumptions emerged as part of themes during data analysis, and some did not. Themes also emerged that were not part of assumptions noted above. All themes that emerged are reviewed and discussed in later chapters.

Assumptions were based on the researcher’s own experience writing letters as well as the results of the literature review discussed in Chapter 1. The researcher’s experience of letter writing and assumptions for this study was “bracketed;” the researcher recognized experiences and assumptions related to letter writing and then set
aside all of them as much as possible. The researcher bracketed out expectations and assumptions about letter writing in practicum prior to data collection (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). This was done by writing out expectations and biases in a reflective memo and suspending them during the current research.

In addition, during data collection and analysis, the researcher kept a reflexive diary. Researcher reflection in diary entries assisted in maintaining an awareness of biases and reactions during the study (Thomas, 2009, 2011a). Additionally, the researcher’s position was addressed by getting feedback during data collection and data analysis through peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing is discussed in the credibility and trustworthiness section later in this chapter.

**Researcher Reflexive Diary**

A diary offers the opportunity to reflect during a study by writing about thoughts, emotions, and events (Thomas, 2009, 2011a). A diary can be structured or unstructured (Thomas, 2009). The researcher kept a reflexive diary, and it included a combination of structured and unstructured entries. The diary was kept electronically in a confidential timeline format through PowerPoint. The timeline was an “add-on” embedded feature of PowerPoint called “Office Timeline Free.” Study related events were also noted on the timeline. Diary entries were not included in the analysis of data.

Since researchers begin making interpretations of data as soon as data are collected (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Thomas, 2009), it is important to keep a record of working interpretation and thoughts for later reflection during data analysis (Thomas, 2009). Entries during data collection were made after every contact with study
participants and data as well as all meetings and conversations with the peer debriefer. This included all scheduled and unscheduled interviews and meetings, during/after transcribing interviews, after writing interview summaries for member checking (discussed later in this chapter), and any feedback from participants. Frequency of entries on the timeline, including entries considered diary entries, depended on the amount of contact with participants, reflections on the data, and communication with a peer debriefer (discussed later in this chapter); there were some weeks containing several entries and some weeks where there were few to no entries. The entries contained general thoughts and reactions of study related events after each day an event occurred. They also included researcher reflections on the content and meaning of events. These diary entries were unstructured.

Structured diary entries during data analysis included responses to questions (Appendix A) that helped keep track of potential researcher bias and to support bracketing by the researcher (Hatch, 2002; Thomas, 2009). Constant reflection during the data analysis period helped the researcher maintain awareness during data interpretation of his participation during the study and previous letter writing experience.

**Researcher Reflexive Diary Influence**

The reflexive diary influenced the researcher in two ways. The first way was it provided a visual image of all research related events. This included all things the researcher did, including but not limited to delivering gift cards, conducting interviews, sending emails, and consulting with the peer debriefer. It did not include a schedule of when events were to take place (this was kept on a separate electronic calendar that was
created prior to data collection). The researcher added events as they happened. The timeline provided a visual representation of activities, and this aided the researcher to keep detailed entries of events.

The second way the diary influenced the researcher was it offered the opportunity to reflect on research related activities, reflect on questions or concerns, and to reflect on diary questions during data collection and data analysis. Writing about other perspectives the peer debriefer provided and by responding to structured diary questions related to data interpretation helped the researcher be more aware of biases and thoughts that may have interfered with collection and interpretation of the data. The diary pulled together “facts” of research related events along with thoughts about those events.

**Single Case Study**

A case study is designed as either a single case or a multiple case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). The current research of letter writing to practicum students from their instructor was a single case study. It was a single case because the study focused on one bounded case (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). The case was bound by its context and activities (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009).

The context of the case, which is the case in its setting (Creswell, 2007), included the location, class structure, and time period. The location was a master’s degree program in mental health counseling from a large counseling program at a large university in the Midwestern United States. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling
and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) accredited the program. The class met in a designated classroom at the university.

The class structure was one mental health practicum class in the counseling program, one instructor, and the students in the course who agreed to participate. The class included no more than 6 students because of program and accreditation standards. Students were completing their practicum experience at a counseling center on the university’s campus that was affiliated with the counseling program. This helped further bound the case in at least two ways. First, the practicum instructor had more access to view student performance and skills through recordings obtained at the counseling center. Second, it helped ensure the counseling environment for students was consistent regarding space for private counseling, appropriate technology and/or observing opportunities for student learning, and maintaining of client rights (CACREP, 2009, pp. 3-4).

Creswell (2007) reported a case study includes a description of recorded “facts” (p. 63) about the case, including personnel; this also places the case in context, and this is important to consider during the analysis of the data and to include in the final report of a case study. Class structure was also important in terms of the people who made up the practicum class. Therefore, each student participant and the instructor completed a brief demographic form (Appendix B) so information about the participants in the case could be included in describing the overall context of the case. This demographic information is shared in the next section.
The time-period of the practicum class was one semester (approximately 16 weeks). The semester began in August 2015 and ended in December 2015. In addition to the case being bound by context, it was bound by the primary activities of the study; the instructor wrote at least four supervision letters to practicum students throughout the semester, and practicum students received at least four supervision letters from their instructor throughout the semester.

Yin (2009) referred to the case being studied as “the unit of analysis” (p. 30). A single case study can include multiple units within the primary unit of analysis (Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). It is important to include more than one unit, if possible, because different perspectives of the same situation will offer a deeper understanding (Yin, 2009). Thomas (2011a) and Yin (2009) referred to more than one unit of analysis within a case as a subunit. Smaller, separate units within the case can offer more detail because the subunits can be analyzed separately, across other subunits, and within the overall case (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) referred to case studies with subunits as sources of data as embedded case studies. Yin (2009) pointed out each embedded unit should connect to the overall case being studied because the overall case is the focus. Thomas (2011a) referred to case studies with subunits as a source of data as nested case studies. Thomas (2011a) discussed that each nested unit should fit within the larger case being studied, including differences among units because the larger case is the focus.

This case study of supervision letters to practicum students from their instructor included subunits. The subunits were study participants. Practicum student participants
were referred to as “students.” The instructor participant was referred to as “instructor.” Each student and the instructor made up the whole of the case because the feedback of each was taken into consideration, compared, and contrasted as it related to the entire case (Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). Thomas (2016) discussed that an important distinction between a single case study with subunits and a multiple case study is the focus of the study. A multiple case study focuses on “comparing clearly different examples, and the contrasts found between and among the cases” (Thomas, 2016, p. 177), while in a single case study with subunits, “The breakdown is within the principal unit of analysis” (Thomas, 2016, p. 177). Figure 1 illustrates the single case for the current study.

![Diagram of Mental Health Practicum Class with Students and Instructor](image)

*Figure 1.* Single Case of Supervision Letters to Practicum Students from their Instructor (Adapted from Thomas, 2011a)
**Procedures**

This section addresses the participants in the study, how participants were recruited, data collection methods, and steps in data analysis.

**Participants**

Participants were students enrolled in a CACREP accredited clinical mental health counseling practicum course and the instructor of record for the course. The practicum instructor served as the group supervisor for all of the students. Data were collected from the instructor and all students who agreed to participate.

**Recruitment of participants.** The selection of participants in a qualitative case study is intentional according to the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). Creswell (2007) stated that participants in qualitative research are selected to “inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). Although according to Thomas (2011a), a case study is not a sample, “it’s a choice, a selection” (p. 62), researcher selection of the case and recruitment of participants was considered purposeful sampling as well as convenience sampling (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002).

After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix C), selection of participants occurred in four steps. The first step was contacting the program coordinator at the identified counseling program for the study. The second step was contacting the first identified instructor by email (See Appendix D). The third step was meeting the instructor in person, providing forms/material, and allowing the instructor to ask further questions. The fourth step included visiting the instructor’s class to offer students the
opportunity to participate. Appendix E contains a study timeline for the instructor, including when the researcher met with the instructor and when the researcher visited the practicum class. To help encourage participation, all those who agreed to take part in the study (students and instructor) were offered a total of $50.00 in Visa gift cards to be delivered by the researcher to participants at scheduled times during the semester. A $10.00 gift card was offered during week 4, a $10.00 gift card was offered during week 9, and a $30.00 gift card was offered at the ending interview.

**Practicum instructor/practicum class.** In the IRB application, the researcher specified the purposefully selected university where the current research occurred. The selected university was a CACREP accredited master’s level mental health counseling program with a counseling center on site. After IRB approval, the first step included contacting the program coordinator for the chosen counseling program by email, scheduling a time to meet in person to briefly describe to the program coordinator the intended research, and to request a list of practicum instructors for the fall 2015 semester. The researcher met with the program coordinator and reviewed the class schedule for the fall 2015 semester. The researcher discussed with the program coordinator those instructors on the list thought to have an interest in letter writing, experience with it, or both. Because letter writing was the main activity in this study, it was important for the instructor to have experience with or an interest in therapeutic letters, letter writing in counseling supervision, the research topic, or all three. The instructor was expected to write at least four letters to practicum students who agreed to participate in the study. Selecting instructors with experience or interest was based on committee member
knowledge, program coordinator feedback, and researcher familiarity with instructors.

Two practicum instructors were selected to contact.

The second step was contacting the first identified instructor by email. The first instructor contacted reported an interest in the study and agreed to meet in person to further discuss the study. The third step was to meet the instructor in person, provide forms/material, and allow the instructor to ask further questions. The following forms were provided for the instructor to look over:

- Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study—Practicum Instructor (Appendix F)
- Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study—Practicum Student (Appendix G)
- Practicum Student Study Timeline (Appendix H)
- Audio/Video Recording Consent Form (Appendix I)
- Notification of Research Study on Supervision Letters (Appendix J)
- Demographic Form (Noted above)
- Practicum Instructor Study Timeline (Noted above)

The researcher answered questions the instructor had. The researcher provided Letter Writing Suggestions (Appendix K) for reference and for guidance as needed, but it was affirmed the suggestions were only suggestions, not requirements for letters. The instructor was encouraged to review the forms and decide whether or not to participate at a later time. The instructor agreed verbally at the meeting to take part in the current research and to return signed forms at the arranged class meeting. The researcher and
instructor agreed the researcher would visit the instructor’s class at the beginning of the second practicum class meeting. The instructor was also encouraged to notify the researcher by phone or by email with any questions or concerns. The fourth step included visiting the instructor’s class to offer students the opportunity to participate.

**Practicum students.** After instructor approval, the researcher attended the second practicum class meeting. Appendix L contains a transcript of what was shared. The study was discussed and students were offered an opportunity to participate. Students were informed that taking part in the study was optional and participation required additional tasks outside of regular course requirements.

The researcher provided each student all the forms provided to the instructor. The researcher answered any questions about the research students had at the time. Students were encouraged to review the forms outside of class and return completed forms at the next class meeting. However, all students chose to complete and return all the forms at the meeting. The researcher’s contact information was provided and students were encouraged to contact him at any time with any further questions or concern.

**Participant summary.** Creswell (2007) reported a minimum of 4 participants should be sufficient for themes to emerge out of the data in a case study. Along with the instructor agreeing to participate in the current research, six practicum students initially agreed to participate. When the researcher first visited the practicum class to discuss the study, all six students approached the study with interest and agreed to participate in the study before the researcher left. Prior to any data collection or receiving a letter from the instructor, one student withdrew from the practicum course. Five students and the
instructor completed the study, and together they made up the whole of the case because the feedback of each was taken into consideration, compared, and contrasted as it related to the entire case (Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). Each participant completed the Demographic Form prior to data collection. Information about participants in a study is important because it helps place the case in context (Creswell, 2007) and it adds depth to the understanding of the case (Thomas 2011a). Table 1 provides a summary of demographic information shared by all who agreed to participate in the study, and brief information about participant responses to the study follows.

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym (Chosen by Researcher)</th>
<th>Identified Gender</th>
<th>Reported Age</th>
<th>Identified Ethnicity</th>
<th>Reported Mental Health Work Experience (Years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quinn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dakota (withdrew from practicum course)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Instructor*

| Mel                                         | Female           | 52           | African-American   | 11                                            |
Student participants included Quinn, Pat, Alex, Chris and Riley. They all responded positively to the study. All five of them shared they would like to read the results of the study, and all five of them were flexible and open during data collection and when meeting with the researcher. In addition to being the practicum instructor, Mel was the individual supervisor for three students. She responded positively to the study and was interested in reading the results of the study. Mel shared she looked forward to writing the letters, and she presented with excitement to share her observations of students receiving letters as well as her experience writing the letters.

**Data Collection**

Data in a case study is typically gathered from multiple sources and from multiple methods. This not only adds to a deeper understanding of the case, but it also strengthens its credibility (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Thomas, 2011a, Stake, 1995, Yin, 2009). Creswell (2007) reported data in qualitative studies could be grouped into four overall types of interviews, documents, observation, and audiovisual. The researcher for this study collected data from interviews and documents. A description of each data source is provided below.

**Interviews.** An interview captures information that cannot be observed (Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011a, Yin, 2009). All five students took part in a check-in interview and an ending interview, and the instructor took part in an ending interview. They were face-to-face and audio recorded on a digital audio recorder, and interviews were offered to take place in a room at the counseling center where practicum occurred. All but three interviews with students were scheduled and took place at the counseling center. Three
interviews occurred at private rooms outside the university because of student request and preference due to scheduling conflicts. The ending interview with the instructor occurred at a counseling center.

Interview notes, which are discussed in more detail later in this section, were taken during all interviews. Each participant was notified of note taking and audio recording prior to interviews. They were informed note taking and recording could be stopped any time at their request. Recordings were converted into MP3s and kept secure in an encrypted, compressed file on a password-protected laptop belonging to the researcher.

Prior to any ending interviews taking place, the researcher requested copies of each letter from the instructor. The instructor provided the letters, and the researcher brought all four letters to each final interview with students and all 20 letters to the ending interview with the instructor. Students were encouraged to bring their own copies of letters to the interviews because their copies may have had marks or notations that could be important to discuss. All five students brought all four of their own letters, but none included marks or notations.

Interviews were semi-structured (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). The researcher asked a few structured main questions and then allowed participants the opportunity to openly respond to them and for the interview to develop (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). The researcher had additional follow-up structured questions prepared for each interview if additional questions were needed to gather more information or clarify information, or if it appeared the interview would benefit from additional structured questions.
The researcher transcribed all interviews, and each transcription was secured on the same protected laptop computer. The researcher wrote a summary of each interview and offered member check opportunities to participants by email on the overall accuracy of interviews (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). More details on member checking can be found in the member checking section later in this chapter. The interviews that took place were (a) check-in interview with practicum students, (b) ending interview with practicum students, and (c) ending interview with the practicum instructor.

**Check-in interview with practicum students.** This approximate 30-minute interview occurred around week 8 of the semester (after receiving two out of four supervision letters). The check-in interview served as an additional data source occurring at a different point during the semester than the ending interview. The check-in interview also provided the researcher the opportunity to inquire about any concerns or questions from students about receiving the first two letters. Inquiring about questions or concerns at the check-in interview assisted in minimizing potential risks, harms, or discomforts to students by checking-in with them. Additionally, since the check-in interview was a source of data and since researchers begin making interpretations of data as soon as data are collected (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Thomas, 2009), it served as a valuable piece to the researcher’s initial interpretation and thoughts about the data. It is important to point out that student responses about differing reactions between supervision letter one and two during the check-in interview contributed to the addition of a question to the ending interview (see ending interview with practicum students below).
Two structured interview questions began addressing the research questions and exploring any participant questions or concerns (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). These 2 main questions were:

1. What are your thoughts about receiving supervision letters from your instructor?

2. What questions, comments, or concerns do you have about receiving supervision letters from your instructor?

The following structured questions were available as needed related to counselor development:

- As a beginning counseling student, so far, how has supervision letters influenced…
  - …Anxiety?
  - …Confidence?
  - …Professional identity?
  - …Feeling overwhelmed or frustrated?
  - …Relationship with instructor?
  - …Reflection on relational aspects of supervision or client care?

**Ending interview with practicum students.** This approximate one hour interview took place within the final 2 weeks of the semester. It was the primary verbal source of data, and it provided students the opportunity to provide a cumulative perspective on how they responded to receiving all four of the letters. It also gave students the chance to add any additional comments related to the current research study and their participation in it.
Along with the additional ending interview question that emerged based on student response during the check-in interview and written letter responses (see letter responses below), a second ending interview question was added. This additional question was based on check-in email responses from the instructor and a follow-up conversation with the instructor (see check-in emails with practicum instructor below). Both additional questions are included below in the sequence of ending interview questions. The researcher asked the following 8 (originally intended 6) main interview questions:

1. What has been your experience receiving supervision letters from your instructor?
2. What content in the supervision letters stood out most to you?
3. How did the supervision letters influence your identity as a counselor?
4. How did the supervision letters affect the counseling process with your clients?
5. How have the supervision letters influenced your development as a counselor?
6. How did your reactions to the supervision letters change over the course of the semester? (Question added due to student check-in interview and written letter responses)
7. What differences and/or similarities did the four supervision letters you received from your instructor have with any other letters you may have received during the semester? (Question added due to instructor check-in email responses and follow-up discussion)
8. What else would you like to discuss or share about receiving supervision letters from your instructor?

The following structured questions were available as needed related to counselor development:

- As a beginning counseling student, how has supervision letters influenced…
  - …Anxiety?
  - …Confidence?
  - …Professional identity?
  - …Feeling overwhelmed or frustrated?
  - …Relationship with instructor?
  - …Reflection on relational aspects of supervision or client care?

*Ending interview with practicum instructor.* This approximate one hour interview took place during the last two weeks of the semester. Interviewing the instructor was important because it added to the depth of understanding of student responses to receiving letters from their instructor by including the instructor’s perspective of student responses to receiving letters. Instructor feedback was based on observation of students and any questions or comments received from students during the semester. It is important to note the instructor did not receive specific questions or comments from students about letters during the semester. The researcher asked the following 4 main interview questions:

1. What did you notice about students receiving the supervision letters?
2. How do you believe you addressed student development in the supervision letters?

3. What stood out to you as developmental changes in the students?

4. What else would you like to discuss or share about writing supervision letters to your students during practicum?

The following structured questions were available as needed related to counselor development:

- What stood out about how the supervision letters influenced…
  - …Anxiety?
  - …Confidence?
  - …Professional identity?
  - …Feeling overwhelmed or frustrated?
  - …Supervision relationship?
  - …Relational aspects of supervision or client care?

**Documents.** If documents are available, they should be considered in a case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). They offer additional data that may confirm, conflict with, or broaden other data (Thomas, 2009, 2011a). Documents as data sources for this study included (a) letters (b) letter responses, (c) check-in emails with practicum instructor, and (d) interview notes.

**Letters and letter writing suggestions.** The instructor wrote four letters to each student. The content of the letters was included as data because they were important in how they related to student responses to them and the influence they had on student
development. The first letter was delivered during the third week of class, the second during the sixth week, the third during the ninth week, and the last the 14th week. The instructor wrote no additional letters outside of the four for the current research. It was the instructor’s preference on how formal to sign letters (i.e., first name only, first and last name, full name and title, hand-written or typed), whether to type and print or handwrite them, the length of each letter, spacing, font size, font style, and paper color. All letters were typed and did not exceed one page. All letters were delivered in an envelope.

The overall style and tone of the letters was the choice of the practicum instructor. However, at the initial meeting with the instructor prior to visiting the practicum class, the researcher discussed letter writing styles and provided basic letter writing and developmental suggestions to the instructor (See Appendix K for letter writing suggestions). The instructor did not need to follow the suggested writing process or content. The suggestions were based on a combination of fundamental principles of personal letter writing, suggestions for writing therapeutic letters, and common developmental struggles of beginning counselors reviewed in the previous chapter.

**Letter responses.** Each letter also included follow-up questions for students to answer (Appendix M). The follow-up questions were on a separate piece of paper included in the envelope along with the letter. Variations of the questions were asked as part of ending interviews noted above, but they were intended to give student participants the opportunity to write their initial responses to reading the letters. Letter responses also served as the primary source of written data for students. They provided students the
opportunity to share their responses to receiving the letters in a different format (writing) and at a different time than the check-in or ending interview. Also, since the check-in and ending interview included the researcher meeting with students, the letter responses gave the opportunity for students to share responses to the letters without the researcher being present. At the check-in interview, students brought letter responses to the first and second letters, and at the ending interview, they brought letter responses to the third and fourth letters. The researcher read the letter responses. Receiving the letter responses at the check-in interview also served as a valuable piece to the researcher’s initial interpretation and thoughts about the data and contributed to the addition of a question to the ending interview with students (see above).

The follow-up questions included instructions at the bottom of the page encouraging students to answer questions on the back of the page if additional space was needed, but no student utilized additional space. In addition, the instructions encouraged students to answer the questions immediately after reading the letter. The time-frame in which students responded was not confirmed. Even if responses to the letters were not written immediately after reading them, another format for students sharing their reaction to the letters (other than interviews) was another helpful source of data. The letter follow-up questions were:

1. How would you describe your initial reaction to reading the letter?
2. What stood out the most to you in the letter?
3. What would you have liked included in the letter?
4. What other thoughts do you have about the letter?
**Check-in emails with practicum instructor.** After the week the instructor was scheduled to deliver each letter, the researcher sent the instructor an email checking in on any concerns or questions the instructor had. The subject line of the email was “Letter Writing Check-In.” The main email content was, “What thoughts, questions, or concerns do you have about writing letters during practicum”?

The check-in emails served as an additional source of data. It also provided the opportunity for the instructor to ask questions or share any concerns during the writing of the letters. It is important to point out the instructor’s response to a check-in email led to the researcher adding an additional interview question to the ending interview with students (see above).

**Interview notes.** If possible, notes should be taken during interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). A researcher keeps interview notes in a manner determined to fit best with the current research (Patton, 2002). Including interview notes in the current research was valuable in adding depth to interview data.

Two sets of interview notes were kept. The first set of notes were kept while interviews took place. These were minimal notes in order to better listen to participants and remain attentive to them. The notes included only main ideas, questions for potential later follow-up in the interview, and behavior that stood out to the researcher during interviews, including participant non-verbal behaviors (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2004). The second set of interview notes was kept when the researcher listened to each recorded interview. These notes included voice related
aspects, such as participant intonations, hesitations, and use of silence. All interview notes were included in overall data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

The goal of analysis for a case study is to interpret all the data and generate themes from the data that relates to the case being studied (Creswell, 2007; McLeod, 2011; Stake, 1995; Thomas 2011a). This is done by developing categories and looking for similarities and differences between two or more categories and then breaking them down into smaller categories (Creswell, 2007). Interpretive inquiry is a data analysis approach that fits well with a case study because the focus of interpretive inquiry and a case study is to gain a deep understanding of what is being investigated (Thomas, 2009, 2011a). Interpretive inquiry involves interpreting data to elicit meaningful themes, and the most common method of interpretive inquiry is the constant comparative method (Thomas, 2009, 2011a). During this method, data are read through several times, coded, categorized, and compared. The constant part involves reading and rereading data; the comparative part involves comparing codes, categories, and themes that evolve from the data (Thomas, 2011a). Themes then emerge that describe the data overall and reflect the meanings participants give to a situation or event (Thomas, 2009, 2011a). Data analysis for the current research followed an interpretive inquiry approach and a constant comparative method. The researcher analyzed data from each student separately, but later analyzed across other students and within the larger case (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). Data analysis also included data obtained from the instructor.
Yin (2009) stated case study analysis is “one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing a case study” (p. 127), and because the process of data analysis is less developed than aspects such as data collection (Yin, 2009), this case study followed a general process of constant comparative data analysis discussed by Thomas (2011a). The general process discussed by Thomas (2011a) served as only a guideline, and the researcher added aspects of data analysis such as the inclusion of the researcher maintaining absence from the data for a period and the inclusion of MAXQDA-11, a qualitative data analysis program, to support the data analysis process. Following steps in data analysis added additional structure to the review, analysis, and interpretation of data. Steps the researcher took in data analysis are important to review. Figure 2 shows the steps followed in data analysis, and the steps are discussed below.

**Step one.** All available data were gathered, organized, and initially reviewed (Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). This step was done to prepare for data analysis by making sure all data sources were present and available for review and to begin organizing it all for analysis. All available data included:

- Check-in interview transcripts
- Ending interview transcripts
- Letters (total of 20)
- Letter responses (total of 20)
- Check-in interview notes
- Ending interview notes
- Check-in email responses
Step two. Two databases were created for each student and the instructor (Thomas, 2011a). The databases were labeled “raw” and “working.” Raw data included all the original data that were kept separate and untouched, while working data were reviewed, changed, highlighted, or written on as needed. The database for the working
data included codes, categories, and researcher interpretations of patterns and themes (Thomas, 2011a). A raw database was created in order to always have a copy of data available in case there was a need for the researcher to refer back to the raw data if working data would ever become corrupted (Thomas, 2011a). Working data did not become corrupt, and the researcher did not need to refer back to raw data during data analysis. Working and raw data were kept in two locations. One location was an encrypted, password protected USB drive. The second location was on the researcher’s password protected laptop computer in encrypted folders. Data in these two locations were organized according to each student (using pseudonyms), and each folder contained sub-folders for each data source. A folder with sub-folders was also kept for the instructor (using pseudonym).

**Step three.** A copy of working data were also imported as separate documents into MAXQDA-11 for the researcher to review (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). MAXQDA-11 was installed on the same laptop computer noted above. Access to data in MAXQDA-11 was also password protected. The program provided the opportunity to generate various reports (discussed in later steps) that aided organization of codes, the organization of categories, and the development of themes.

Through MAXQDA-11, the researcher read all data, selecting/highlighting one word, multiple words, entire lines, or whole paragraphs that could be important or seemed to hold meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Saldana, 2013). Each source of data was reviewed separately, and with each selected/highlighted word, words, or line, initial codes were noted for data in MAXQDA-11 (Thomas, 2011a). Merriam
(2009) identified coding of anything that “might be important” (p. 178) as Open Coding. The researcher reflected on whether or not each section, line, or word of data really said what was initially interpreted (Thomas, 2011a). After comparing and contrasting the initial codes with the reflection of them, codes emerged from the data and were referred to as “temporary constructs” (Thomas, 2011a, p. 172).

**Step four.** After temporary constructs emerged from the data, no data were looked at for at least two weeks. Maintaining separation from the data after the creation of temporary constructs created distance between the researcher and the data, and this helped the researcher approach the data from a different perspective during the second read through.

**Step five.** The researcher read the working data a second time through MAXQDA-11, paying attention to the initial codes and comparing them to responses to the second read through (Thomas, 2011a). Not looking at the data for a period discussed in step four, reading the original data again, coding the same data, and then comparing the codes from both readings was similar to a process Baxter and Jack (2008) identified as “double coding” (p. 556). To support the second read through in confirming a code, eliminating a code, or revising a code, the researcher also created a document through MAXQDA-11 entitled “Word Frequency” to analyze all data for word frequency. The purposes of this was to help ensure the researcher coded all units of data that seemed relevant, to verify codes from the read through, and to confirm all relevant word or words were included in data analysis. The word frequency document consisted of a list of words from all data sources, the frequency of usage of each word, and in what data
source the word was used. Codes were confirmed, eliminated, or revised, and codes not reinforced during the second read through were removed or renamed. The original list of temporary constructs was kept just in a case there was a need to reference them later and compare changes (Thomas, 2011a); however, there was not a need to reference the list.

**Step six.** After codes were confirmed, eliminated, or renamed, a list of codes called “second-order constructs” (Thomas, 2011a, p. 172) was created that seemed to summarize important aspects of the data. The researcher then began grouping second-order constructs together that seemed to fit together until it seemed constructs captured the essence of the data (Thomas, 2011a). Merriam (2009) identified this type of coding as Axial Coding. The goal of Axial Coding is to develop initial categories, including any subcategories, and to look for patterns that will become themes (Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2013).

To support the grouping of second-order constructs, the researcher created a MAXQDA-11 document for each student called “Document Variables.” This listed all data sources for each student and the number of codes in each data source. This document verified that codes from all available data sources were considered in data analysis. To also support the grouping of second-order constructs, the researcher then created for each student another document through MAXQDA-11 entitled, “Coded Segments.” The document listed all coded sections of data across all data sources. “Document Variables” and “Coded Segments” provided the researcher the opportunity to look though second-order constructs again and assisted in comparing all data sources for each student. Along with reviewing “Coded Segments” through MAXQDA-11, the
researcher also printed the “Coded Segments” document for each student (with pseudonyms). Reviewing “Coded Segments” on paper further assisted the researcher in looking over second-order constructs again and to begin grouping codes. The researcher then began grouping codes for each student into categories.

As the instructor was also a participant in the current research, the researcher completed data analysis steps three through six for all instructor data as well, including the creation of supportive MAXQDA-11 documents.

**Step seven.** After grouping second-order constructs for each student, the researcher then cross-analyzed the groupings among students (Creswell, 2007; Thomas, 2011a) to see how they related to each other and to see how the results related to the whole case (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009). Second-order constructs from instructor data were also included in this. A document through MAXQDA-11 assisted with cross-analysis. It was called “Matrix of Code Frequencies.” This provided a list of all codes, all students, the instructor, and all data sources. It assisted the researcher in looking at all data together when cross-analyzing and grouping.

The comparison of groupings also allowed the researcher to explore similarities and differences (Merriam, 2002). Discrepancies were reviewed for accuracy. Groupings were then organized into initial themes that reflected the overall patterns and meanings of the data (Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). The researcher referred to the review literature for assistance in labeling themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2004), but themes were ultimately based on the data (Merriam, 2009).
The labeling of themes is often identified as Selective Coding, and the goal is to construct “themes that capture some reoccurring pattern that cuts across your data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 181). A graph was created through Microsoft Word that contained a list of themes. Having a list of themes, including similarities and differences within themes, assisted in the next two steps of data analysis.

**Step eight.** Reflection on the themes took place next. While thinking about the themes, the researcher looked for (a) how themes related, (b) what themes agreed, (c) what themes contradicted each other, and (d) any sub-themes (Thomas, 2011a). Themes were considered “final.”

Although themes were considered “final,” as Merriam (2009) discussed, theme names may go through revisions up until writing-up of the findings. Some theme names for the current research were slightly revised for wording leading up to and including the writing-up of findings. Themes were renamed throughout the process because of researcher continual reflection on the themes.

**Step nine.** The researcher then looked at how themes applied to the research questions and the intent of the current research (Merriam, 2009). The “graph” mentioned in step seven was referenced in support of how themes applied. The themes addressed how students responded to receiving supervision letters and what aspects of the letters affected their development as counselor trainees. This included similarities and differences within each theme. Including this within themes showed what Ryan and Bernard (2003) referred to as “manifestation of expressions in data” (p. 86) and “degrees of strength in themes” (p. 91).
Step ten. Sections of data that reinforced themes related to the research questions were then selected (Thomas, 2011a). Merriam (2009) discussed the amount of supporting data to include should be enough to support themes, yet not too much to burden the reader. Sections of data supported themes and clarified ways they connected with or conflicted with each other as well as connected to the research questions (Thomas, 2011a).

Credibility and Trustworthiness

The credibility of a study and the level of trust a reader can have in the results are important concerns to address (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2009, 2011a; Yin, 2009). The quality of the current research was addressed through the primary methods of (a) member checking, (b) triangulation, and (c) peer debriefing.

Member Checking

Member checking involves asking participants after an interview if the researcher’s interpretation of the interview matches what the participant understood and intended the content of the interviews to be (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). Member checking is one of the most important techniques to strengthen credibility of researcher interpretations of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995).

Member checking was offered to all participants after the check-in and ending interviews. Within 1 week of the completion of the check-in interviews and within 2 weeks after the completion of the ending interviews, each participant was emailed a summary of the interview as a document attachment. Check-in interview member checks
were one page in length, and ending interview member checks ranged from two pages to three pages in length. Summaries described participant responses to interview questions, as well as occasional participant quotes from interviews. Participants were asked to review the summary for overall accuracy of interview content. The researcher requested that participants email confirmation of interview accuracy or point out needed corrections within 1 week.

One student responded to the member check to the check-in interview and ending interview, and one other student responded to the member check to the check-in interview. In all three member check responses, students reported the interview summaries reflected accurately their recollection of the interviews. Any feedback, especially changes to overall interview content would have been added to interview data, and it would have been considered in the overall analysis of data. No feedback or corrections needed added to interview data. Although there was a limited number of responses to interview summaries by participants, student reports that interview summaries were accurate provided some support that researcher interpretations of interviews matched with student recollection of interviews.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is essential in case studies because it reduces researcher misinterpretation and bias by checking to see if researchers are correct in interpretation of study data (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). Thomas (2016) discussed triangulation as similar to the idea of the "polyhedron of intelligibility" (p. 67), and this means that to really understand something, it needs looked at from different
perspectives and through different methods. Triangulation provides the opportunity to see data from different angles (Thomas, 2009), and it can include triangulation of data source, methodology, investigator, and theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2009). Data source and methodology triangulation were used in this study.

**Data source.** The goal of data source triangulation is to see if data will have similar meaning when considered from different perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011a; Yin, 2009). The current research consisted of more than one student, and each student provided a different perspective of the case of receiving supervision letters from a practicum instructor. The current research also included the perspective of the instructor who wrote and delivered the letters to students. Each perspective, including similarities and differences, was considered in how it all fit into the entire case (Thomas, 2011a).

**Methodology.** Methodology triangulation is when multiple methods are used to collect data and to investigate the case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2009). One aspect that differentiates a case study from other forms of research is a case study typically uses multiple methods of collecting data (Thomas, 2011a). As discussed above, various data collection methods were used, including interviews, letters, letter responses, and interview notes. All available data were considered during data analysis.

**Peer Debriefing**

Peer debriefing strengthens a study by giving a researcher an objective person with whom to confidentially discuss the study (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
This helps the researcher stay aware of bias, test data interpretations, and consider his or her emotions toward the study (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The peer debriefer for this study was a colleague of the researcher. The peer debriefer had an earned doctorate degree in counselor education and supervision, was an independently licensed counselor, was certified to provide clinical supervision in the counseling profession, had experience in the case study approach, and had experience in qualitative data collection and analysis methods. The researcher spoke with the peer debriefer throughout data collection, data analysis, and during the writing of the results. Meetings, conversations, or email took place at least one time per month to discuss the researcher’s thoughts and reactions of the study up to that point. Meetings and conversations occurred through a variety of methods, including over the phone, by Skype, in person, and by email. The researcher included a diary entry for each contact with the peer debriefer.

**Delimitations**

Due to potential differing program standards, counseling programs not currently accredited by CACREP were not considered for this study. In addition, school counseling practicum courses were not considered because school counseling practicum involves different experiences than clinical mental health counseling. Counseling programs without an internal site/clinic for practicum students to complete practicum hours were not considered because this would have changed the boundedness of the case and instructor feedback due to the limit the instructor would have had to review recordings of sessions practicum students have with clients. The instructor had
experience with or interest in therapeutic letter writing or letter writing in the context of counseling supervision.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the single case of supervision letters to practicum students from their instructor. The case was bound by the parameters of context and activity. The current research investigated how practicum students responded to receiving supervision letters from their instructor and what it was about letters that influenced their development. The current research included individual practicum students enrolled in the mental health practicum course, along with the instructor. Qualitative data collection methods of interviewing and document review were applied. Each student took part in one check-in interview and one ending interview, and the instructor took part in one ending interview. Students also answered four questions in writing in response to each of four letters. Data analysis followed qualitative methods and recommendations for the constant comparative method. Available methods to improve credibility and trustworthiness were taken by the researcher in an attempt to ensure the most trustworthy and credible study based on the available data. The results of data analysis are discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

This chapter describes the results of data collection and analysis methods discussed in the previous chapter. The results address the following two research questions:

1. How do practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor?
2. What aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees?

Four themes emerged from data related to research question one, and four themes emerged from data related to research question two. In addition to the four themes for each research question, a supplemental theme emerged. A review of themes, along with supporting data for each theme follows.

Research Question One

Four themes emerged from data related to the research question, “How do practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor?” The four themes were common to all five students. However, within each theme there were similarities and differences of expression. The description of themes includes both similarities and differences because it adds depth to each theme and to how students responded to receiving supervision letters from the instructor.

Additionally, the description of themes includes relevant feedback from the instructor. Including this offers an opportunity to add depth while providing a supportive
or a contradictory perspective. In addition, because the supervision letters were considered data for this study, aspects of letters that were seen by the researcher as relevant to themes are included within the description of themes.

The four themes that emerged in response to research question one were (a) students valued receiving letters and looked forward to receiving them, (b) students desired more feedback from letters, (c) students experienced emotional reactions that varied among letters and each other, and (d) students recognized the influence letters had on counselor development.

**Theme One: Students Valued Receiving Letters and Looked Forward to Receiving Them**

The first theme that emerged from data related to the research question, “How do practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor” was that they valued receiving letters and looked forward to receiving them.

**Similarities.** All five students discussed the value of receiving letters. Quinn shared, “It helped with the semester” and added, “I also enjoyed reading what I could do to advance in my practicum work.” Pat stated, “I did enjoy feedback. I did enjoy it,” and Alex stated, “I liked them.” Chris also reported that she liked receiving supervision letters when she wrote, “Nice experience to receive a letter” and “I really enjoyed receiving and reading my letter.”

Chris provided a summary of the value she experienced when she wrote, “I really enjoyed receiving letters throughout the semester and this one is no different.” Chris also shared that receiving a letter was like receiving a gift when she stated, “I really liked it.
Is kind of like a little Christmas present.” Additionally, Riley stated, “I think it was overall a good experience. I liked it.”

All five students also valued letters to the extent of being excited and looking forward to receiving them. Alex wrote, “I felt excited to receive my first letter” and “I felt excited to read what she has to say. I couldn’t wait to get my letter!” Alex also stated, “I’ve found myself really excited to open the second one. So she put it in my box, and I ran over to it to see what’s in it. So, I find them something to look forward to and helpful.” Additionally, Alex shared her interest in receiving the last two letters when she stated, “I’m excited to read the third and fourth letter. I’m like alright, I’m waiting!”

Riley shared her excitement to receive a letter when she wrote, “After receiving my first letter I found myself excited and anticipating receiving my second supervision letter.” Riley also stated, “Looking forward to getting those letters, you know, the four letters, and you know, when will the next one come?” Chris shared her excitement as well when she stated, “I’ve looked forward to them I guess, like more and more.”

Quinn shared looking forward to them more out of curiosity when she stated, “I think she’s giving it to us next week, so it will be interesting to see that one. It should be interesting to see what she says.” Quinn also shared her general curiosity about the letters when she stated, “I was always just curious to see what she was going to say.” Pat expressed looking forward to receiving letters, but it was also more related to curiosity when she wrote, “Curious how I set the tone or what was said to set it.” Pat appeared to be referencing letter one and a sentence that read, “Thank you for setting that tone!”
From Mel’s perspective, all five students seemed to look forward to receiving letters. She explained, “But just in class, they just seemed eager to get them. I think I was handing them out the one week, and the one person commented, where’s mine, where’s mine!” Additionally, Mel discussed a time when she asked students about preferences to receiving letters,

> Do you want me to just put it in your folder and you can look at it later, or do you want me to hand it? They’re no, no, hand it to me! Cause they really were looking forward to reading it and seeing what was in the letter. So that’s, I think, the biggest impression I got, in terms of their receiving the supervision letters.

So, it seemed to resonate with them. (Mel)

**Differences.** With Chris as the exception, four out of five students shared that along with valuing the receipt of letters, they also valued the “idea” of receiving supervision letters. Quinn stated, “I think the idea of it is good.” Pat stated, “I think it’s a good idea. Yea, really, I think it’s a good idea.” Pat added though that the idea of receiving supervision letters may depend on the instructor having sufficient time to write them when she stated, “I can see where it could be very helpful if given enough time allotted for that. For the actual process.” Additionally, Alex wrote, “I can definitely see how beneficial they could be” and when she stated, “Overall, I really love the concept.” Riley also shared that she valued the idea of receiving letters when she stated, “I think that was good, but I mean I like the idea of it, definitely.”

Alex and Riley discussed valuing receiving letters so much that they developed an interest in writing letters to clients. Alex explained,
I pulled out all the things I noticed that were good about them, and that could’ve been very well do to this…that’s what she did in a lot of these, and I did that in my last session, because it is helpful. I mean I had everything written for them.

(Alex)

Riley added, “Like it influenced us in wanting to write to them.” Pat, Chris, and Quinn did not share a desire to write letters to clients, but based on her observation, Mel shared that it seemed like all five students wanted to write letters to clients.

It seemed like they really valued the experience of being on the receiving end of that, and so they wanted to then do that with their clients. So, it kind of gave them the sense that, yea, this is something that, you know, I know how I benefited from receiving it, I’d really like to share that with my clients. (Mel)

Alex was the only student who reported valuing the letters to the point of wanting them included in other counseling classes. She stated, “You wish it was something all your professors would write.” Alex further explained how she viewed the letters fitting in with a practicum class compared to other counseling classes,

I mean, practicum is obviously the best-case scenario because it’s small. It’s a small class. So, it’s better writing five, but if it were, you know, an elective class where forty-five people were sitting in it, that would be a little more difficult, and not realistic. But it is something that you wish you could receive, just because, it might just be me, but I love the feedback. I wish it were implemented elsewhere. (Alex)
Although all five students overall valued receiving supervision letters, with the exception of Quinn, four students shared that one or more letters was more valuable to them than other letters. Pat stated, “Like the last letter was, I thought, very helpful.” Pat also shared preferring two letters when she stated, “I have to say the first and the last letters I felt were the best.” Alex singled-out one letter when she stated, “This one was, this one was the most helpful for me.” Chris referenced a single letter when she stated, “I know for sure the very last one she sent was really helpful.” Also, when discussing a letter she preferred, Riley stated, “Definitely the last letter.”

**Theme Two: Students Desired More Feedback From Letters**

The second theme that emerged from data related to the research question, “How do practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor” was that they desired more feedback from letters.

**Similarities.** All five students discussed a desire that the letters include more feedback from the instructor. The desired feedback was related to counseling skills and performance in counseling sessions. Quinn stated, “So maybe if she would’ve included more stuff like that, then that would’ve been good.” In a written response, Alex wrote, “I would have liked feedback specific to what I’m doing well w/individual clients. Is there any skill I’m really doing well with as evidenced by . . .?” Regarding how the letters would be more useful to her with additional details, Alex explained, With details. Yea. Yea. So that would be my only extra comment, is that I find them valuable, and I can see how—if done the way I would prefer—they could be just like out of this world helpful. (Alex)
Chris also shared that she wanted more feedback when she wrote, “I would have liked the letter to include a few areas in which I could improve.” Chris also wrote in another letter response, “It might have been helpful if the letter had included any reflections or reactions to things that have been happening during sessions with my clients.”

Additionally, Riley discussed wanting more details in the letters when she stated, “Maybe just more about, like some of the specific counseling skills that she sees me using in session.” Riley also wrote, “I would have liked to hear more specific feedback on a skill I am using appropriately or have improved.”

Pat wrote in a letter response, “Mention of any obvious weakness to improve or to consider improving.” She shared what she wanted more of when she wrote in another letter response, “Specific strengths” and “Areas to focus on for improvement.” Pat also stated, “How can I make it better. You know.”

**Differences.** Along with wanting more feedback from the letters, Riley and Chris discussed wanting more feedback by receiving more actual letters. Riley stated, “I think it would definitely be really nice if it was more.” Riley expanded on this by sharing how often she would have wanted to receive a letter. She stated, “Getting them weekly would definitely be really nice.” Because of the amount of work Riley perceived it would be on an instructor to write letters weekly, she later added, “Maybe just like one or two more scattered in there.” Chris also shared that she wanted more letters when she stated, “If she had given us more than just four, that would’ve been nice too.”
Alex, Quinn, and Pat shared being okay with the number of letters received. Alex stated, “I would say, yea, four was fine.” However, she also added, “I think it would be less effective if there were less. I wouldn’t go less.” Quinn stated, “I think four is good,” and Pat stated, “I think that four was good.”

Along with wanting more feedback on areas of improvement and on strengths in the letters she did receive, Pat was the only student who shared that she also wanted feedback that corresponded with common developmental moments in counselor training. Pat explained,

Kind of following a purpose, or those mile markers, the objectives, that certain objectives are met within the learning experience would’ve been helpful from the student’s point of view, to be able to see how that was achieved and get the letter in response to that. (Pat)

Pat added that addressing developmental aspects in letters could be done with the help of developmental questions when she stated, “I think that, standardized questions or points that are centered around different milestones within the program would be quite helpful.”

**Theme Three: Students Experienced Emotional Reactions That Varied Among Letters and Each Other**

The third theme that emerged from data related to the research question, “How do practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor” was that they experienced emotional reactions that varied among letters and each other.

**Similarities.** All five students discussed their emotional reactions varied among letters. Quinn stated, “I think the first one was more of a negative feeling, and the second
one was a little more positive.” Quinn further explained her reaction to all four of the letters,

So, maybe this one would’ve been more negative. This one I guess would’ve been more positive. This one was kind of, like, I was a little bit more hard on myself, I guess. So, maybe it probably went, negative—positive—negative—positive. (Quinn)

Pat wrote in a letter response, “Reaction was a bit less enthusiastic this time partly because I feel less confident than I initially felt early in the semester.” Pat also shared her experience of feeling misunderstood when she stated, “These distortions are more of a challenge trying to understand. And, you know, how to process that. There was more time spent on processing.” Pat was referencing that she believed at least one letter did not accurately reflect how she viewed herself at that time. However, although Pat shared experiencing less positive feelings due to feeling misunderstood, she shared that her experience reading other letters led to different feelings when she stated, “Where these were like, oh yea! Or, oh, how nice!”

Chris shared that feelings toward the letters changed over time when she stated, “I definitely think it got more positive.” Chris further discussed this when she shared, “It was nice getting the first letter, but the other ones were definitely more, like had a bigger impact I guess.” Although Riley stated, “It was always a good experience,” she also discussed changes in her emotional reactions. Riley explained,

I think that after my first one, I was super-excited to get my second one because I wasn’t really working with clients during the first one. I am so excited to get my
second one because I will be working with clients by then, so I’m excited to see how the feedback will change. And then, my second one, it wasn’t that much more personal, so I was like, ok. Now, I’m excited for the third one. The third one wasn’t as personal as I would’ve wanted either. So the fourth one, then at that point, I was like, oh, I’m not really expecting it. (Riley)

Alex wrote in one letter response, “I continue to feel like they have a positive impact,” and she wrote in another letter response, “I felt somewhat disappointed by this letter because it still didn’t include specific client feedback.” Alex also shared being irritated with a specific letter when she stated, “So this one, it was general. And I was irritated by that because I wanted more specifics.” Alex further explained changes in emotional reactions to supervision letters,

Yea, the first one, I didn’t know what to expect, so I just took it and read it, and I was like, oh, that’s nice. I liked it at the time. I thought it was cool. And then I was like super-excited to get this one. I saw her put it in my mailbox, so, I like ran over to go get it. And then I read it, and I was like, oh, that’s nice. And then, this one was nice because, I was struggling so badly. I just was discouraged, so this one was nice to read at the time. And then I got this one, and I was like, oh, ok, yea, that one’s pivotal. And that one, I was like, uhhhhh. I didn’t like the fourth one. (Alex)

All five students discussed experiencing a positive emotional reaction to at least two letters. However how students described a positive reaction varied. Quinn shared that letters helped her to feel motivated when she stated, “There’d be little pieces that
would like motivate you, that I can do this, and like, I have gotten this far, and I like will get through this.” Pat wrote in one letter response, “Felt supported, validated, and enlightened,” and she wrote in another letter response, “This letter was some of the encouragement I have needed for some time.” Pat also stated, “So to get that kind of feedback was real, makes you feel warm and fuzzy.”

Alex shared that a letter was like an emotional boost. She wrote, “They particularly help when in need of a pick-me-up.” Alex explained further,

It was a pick-me-up that was welcomed. I mean, it was definitely something where you look forward to getting them because you knew they were going to have things in there that were reaffirming…and at any point when you’re that overwhelmed and that frustrated, anything that’s positive is welcomed. So, that would be how I would say throughout all the chaos they were just like a pick-me-up. I don’t know what the clinical term for a pick-me-up is. (Alex)

Chris wrote in a letter response, “I felt validated because my instructor pointed out that I did have some challenging experiences.” Chris further discussed feeling validated when she stated, “Validation eight times. You know, just validating that what I’m doing is actually useful.” Additionally, Riley wrote in a letter response, “After reading the letter I felt a sense of encouragement and support.”

**Differences.** No letter was experienced the same by all five students. Regarding the first letter, Quinn stated that her response was “more of a negative feeling,” and while Chris reported liking the first letter, she stated that other letters “had a bigger impact I guess.” For the second letter, Quinn reported a positive response, whereas Pat stated that
her response was “a bit less enthusiastic.” Regarding the third letter, Pat wrote being “neither impressed or not,” and Quinn stated that her response was “negative.” However, Alex referred to the third letter as, “The most helpful for me” and “Pivotal.” For the fourth letter, Pat stated, “The last letter was, I thought, very helpful” and, “I have to say the first and the last letters I felt were the best.” However, Alex stated, “I didn’t like the fourth one.” Riley discussed that she looked forward to receiving the fourth letter because she wanted to compare the first letter to the fourth one, and when discussing her reaction, Riley shared preferring “definitely the last letter.”

Riley was the only student to share that she experienced a physical reaction when reading letters. She stated, “I would smile when I read them. It would make me feel good.” Riley also wrote, “My supervisor’s enthusiasm in the letter helped to put a smile on my face when reading the letter.” Additionally, Riley wrote in a letter response, “I felt a smile on my face when reading that my supervisor thought I was ready to move on.”

Also, Riley was the only student to share that she felt unique in comparison to others in practicum who did not receive letters, although she referenced other students taking part in the current research feeling similar. Riley explained,

It made us feel like special I guess. And then a lot of people, like almost seemed like a little bit, I don’t know if jealous, but like, well what is it? Like, you know, wanting to know more about it. (Riley)

Quinn and Pat were the only two students who discussed that some of the negative feelings they experienced may have been influenced by when they read the letters. Regarding one particular letter, Pat stated, “I was in a lot of pain when I read it, and that
was probably not a good approach.” Quinn shared that she read a letter around other students as they also read their letters, and that this may have influenced her reaction to her own letter. Quinn explained, “Whereas the second one, it probably works a little better to read it by yourself; then you don’t have the impact of other people, what they’re saying and what they’re getting from it.” Regarding a negative feeling due to receiving and reading a letter, Pat was the only student who added that the opportunity to write back to the instructor for clarification or sharing could have been beneficial. Pat explained,

If I had had an opportunity or a way to respond and say, you know, I don’t see it that way, I think that we could’ve both understood. We could’ve looked at that difference and been able to do something about it. Like the difference between the view here and my view. (Pat)

Theme Four: Students Recognized the Influence Letters had on Counselor Development

The fourth theme that emerged from data related to the research question, “How do practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor” was that they recognized the influence letters had on counselor development.

Similarities. All five students reported recognizing the influence letters had on the development of confidence. Quinn shared that a letter answered questions she had about how she was doing as a counselor when she stated, “I wonder if my approach is good, does she like it? If she don’t, I don’t really know. So, I got the letter, and I was like, that’s good, you like it.”
Alex shared that the content from a specific letter helped with her confidence when she stated, “She put in here that she sees I’m feeling more confident and comfortable. And I was.” Alex was referencing the content of a letter that read, “I’m seeing you feeling more confident and comfortable as you get to know your clients and start to conceptualize their presenting concerns and how you might be more helpful to them. That’s great to see!” Alex discussed the impact the letters had on her confidence to continue with practicum when she stated, “And when you’re having a day where you feel like you want to quit, and you get a letter that brings out those better things, it’s invaluable.”

Chris also discussed increased confidence when she stated, “I feel more confident after getting the letters, so I feel like that has to help me help them better.” Additionally, Chris stated, “It’s definitely given me more confidence to kind of be myself in sessions,” and Chris later added, “So, yea, I think just overall more confidence to be, like, myself, and not try to do all these other things that I don’t particularly care for.”

Pat discussed confidence in working with classmates when she stated, “That increased the comfort there, maybe the confidence there in that side of the counseling, you want to call it a wall, I know I called it a hat, but let’s call it a wall.” Riley explained how a specific letter addressed confidence and her response to it,

What stood out most to me in the third letter was her talking about my confidence with my skills, and I think that was a big deal, cause going into practicum all we had was really textbook knowledge. So I felt I was kind of doubting myself, and thinking I didn’t really know enough to start working with clients. And I did
become more confident, and she noticed that. So, that was a huge compliment.

(Riley)

The line in the letter Riley was referencing read, “I see you developing more confidence in your skills and in your ability to conceptualize what is happening with your clients.”

**Differences.** Confidence was the only area of development recognized by all five students. Other areas were recognized, but they differed among students. This included the areas of identity, awareness, the supervision relationship, and anxiety.

Pat, Chris, and Riley recognized the influence the letters had on identity. Pat shared that her identity related to counseling was in many ways associated with how she viewed herself among others when she stated, “My identity of myself among my colleagues was improved through these letters.” Chris discussed the influence the supervision letters had on identity related to how she approached counseling sessions when she stated, “It’s helping me like kind of incorporate that into what I’m viewing my identity as a counselor, what it’s becoming.” Riley discussed that supervision letters had an influence on how she saw her “fit” with the counseling profession. She stated, “Receiving that support helps to confirm that I am doing the right thing being in this profession.”

Quinn, Chris, and Pat recognized how the letters helped increase their awareness during practicum. Quinn shared her response to reading a specific letter when she stated, “After reading this letter I really started to think about my theoretical orientation.” Additionally, when referencing another specific letter, Quinn stated, “And I remember reading it thinking, gosh, I didn’t realize I was like, such a visible disaster.” The line
Quinn referenced was, “These last few weeks have been very challenging for you and I see your determination to get done what needs to get done.”

Chris also discussed increased awareness when she stated, “I think that it just made me more aware of when, like, when what I was doing was effective, especially in terms of silence.” Pat referenced a specific letter when she stated, “There was even a surprise in there that, you know, some of the things that I didn’t know came out in that letter.” Pat further explained how two letters in particular increased her overall awareness during practicum,

There were things that were mentioned in both of them that I was not aware of.
They were positive attributes that she placed on me that, it’s like, oh! That’s cool.
Ok. So, it was things that I was not aware of, in both of them, that contributed to the camaraderie in the classroom. Ahh, cool! (Pat)

The supervision relationship was an area of development recognized by four out of five students, with Pat as the exception. Mel provided group supervision to all five students, and the supervision relationship referenced is the supervision relationship with Mel as the instructor. Mel was also the individual supervisor for three out of five students.

Quinn stated, “It probably in some senses helped to maybe trust her a little bit more.” Alex also shared the influence letters had on the supervision relationship when she stated, “I think it improved it. Like it’s already good, and it’s developing, but I feel like it definitely helps to improve it.” She also stated, “I’d say they strengthened our
relationship in terms of like, she told me what I needed to hear, and, I mean whether you want to hear it or not.”

Riley discussed the influence letters had on the supervision relationship when she stated,

I think that the letters did impact the relationship because it made me realize that she is giving a lot of individualized attention to each of us with our growth, and you know, seeing how we’re doing and watching how we’ve developed. (Riley)

Riley further explained,

But then I also think the letters also, like we talk about rapport with our clients, but I think they help build rapport with her as a supervisor because she is getting to know us on a different level than a lot of other people do. And seeing her show that in letters was cool. (Riley)

Chris also shared that receiving letters influenced the supervision relationship, but she also added how they influenced her relationship with clients when she stated, “You know, just in general, I think it helped improve both with my instructor and with my clients.”

Chris, Alex, and Riley discussed that the letters influenced how they dealt with anxiety. Chris stated, “But like reading that, it’s like no, ok, this is still being effective, so it definitely has made me less anxious going into sessions.” Additionally, Chris wrote in a letter response that what stood out to her in a letter was, “Anxiety is normal.” The letter Chris referenced included the line, “As we discussed in class, that anxiety is perfectly normal.”
Alex wrote in a letter response, “I did have some anxiety when I first began seeing clients so it was nice to read my confidence was becoming noticeable.” A line in the letter included the instructor pointing out a positive change in responding to anxiety; the line read, “I know you expressed anxiety in your initial sessions with clients, but I’m seeing you feeling more confident and comfortable.” Riley acknowledged experiencing anxiety at the beginning of practicum and what it was about letters that encouraged her when she stated, “Keep doing what you’re doing, like, cause there was a lot of anxiety beginning practicum, with like, I don’t really know what I’m doing at all.”

Mel shared her observation of initial anxiety experienced by students when she stated, “They were anxious because they didn’t have clients.” Mel explained her intent in the letters to address this initial anxiety,

There was some anxiety, you know, they all had that internal anxiety about seeing clients for the first time, and getting the first clients. So I addressed that in the letters (Mel).

**Research Question Two**

Four themes emerged from data related to the research question, “What aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees?” The four themes were common to all five students. Just like with research question one, within each theme there were similarities and differences of expression. The description of themes then also includes both similarities and differences because it adds depth to each theme and to what aspects of letters influenced development of students as counselor trainees.
Also, similar to the description of themes related to research question one, the themes below include relevant feedback from the instructor. Including relevant instructor feedback also offers an opportunity to add depth while providing a supportive or a contradictory perspective. Because the supervision letters are considered data for this study, aspects of them seen by the researcher as relevant to themes are also included.

The four themes that emerged in response to research question two were (a) individualized/personalized feedback was “evidence” of the instructor paying attention, (b) specific words and writing style stood out, (c) being in writing and the ability to reread letters, and (d) additional instructor perspective and feedback was another form of support.

**Theme One: Individualized/Personalized Feedback was “Evidence” of the Instructor Paying Attention**

The first theme that emerged from data related to the research question, “What aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees” was that individualized/personalized feedback was “evidence” of the instructor paying attention.

**Similarities.** All five students discussed how individualized / personalized feedback in letters reflected that the instructor was paying attention to them as individuals. When asked about her experience receiving supervision letters, Quinn stated, “I think that helps, that she like personalizes the letters.” Quinn further explained the value personalizing the letters had, “I think it just makes me feel like it’s worthwhile. Cause I just don’t think it would have, like any impact if like it wasn’t personalized. I
don’t think it would have any impact.” Quinn also shared that personalized feedback showed that her instructor was paying attention when she stated, “I guess for me, it was maybe helpful to see how much she’s noticing or like trying to pay attention.”

Pat wrote in a letter response, “My efforts as a student were recognized in the last paragraph, especially.” Pat also shared that letters confirmed that her instructor noticed how she wanted to come across during practicum. Pat stated, “With letters especially, confirming that you are being authentic, and not only does the supervisor notice it, but she notices your colleagues also noticing it.”

Alex stated, “They definitely feel like they were individual to me, and she talks about my personality.” She expanded on this comment when she stated, “I mean she couldn’t have copied and pasted that, and it wouldn’t have applied to anyone else.” Alex further explained the evidence the letters were for her,

It was evidence that my professor was listening and paying attention. I mean she was definitely paying attention, and that was nice, because that’s the type of class that’s so tight-knit, if she weren’t paying attention, I’d have been a loss. So, the fact she was listening and paying attention. (Alex)

Chris discussed that letters being personalized reflected that her instructor was thinking about only her and not comparing her to anyone else. She explained,

I think the letters helped feel like I was getting more direct attention, I guess. Cause even for, you know, ten minutes or however long it took her to write these, she was just thinking about me and my growth and stuff, and so it was nice to get
that side versus just, like, well here’s your experience, now let’s compare it to everybody. Like ohhhh, let’s just focus on me for a second. (Chris)

Riley stated, “It reaffirmed I noticed the effort you’re putting in,” and she wrote in a letter response, “I again enjoyed receiving the letters and seeing how much my supervisor has watched me grow as a professional.” Riley also shared what she thought of the added attention from her instructor over the entire semester. She stated, “I think it means a lot to me that she noticed that, you know, at the beginning and then she continued to notice that, and then reminded me of it.”

Mel explained her attempt to make the letters personalized / individualized for all five students so the letters reflected student unique experiences and her being attentive to their experiences,

I was trying to tailor it to each student, to make it meaningful. Because although they were all in the same classroom, and they were in the experience, it was impacting each of them differently. And they each had unique challenges based on the clients that they were working with. (Mel)

Differences. Along with letters being “evidence” of the instructor paying attention, Quinn and Riley added that the perceived effort the writer makes to personalize/individualize a letter could make a difference. Quinn stated, “If she weren’t putting effort into, like what she was writing, then I think it would have like no impact.” Riley further added that letters provided an opportunity for the instructor to think more about individual students when writing them. She explained,
I think it also allows the opportunity for your supervisor to really like think about your progress and think about you as an individual student. Like intentionally paying attention to changes and stuff like that. And putting a little bit more effort into it. (Riley)

Pat, Alex, and Chris did not discuss their perception of the instructor’s effort in writing the letters.

**Theme Two: Specific Words and Writing Style Stood Out**

The second theme that emerged from data related to the research question, “What aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees,” was specific words and writing style stood out.

**Similarities.** All five students discussed that specific words stood out in the letters. This included sentences, statements, paragraphs, or sections. Referencing a specific letter, Quinn stated, “Like that last paragraph I think was the paragraph I more responded to. Like to take away with you, like take some time to actually think about the entire semester.” During an interview, Quinn read a portion of the paragraph that stood out to her. It read, “I hope you had an opportunity to reflect on what you’ve learned about yourself as a counselor in training.” Quinn also pointed out that in each letter words stood out to her in some way. She stated, “I think I probably had a sentence or a phrase, or an idea that I identified with and that I probably carry, that I would like think about.”

Pat wrote in a letter response, “My efforts as a student were recognized in the last paragraph.” Referencing a specific statement in a letter, Pat also stated, “My
commitment to self-care, you know. It’s like, oh! Cool! That was a cool statement.”

The statement Pat referred to read, “Your commitment to self-care has also set a positive example that I hope they follow; thank you for modeling that!”

Chris discussed sentences being helpful when she stated, “Especially getting a particular sentence that really helped kind of like put me more at ease going to see like further clients.” Referencing a specific sentence, Chris stated, “I think it’s this last sentence—like, that you have an inner strength and just all of that. I was like, oh, that’s nice.” The sentence Chris referred to was written as, “You have an inner strength and genuine sense of compassion that resonates with your clients; they see your strength and confidence in them and they start to believe that they can be the person you see in them.”

Riley discussed how a specific sentence was helpful when she stated, “And then, I guess like, her last sentence was just, I took it as a way of saying, that like, her telling me that she thinks I’m ready to move on.” The sentence Riley referenced was written as, “Best wishes for a bright future.”

Alex shared that a phrase in a letter stood out to her when she wrote, “What stood out to me the most was the part where we ‘turned the corner’ in regards to my clinical supervision.” She also shared in another letter response that specific words stood out when she wrote, “She wrote that I demonstrated vulnerability and honesty when it comes to my strengths and weaknesses.” Additionally, Alex wrote in another letter response, “I felt encouraged by her kind words in the first paragraph.”

Differences. Although a word or words stood out to all five students, the number of words in the letters differed for each student. Not including introductions and
salutations, the total number of words in the body of all four letters for Quinn was 657. For Pat, the total number was 654. The total for Alex was 661. For Chris, the total number of words was 597. The total number of words for Riley was 609.

Along with words standing out in a positive way, Quinn and Pat were the only two students that discussed that words also stood out in a negative way. Referencing a specific letter, Quinn stated, “From what I got of that, I got focused, disciplined, attentive, and reserved, I’m like, ohh, those aren’t fun words. I think she was meaning it in a good way.” Quinn further explained what the word “reserved” meant to her, Yea, she said I was just like more reserved than my other classmates, and I don’t really like the reserved word. I mean I might be, but I think sometimes reserved figures being more quiet and you’re not more outgoing I guess, like more out there. (Quinn)

When referencing two words in a specific letter, Pat stated, “There are a couple words here that, that you know, my confidence, my comfort, were actually very tried at that point in time.” The line from the letter Pat referenced was, “You seem to have developed more confidence and comfort in your interactions and observations of your work with your clients.” Pat further explained her reaction to the words comfort and confidence, “I’m getting a letter that is saying I seem to have developed more confidence and comfort . . . That was an observation that just didn’t seem to fit me in that one.”

Riley and Chris were the only students who shared that the writing style of the letters also stood out. Riley viewed the writing style as informal. She stated, “I liked it because it’s more relatable than so serious and professional” and “Her personality
definitely showed through her words, and everything in the letter.” Riley further explained,

I guess I was expecting the letter to be more professionally and clinically written. But I liked to see it this way, because that’s more of my instructor’s personality, and it seems more genuine coming from her this way. I liked it because it’s more relatable than so serious and professional. (Riley)

Chris also saw the writing style as informal. She stated, “I think what stood out most, was just how, like, she kind of was writing how she talks.” Chris further explained,

So, just you know, not making them super formal. Like relaxed. You could, you know, as you read it, you can almost hear her saying these things. So, I think that’s probably what stood out most. At least, or especially in these last two, was just her genuineness. (Chris)

Riley and Chris added that punctuation also made the writing style informal. Riley stated, “Like with exclamation points, I could tell my supervisor’s energy just from reading them.” Riley further explained,

I don’t know, to me that put a more informal spin on it, cause I guess I just think of when you’re writing an essay or research paper you don’t usually put exclamation points, and that was also a symbol to me of personality and tone and emotion, which you usually leave out of formal documents. (Riley)

Chris wrote in a letter response, “Exclamation points really stood out to me. They gave the letter a feel of excitement and set a positive tone.” In addition, Chris referenced a specific letter when she stated, “I know, you know, she’s like, this feels good, doesn’t it,
with exclamation points everywhere.” Quinn, Pat, and Alex did not discuss exclamation marks, but all five students received letters that had exclamation marks; every letter except one letter to one student contained at least one exclamation mark.

Chris was the only student to share that quotes and metaphors stood out to her. She stated, “It’s just when she, the quotes and the metaphors,” and she wrote in a letter response, “Liked the inclusion of the metaphor.” One metaphor Chris discussed standing out to her was written as, “Calm in the midst of the storm.” Chris added, “I think the quotes helped,” and “That was in quotes, and so that really stuck out.” Although the other four students did not report that quotes and metaphors stood out to them, at least one letter to all five students contained a quote and at least one letter to all five students included a metaphor.

**Theme Three: Being in Writing and the Ability to Reread Letters**

The third theme that emerged from data related to the research question, “What aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees,” was being in writing and the ability to reread letters.

**Similarities.** All five students discussed the value of letters being in writing. Chris discussed the “permanence” of writing when she stated, “Now it’s in writing so it’s like there forever.” Quinn also discussed the impact of having something in writing when she stated, “I think paper is more like, I guess the word that in mind is like intentional, like it’s there so you’re reading it, and it maybe sticks in your head more.”

Being in writing provided the opportunity to “see” feedback. Quinn stated, “I kind of liked seeing what she finds that I’m doing well.” Quinn also wrote in a letter
response, “It was nice seeing in words how much we’ve accomplished this semester.”

Alex stated, “I just feel like, it’s just nice to see, I guess. You know.” When describing her reaction to a letter, Pat wrote, “Pleased—to see that I’m viewed this way.” The letter she referenced included the lines, “Your eagerness, honesty and sincerity have been evident throughout the first few weeks of the course” and “Your commitment to the learning process and your curiosity about the counseling process.”

Being in writing offered reminders. Chris wrote in a letter response, “It was also nice to have a written reminder.” Riley shared how the letters were written reminders when she stated, “Talking about it in class is one thing, and then putting it down on paper, is like a reinforcer. It was important to me.” Alex discussed how seeing it in writing added to hearing it from her instructor when she stated, “And I can bring things up in class, and my instructor will say, like hey you are the type to rapport building, but just like seeing it here. I read it first in the letter.”

**Differences.** Although all five students discussed the possibility of rereading letters, only Quinn, Pat, and Chris shared that they reread at least one letter during the semester. Quinn explained rereading a letter just a few hours prior to an interview with the researcher,

> I read it like recently actually when I was looking at them. I was making sure I had the letters in there. So, yea, I read it actually like maybe a few hours ago. And I remember the first time I read it. (Quinn)
Pat discussed rereading two particular letters. Regarding one letter, Pat stated, “I took the time to read it a couple times,” and referencing another letter, she stated, “I had to go back and reread it. Yea. Did that say what I think it said?”

Chris stated, “I went back and you know, like reread the different sections or different sentences a couple times.” Chris also wrote in a letter response, “I love being able to reread them when I need encouragement!” Chris further explained rereading a letter recently,

I know I read this one at least, like three times…I’d maybe pull it out, pull one of them out like twice a month maybe. Every other week, something like that. A little reminder. Especially once I hit the halfway point of the semester—I kind of just wanted to be done. (Chris)

Alex and Riley did not report rereading letters during the semester; however, they discussed the ability to reread them in the future as needed. Riley stated, “And then you have it to hang on to and remind yourself to look at if you’re doubting yourself or something like that.” Riley shared where she planned to keep the letters to reread in the future if needed. She stated, “I’m definitely hanging onto them. I have a binder of all my counseling stuff, and they’ll definitely go in there.” Alex, shared the benefit of holding onto the letters as well when she explained, “I think that it is important to have that type of positive feedback and to have something to fall back on when you’re having a stressful week, or just that anytime you need a pick-me-up.”
Theme Four: Additional Instructor Perspective and Feedback was Another Form of Support

The fourth theme that emerged from data related to the research question, “What aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees” was that the additional instructor perspective and feedback was another form of support.

Similarities. All five students discussed that the additional perspective and feedback from the letters was additional support. Pat shared, “It’s an outside perspective that was valuable.” Pat also stated, “All in all, I think that the additional feedback is helpful.” Pat further elaborated on how the additional perspective was helpful for her, I mean it was positive in getting the instructor’s perspective. For instance, in her letter she states that this is my perspective…So it was a doubly whammy good thing—a double, you know, couple pats on the back kind of thing. (Pat)

Chris wrote in a letter response, “It was reassuring to read that my instructor thinks I am presenting with a calm and reassuring presence in my sessions.” Chris wrote in another letter response, “Reassuring to read that my increased participation in class was being recognized.” Additionally, Chris stated, “They were getting me the confidence boost that I need and the reassurance that I was wanting.”

Quinn stated, “I think it’s nice to have the second outlet.” Quinn also shared, “It was interesting to read what she was thinking of your progress, you know throughout the weeks and stuff like that.” Additionally, Quinn wrote in a letter response, “This letter brought out some very interesting thoughts. I enjoyed hearing her perspective.” Also,
Quinn wrote in another letter response, “I was encouraged to read my supervisor’s thoughts.”

Riley discussed letters as beneficial feedback outside of meeting face-to-face when she stated, “I feel like it’s another way to receive feedback then just sitting down with them in person” and “I think that it’s a good opportunity to get feedback you might not be able to get during weekly supervision.” Alex discussed the value of another perspective when she stated, “Seeing it from a different perspective has been helpful” and when she shared, “Because it’s nice to know that although one person sees my progress one way, someone else sees it differently. So, that was helpful for me.”

Mel discussed how letters provided an opportunity to provide support in a different way,

There’re some things that might’ve been even more awkward for me to say verbally, but it was comfortable in a letter, cause that provided that distance…So I could be a little more personal than I would be in class…If I shared in the letter what I shared with the group, it might have seemed like, maybe I had favorites.

(Mel)

Mel shared in a check-in email response that a way letters provided her the opportunity to provide support in a different way was because they eliminated a barrier between her and students. Mel explained,

When I am teaching, there is a natural “buffer” between myself and my students—the classroom setting and other students with whom I share my
attention. However, when I am writing a supervision letter, it’s just me and that student—with no other buffers or barriers between us. (Mel)

Differences. Although seeing the letters as an additional, supportive, instructor perspective, Quinn and Pat shared that they believed the additional support should have been provided at different times during the semester. One letter was delivered in September, two letters were delivered in October, and one letter was delivered in December. Although Quinn did begin by stating, “I think it was kind of appropriately spaced out,” she explained in more detail how spacing during a particular month could have been better,

Probably like, the November one, like if there would’ve been one in November, then that would’ve been good. Way too much was going on. That probably would’ve been the only area where it would’ve been nice to have one in cause you have a huge gap from October to December, and like by that point we had like almost forgotten about the letters. But I think it made sense. It was just kind of how the semester worked out. (Quinn)

Pat wrote in a letter response, “Perhaps once case conceptualization and treatment planning were in place may have been helpful as not much has happened since 1st letter.”

Pat explained further her preference of spacing of the letters,

I thought these two were awful close together. This was the 7th. This was the 28th of the same month. This one’s stretched out a little bit more….So I suppose like every four to five, maybe even six weeks, I would say. (Pat)
Chris and Riley did not discuss the spacing out or timing of letters, and although Alex did not share wanting it to be different than it was, she did express a preference when she stated, “Like September, October, November, and December. One a month, ideally.”

Although all five students viewed the letters as another form of support, the way they viewed the letters being supportive varied. For example, Quinn wrote in a letter response, “I felt as though I got confirmation that I was doing well, and I appreciated the fact that my supervisor had noticed my qualities that I bring to the session.” Quinn added that along with reading what she was doing, she also liked knowing how she could improve when she stated, “I kind of liked seeing what she finds that I’m doing well and then finds that you can improve in this area.” Pat stated, “But there are positives in them, and those do stand out clearly. I mean, those were encouraging, cause you got like, these are the things that I am doing right.” Pat also shared that she viewed the letters at times as a “marker” along the way when she stated, “It kind of let you know that you’ve either got it or you don’t. Kind of the little tests along the way before you get to an exam, you know, are you catching on?”

Alex shared that the letters helped her look toward the future when she wrote in a letter response, “This gave me hope that things get better.” Alex also stated, “I felt like it just, I don’t know, I felt like it pushed me to keep going.” Additionally, Alex also shared in a letter response, “I always like to hear that it’s apparent I care about helping my clients.” Alex further explained how the letters supported her,

It was kind of brought out in the letters she understands I care about them. And that was important to me. Like concerns how you might be more helpful to them,
and it’s great to see . . . So, I appreciate the comments about how she can see that I care. (Alex)

Chris shared in a letter response, “It was also nice to feel understood with regard to the struggles I’m experiencing.” Chris added that the letters helped her feel understood when she stated, “I felt validated because my instructor pointed out that I did have some challenging experiences.”

Riley shared in a letter response, “It was rewarding to hear that my supervisor noticed my attempts to integrate new information into my sessions.” Riley also shared how the letters reinforced something she valued. Riley explained,

And then I also really liked that something we focused on a lot in class was self-care, and how we didn’t always have enough or feel like we had enough time for self-care. So, she really emphasized being more aware of that, and that was something I appreciated. Her including it in the letters was kind of like a reminder, you know, make sure you’re taking care of yourself. That’s something important along the way. Talking about it in class is one thing, and then putting it down on paper is like a reinforcer. It was important to me. (Riley)

**Supplemental Theme**

Aside from themes related to the two research questions for the current research, one supplemental theme emerged during data analysis that is important to share. The theme relates to the overall context of the case and is important to describe because the stress level and expectations during the semester could have had an influence on how
students responded to receiving supervision letters, and what aspects of letters influenced student development as counselor trainees.

**Supplemental Theme: Stress Levels And Expectations During The Semester Were Considered Unique**

The supplemental theme that emerged was that the stress levels and expectations during the semester were considered unique.

**Similarities.** Mel shared that based on her observation of students, all five of them experienced stress and semester expectations that were unique. Referencing two students as an example, Mel stated, “I think two students had clients the first week, which is pretty much unheard of, but again, that’s how the semester started.”

Mel also stated, “This was an extraordinarily difficult semester for them.” She further explained,

There were times when I actually gave them additional week to work on an assignment because they had so many other academic obligations. And they had all of these other tasks that they were charged with in terms of our class. (Mel)

**Differences.** Mel shared that based on her observations, all five students experienced expectations and stress that was unique. Pat, Riley, and Quinn specifically compared the current semester to previous semesters. Pat wrote in a letter response, “It’s been the most trying semester thus far.” Additionally, Pat stated, “This whole time was a very difficult time.” Pat also shared that she agreed with a line in a letter when she wrote in a letter response, “No other thoughts except agreement ‘whew what a semester!’” (from a student academic view vs. client view).”
Riley compared expectations for practicum during the semester to what she thought expectations were for practicum during previous semesters. She stated, “And that kind of, that goes back to having those additional hours in the center this year, and having some of those more challenging cases.” Riley further explained,

And they told us that normally practicum students work five hours a week in the center, and because of the lack of students with this cohort, we were required to work seven hours a week in the center. So, that was a little bit more added stress. We got some pretty, serious, things got deep very fast. So, I think it was really stressful. (Riley)

Additionally, Riley explained what an extra two hours each week was like for her. “We had the additional hours in the center, and then that adds additional hours to watch your tapes, additional hours for documentation. Two hours doesn’t seem like a lot, but it takes a mental toll, that extra time.” Quinn also compared expectations for the semester to what she thought were expectations for previous semesters,

My first client had a very severe past, and I was like, wow. I had a lot of crisis clients, and suicide was something that I became really familiar with, like dealing with it. I had no roommate issues. Mine were all more intense. So, yea, we had to get a lot farther this semester than other pracs had to. (Quinn)

Although Chris and Alex did not specifically make comparison to another semester, they both discussed the elevated stress level of practicum in general. When speaking about how receiving more letters would have been helpful, Chris referenced that more letters after a certain point in the semester would have helped more; she stated,
“Especially once I hit like the halfway point of the semester—I kind of just wanted to be done.”

When Alex was asked what else she wanted to share about receiving supervision letters during practicum, she referenced how helpful they would be during practicum because of the level of stress,

I think that they should be implemented in every practicum class or section, whatever you want to call it. And I think that it’s because it’s such a stressful time that any type of positive reinforcement is helpful and it does help to create that bond. (Alex)

**Summary**

In this chapter, analysis from data was described. All data contributed to answering the following two research questions:

1. How do practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor?
2. What aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees?

The review included the description of themes related to the two research questions noted above as well as a supplemental theme that emerged. Themes that emerged in response to research question one were:

1. Students valued receiving letters and looked forward to receiving them
2. Students desired more feedback from letters
3. Students experienced emotional reactions that varied among letters and each other.

4. Students recognized the influence letters had on counselor development.

Themes that emerged in response to research question two were:

1. Individualized/personalized feedback was “evidence” of instructor paying attention.

2. Specific words and writing style stood out.

3. Being in writing and the ability to reread letters.

4. Additional instructor perspective and feedback was another form of support.

The supplemental theme that emerged was:

1. Stress levels and expectations during the semester were considered unique.

All themes are discussed in Chapter 4, including their connection with the current literature.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current research was to explore how practicum students from a mental health practicum class responded to receiving letters from their instructor and what aspects of the letters influenced their development. The two research questions addressed were:

1. How do practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor?

2. What aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees?

A discussion of the themes follows. The discussion includes interpretation of findings, contributions to the current literature, and implications. Additionally, limitations are discussed as well as recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of the Findings

Guided by the research questions noted above, four themes emerged for research question one, and four themes emerged for research question two. A supplemental theme also emerged that is relevant to discuss. All themes were common to all five students who participated in the current research.

Research Question One

Research question one explored how practicum students responded to receiving supervision letters from their instructor. The following four themes were evident.
Theme one: Students valued receiving letters and looked forward to receiving them. The first common theme for how students responded to receiving supervision letters from the instructor was all five students valued receiving supervision letters and looked forward to receiving them. This theme corresponded with an initial researcher assumption about the current research prior to data collection. The assumption was students receive letters favorably.

The value all five students gave to receiving letters supported suggestions by Desmond and Kindsvatter (2010), Hoffman (2008), Koltz (2008), and Sax (2008) that supervision letters could be beneficial for training and counselor development. Other themes discussed later in this section contributed to the overall value of the letters, but aside from other themes discussed later, there are several other possible reasons students valued letters and looked forward to receiving them.

One possible reason students valued the letters is because people automatically give value to a more personal styled letter written on paper (Ross, 2009). The supervision letters were written in a more informal style and were on paper (discussed in later themes). Another possible reason is the “epistolary formulae” contained in letters (Trapp, 2003). Features of the “epistolary formulae” are easily recognizable, and they include the introduction/salutation and a complimentary close (Trapp, 2003). The current research did not explore responses to the “epistolary formulae” reported by Trapp (2003), but all four letters to all five students contained an introduction/salutation and a complimentary close.
Another possible reason all five students valued receiving letters may have been because of the “Reciprocity Principle” (Nystrand, 1986). The “Reciprocity Principle” is the social process of writing and reading a letter. The writer of a letter writes with the intent to share what a reader might need or benefit from reading (Nystrand, 1986). Another aspect of the “Reciprocity Principle” is the mutual understanding that writing a letter and reading a letter occurs separately. The “Reciprocity Principle” was present in the letters. The instructor discussed that she believed she expressed in letters what students would benefit from reading, and students discussed recognizing letters included things that either fit with their unique needs during a particular struggle or matched a common developmental need. The instructor also wrote the letters separately from when students read them.

Along with overall valuing the receipt of letters, students also valued the idea of receiving letters. One student shared, “Letters in general are powerful.” Valuing the idea of receiving letters is important because some letters were valued more than other letters. However, even though multiple letters may not be valued equally, valuing the idea of receiving letters suggests the receiver of a letter will still look forward to receiving a next letter, and all five students did. Looking forward to receiving the letters was mainly because students were curious about what would be written in them and what the instructor thought about them. Curiosity by students about what a letter would contain was similar to Pyle’s (2006, 2009) report of clients who received letters from a counselor. The clients wondered what the content of the letters would be and what the writer would think of them.
It is also important to point out students discussed that practicum students who did not take part in the current research expressed curiosity to them about letter writing and about receiving letters. This interest by others not participating in the current research was similar to the report by Hall et al. (2000) that family and friends of children receiving letters as part of a study wished they could also receive letters. It is possible the interest by practicum students who did not participate in the current research was because students discussed with them their reactions to receiving letters. Alternatively, it could be because other practicum students were not receiving letters from their instructor. These possible reasons were not explored in the current research.

Value from receiving letters led two students to be interested in writing letters to clients. This interest reflected awareness that something they valued might benefit others. This was similar to Rodgers’ (2009) suggestion that writing letters to another can model the value of sharing in relationships. The interest in writing letters to clients was also similar to the suggestion by Anderson and Swim (1995) that on-going communication can model for a supervisee how to engage with clients.

Theme two: Students desired more feedback from letters. The second common theme for how students responded to receiving supervision letters from the instructor was all five students wanted more feedback from the letters. This theme did not correspond with an initial researcher assumption about the current research prior to data collection, and it was not an initial assumption.

Although students wanted more feedback from letters, students wanted the feedback to be a balance of what they were doing well and what were areas of
improvement. The desire for feedback on both strengths and areas of improvement corresponded with suggestions on what benefits a supervisee (Borders, 2014; Falender & Shafranske, 2004; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998). It also corresponded with one of the things supervisees want from a supervisor (Falender & Shafranske, 2004; Hess, 1987b). Feedback can be especially helpful considering the most difficult period in counselor training is when first meeting with clients (Watkins, 2012). Since beginning counselors often rely on feedback from a supervisor (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2001), it is important that a supervisor can respond to stressors students experience (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b).

The desire by all five students to get more feedback from letters also matched with guidelines from the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) on providing feedback during supervision. A section in the Task Force Report on Best Practices in Clinical Supervision (ACES, 2011, p. 4) includes best practice guidelines on giving feedback to supervisees. Some guidelines that matched with the kind of feedback students wanted are:

- The supervisor provides a balance of challenging and supportive feedback appropriate to the counselor’s developmental level, experience, and client needs
- The supervisor provides constructive feedback that is specific, concrete, and descriptive
• As appropriate, the supervisor offers alternatives for supervisee’s behaviors that need to be changed, or provides directives as needed to ensure client needs are met.

The guidelines do not specify the format of feedback (i.e., written, verbal), but the desire by all five students to get as much feedback as they could get from the letters showed they were eager to learn, to read about their strengths, and to be challenged on areas of needed growth.

In addition to wanting more feedback on skills, strengths, and areas to improve, one student wanted feedback she believed would match with developmental expectations during practicum. It may have been helpful for the instructor to follow a “developmental template” when writing the letters, but since students develop at a different pace and may not be at the same stage of development as other students when entering practicum (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010), it is important that feedback is not a copy of the same thing to different students. The supervision letters for the current research did address aspects of development, and developmental areas influenced by the letters are discussed later in this section.

**Theme three: Students experienced emotional reactions that varied among letters and each other.** The third common theme for how students responded to receiving supervision letters from the instructor was all five students had emotional reactions that varied among the four letters each of them received and differed among other students. This theme did not correspond with an initial researcher assumption about the current research prior to data collection, and it was not an initial assumption. The
theme primarily resulted from a question added to the ending interview. The added question was, “How did your reactions to the supervision letters change over the course of the semester?” The additional question was due to responses during the check-in interview as well as from letter responses that reflected differing reactions to the first two supervision letters.

Letters written in a personal, informal way can create emotional responses for readers (L. D. Green, 2007; Trapp, 2003). Reading in general causes readers to experience brief, fleeting emotional reactions while reading (Graesser & D’Mello, 2012), and emotional reactions to the same or similar material can vary by reader (Goetz, Sadoski, Stowe, Fetsco, & Kemp, 1993). All five students discussed emotional reactions to the letters. Not only is it important to note the letters generated emotional responses, it is also important to note those responses ranged for each student. The range was positive to negative for some while the range for others was more along the lines of positive to less positive.

Although all five students valued receiving the letters overall, and responses to at least two letters were positive by all five of them, emotional responses varied depending on the letter. Some words in the letters contributed to both a positive and negative response (discussed in a later theme), but specific reasons for different emotional responses to the letters were not explored in the current research. However, two students discussed briefly that for them the environment they were in at the time of reading a particular letter might have contributed to a negative response. One student shared she was at an appointment and was uncomfortable physically when she read a letter. Another
student discussed she read at least one letter around other students as they read their letters, and their responses to reading the letters may have contributed to her response.

It is important to acknowledge the environment and the presence of others can influence emotions. This may be particularly important given the smaller class size and the environment of practicum where students have closer contact with each other during a period of typically elevated stress and anxiety. The reported influence the environment and others could have on someone’s emotions could be looked at as emotional contagion (Doherty, 1997; Doherty, Orimoto, Singelis, Hatfield, & Hebb, 1995; Totterdell, Niven, & Holman, 2010). Done through words, tone, and non-verbal means, Bhullar and Bains (2013) described emotional contagion as the tendency to “catch” another person’s emotions (p. 159). Doherty et al. (1995) discussed that people are susceptible to catch both positive and negative emotions of others. Fowler and Christakis (2008) explored the spread of happiness in a social network over a 20-year period, and they concluded happiness could be influenced by the happiness of those someone associates with. Additionally, Ferrara and Zeyao (2015) explored the emotional contagion of Twitter users in social media, and they reported people are more likely to adopt positive emotions of others than negative emotions.

Counselors-in-training are diverse, and they contain varying worldviews and unique characteristics based on their experience and environment (Nassar-McMillan & Niles, 2011). Each student’s response to the letters was also different from any other student’s response. All five students in the current research were in the same counseling program, shared the same courses, and were in the same practicum class with the same
instructor, but they each had unique needs and experiences that contributed to distinct, individual responses to supervision letters.

One helpful way for a letter writer to check-in with readers and their emotional reactions could be what one student discussed—having the opportunity to respond to a letter. The ACES (2011) Task Force Report on *Best Practices in Clinical Supervision* suggested that to assist in strengthening a supervision relationship, a “supervisor elicits and is open to candid and ongoing feedback from the supervisee” (p. 8). The opportunity to respond to a letter, which a supervisor might need to specifically request or encourage, would be helpful, especially considering reactions to letters are likely to include emotional responses that may be less positive than a writer intends. When writing supervision letters to students, no matter how well written, they will create a different reaction for each reader. The individuality of student experiences and their needs is important to maintain awareness of, particularly during a time of elevated stress and anxiety.

**Theme four: Students recognized the influence letters had on counselor development.** The fourth common theme for how students responded to receiving supervision letters from the instructor was all five students recognized the influence letters had on development. This theme corresponded with initial researcher assumptions about the current research prior to data collection. These assumptions included:

- Letters help students reflect on their training as a counselor
- Letters strengthen the supervision relationship
- Students report letters influence their growth and development as a counselor
Along with a supervisor monitoring client well-being (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009), a supervisor is also responsible to monitor supervisee professional development (ACA, 2014). The choice a supervisor makes has an effect on supervisee development (Heppner & Roehlke, 1984). The instructor discussed that her overall intent in the first supervision letter was to address initial anxiety. The primary intent in the second letter was to address interactions with clients. The third letter was intended to encourage students to think about where they might want to be developmentally at the end of the semester. The intent of the fourth letter was to summarize the semester and to encourage ongoing development.

Results of the current research supported suggestions by Desmond and Kindsvatter (2010), Hoffman (2008), Koltz (2008), and Sax (2008) that supervision letters can have an influence on counselor training and development. Heppner and Roehlke (1984) discussed that supervisees go through interpersonal changes during practicum and their perceptions change during development. Areas of development students recognized letters influencing included the following:

- Confidence
- Anxiety
- Supervision relationship
- Identity
- Self-awareness

**Confidence.** All five students recognized influence in at least three of the above areas, with confidence as the only area recognized by all of them. Building confidence is
important to managing anxiety (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 1993; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b), and anxiety is one of the main stressors beginning supervisees struggle with (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Weatherford et al. (2008) reported the value of building confidence when discussing a study by Ronnestad et al. (1997), who concluded that development takes place as confidence increases.

**Anxiety.** Bernard and Goodyear (2009) discussed the need for supervisees to be able to positively cope with anxiety. Three students recognized the letters helped them do that. This corresponded with the instructor’s intention in the first letter, to address initial anxiety. According to the ACES (2011) Task Force Report on *Best Practices in Clinical Supervision*, one of the tasks of a supervisor that helps to strengthen a supervision relationship is “to lessen supervisee anxiety that is detrimental to supervision while recognizing that some anxiety is inevitable, normal, and positively related to supervisee growth” (p. 7).

**Supervision relationship.** Four students recognized the letters helped strengthen the supervision relationship with their instructor. Of the four students who recognized that letters influenced the supervision relationship with their instructor, two received individual supervision from a supervisor who was not their instructor, and two received individual supervision from the instructor. The current research did not explore group supervision relationships in comparison to individual supervision relationships. It is not clear if the letters influenced the supervision relationship differently for the two students who had a different individual supervisor or for the two students the instructor supervised individually. One of the goals of a letter is to begin or strengthen relationships (Trapp,
2003), and all four students discussed the relationship with their instructor was strengthened by receiving letters.

A strong supervision relationship is vital to supervision and the training of counselors (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Borders & Brown, 2005; Falender & Shafranske, 2004; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Not only is it important to student development, it is expected of a supervisor to shape and cultivate a positive supervision relationship (ACA, 2014). A section in the ACES (2011) Task Force Report on *Best Practices in Clinical Supervision* includes best practice guidelines for the supervision relationship. One guideline describes the relevance of the supervision relationship. It is written as, “The supervisor operates with awareness that the supervisory relationship is key to the effectiveness of supervision as well as the growth and development of the supervisee” (p. 7). Improvement in the supervision relationship was similar to a report by Maybin (2000) that letters strengthened relationships of inmates receiving letters. It was also similar to France et al.’s (1995) report that clients believed the therapeutic relationship improved because of receiving letters. Part of the improved relationship could have been similar to the report by Rodgers (2009) that clients who received letters from a counselor thought they were valued as individuals more than processes or goals.

**Identity.** Three students recognized the influence letters had on identity as a counselor. Many beginning supervisees have an insecure professional identity, and this can lead to supervisees becoming unmotivated (Loganbill et al., 1982; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b). Skovholt and Ronnestad (2001) compared entering a helping profession to being a new person in another country; it is easy for students to be unsure of
where they might fit in and who they are (Nassar-McMillan & Niles, 2011). One student discussed that she did question where she fit in the counseling field, and the letters helped confirm her strengths and her role in the profession.

The letters had an influence similar to the report by Maybin (2000) of letters helping inmates shape and reconstruct their identity. It was also similar to A. Wilson’s (2000) report that letters helped to create and re-create perceptions of self and self among others for inmates. One student reported the letters helped her to see how her identity was among others during practicum. Additionally, the influence letters had on student identity was similar to Ahearn’s (2000) report that love letters between Junigau villagers helped shape their identity in society and as an individual, as well as the report by Burgess and Ivanic (2010) of identity being constructed each time someone reads a letter.

**Self-awareness.** For three students, the letters helped them become more self-aware during practicum. Ellis (2006) and Loganbill et al. (1982) discussed the value of awareness building during a supervisee’s development. Freedman and Combs (1996), Laub and Hoffman (2002), and Desmond and Kindsvatter (2010) discussed that letters can point out things, including patterns someone might not be aware of. Much of the increased awareness by students was because letters contained things they did not recognize in themselves. Some of these included skills, struggles, and strengths.

The letters were a way to assist with being more aware of not just client-care, but self-care as well. Burnout is one of the most common results of stressors, and maintaining wellness through positive self-care can be critical (Nassar-McMillan & Niles, 2011). One student discussed how a letter brought to her attention that she may have been more
overwhelmed than she realized, and another student shared that she appreciated a letter bringing to her attention her commitment to self-care. The influence letters had on self-awareness was similar to Almasi’s (2010) and Steele’s (2009) report that letters can increase self-awareness by helping someone read aspects of themselves and reflect.

**Integration of research question one themes.** Research question one explored how practicum students responded to receiving letters from their instructor. The four themes of research question one connected to answer the research question and were interrelated in how students responded to receiving letters.

Students discussed in theme one that they valued receiving letters and looked forward to receiving them. That value and anticipation though depended a great deal on the contribution of other themes. One thing that contributed to students valuing and anticipating the letters was they experienced emotional reactions to letters that varied among letters and each other (theme three). Each student experienced overall positive reactions to at least two letters, and those emotions varied a great deal, ranging from feeling special because of receiving letters to feeling encouraged and affirmed by content in the letters. Even though there were emotional reactions considered negative, positive reactions carried more influence in the overall value students attributed to the letters.

Along with valuing letters as much as they did because they experienced positive emotional reactions to the letters, students also valued them and looked forward to receiving them because they recognized the influence letters had on their development during practicum (theme four). Nearly all practicum students encounter anxiety, lack of confidence, lack of self-awareness, and confusion about professional identity during
practicum. Receiving letters that helped lesson anxiety, increased confidence, increased self-awareness, and strengthened professional identity contributed to students valuing the letters. With the importance of the supervision relationship, recognizing how letters helped strengthen that relationship also added to why the letters were valued and anticipated.

Additionally, recognizing the influence letters had development contributed to experiencing emotional reactions to letters discussed in theme three. More confidence, less anxiety, a more secure professional identity, an improved supervision relationship, and increased insight gained from receiving letters contributed to emotional reactions. Reactions not only varied among letters, they varied among students because the letters influenced development in different ways for each student. Also, in theme two, students desired more feedback from letters, and recognizing the influence on development (theme four) and experiencing varied emotional reactions (theme three) contributed to students valuing the letters and wanting more feedback from them.

**Research Question Two**

Research question two explored what aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees. The following four themes were evident.

**Theme one: Individualized/personalized feedback was “evidence” of the instructor paying attention.** The first common theme for what aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees was all five students viewed personalized feedback in the letters as “evidence” the instructor was paying
attention to them. This theme did not correspond with an initial researcher assumption about the current research prior to data collection, and it was not an initial assumption.

Supervisees want a supervisor that shows an interest in them (Hess, 1987b). Letters, especially those on paper, can be valuable because they become physical “evidence” of being thought of by someone (Schneider, 2005) and as a symbol of connection (Carpenter, 1978; A. Green & Lambert, 2013; Lander & Graham-Pole, 2008). The “evidence” for all five students was associated with letters being personalized.

Each person who enters the counseling field is unique (Nassar-McMillan & Niles, 2011), and therefore so is each supervision relationship (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Students appreciated that letters included things the instructor noticed about their individual efforts as students, their work with clients, and qualities they valued about themselves. This appreciation was similar to the report by Alexander et al. (2008) that clients receiving letters from practicum students appreciated someone noticed things unique about them. It was also similar to the report by France et al. (1995) that clients felt therapeutic letters were evidence the writer noticed things about them beyond what was expected. Additionally, personalized feedback as proof the instructor was paying attention was similar to Freed et al.’s (2010) discussion of letters from counselors and nursing students being appreciated because letters were personalized. The letters served as private, individualized feedback that supported students feeling such things as “recognized,” “confirmed,” “reaffirmed,” and that the instructor “was listening.” That type of attention from an instructor during a stressful time such as practicum can be valuable.
Two students discussed that the perceived effort the instructor put into personalizing the letters made a difference. Writing does often require more thought than speaking (Horowitz & Samuels, 1987), and for the purpose of others who may want to write letters to practicum students, it is important to point out that personalizing them does take effort and a time commitment. The instructor for this study attempted to write letters a few days before a letter was to be delivered so she had time to be thoughtful about the content and to review them before delivering them. Although it does take time to write the letters, the instructor discussed that as she got to know students better, it became easier to write the letters. Personalization in the letters was crucial, with one student even wondering if it would have been worthwhile at all to get letters that were not personalized.

**Theme two: Specific words and writing style stood out.** The second common theme for what aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees was words and writing style stood out to all five students. This theme did not correspond with an initial researcher assumption about the current research prior to data collection, and it was not an initial assumption.

Words are powerful (Gladwin, 1970), in positive or negative ways (Teicher, Samson, Sheu, Polcari, & McGreenery, 2010). Emotional responses can be associated with specific words (Bradley & Lang, 1999; Briesmeister, Kuchinke, Jacobs, & Braun, 2015; Stevenson, Mikels, & James, 2007), and even one word can have an influence (Stokoe, 2012). For all five students, specific words influenced their responses to the letters and to their development.
At times, what stood out was one word, whereas other times it was a line, a sentence, a paragraph, a statement, a phrase, or a section. In the midst of hundreds of words, just a few at times became aspects of the letters that influenced development. One student discussed that specific words stood out positively in every letter in some way. The current research did not specifically explore a connection between the number of words in letters and students liking/disliking letters, but there did not appear to be a connection. It is possible the perceived quality of content mattered more to students than the quantity of letter content.

Words that stood out were viewed overall as positive and supportive, but as two students discussed, words also stood out at times in a negative way. It is important to recognize the emotional reaction someone can have to specific words. Student response to specific words in the letters was similar to the report by Mohammad and Turney (2010) that people can have reactions to “common” words, although those reactions are often different among people and depend on the situation. Specific words standing out to students was also similar to Briesmeister et al.’s (2015) report that words can stand out for someone because of their perception of a word based on their previous experiences with that word. Stevenson et al. (2007) explored emotions associated with 1,034 words considered common, while Kuperman, Estes, Brysbaert, and Warriner (2014) explored the emotions associated with 12,658 words, and both reported a similarity to what students in the current research discussed, that words stood out at times and resulted in an emotional reaction.
Along with a specific word or specific words standing out, writing style also stood out, specifically the use of quotes, metaphors, and punctuation. Because of writing style, the letters were viewed by two students as informal, something that made the letters more “relatable” and “relaxed.” One student also discussed liking metaphors in the letters. Additionally, one student liked that the letters included quotes. Two students also appreciated that the letters had exclamation marks.

A style seen as informal stood out in positive ways, reflecting that students appreciated a writing style that was more relaxed. Specific words resonated in positive ways, but at times, at least for two students, some of those words stood out in a negative way. It is important to point out there can be negative reactions by students to words even when the overall intent of a letter is positive, a letter is intended to facilitate development (discussed in previous theme), and a letter includes supportive content (addressed in later theme). The instructor discussed her awareness of the influence what she wrote could have, and she shared that she was cautious of what she included in the letters. This caution could be especially important because letters may be written on paper and possibly reread (discussed in the next theme). Although other words in the letters contributed to an overall positive response to letters and influenced development in a positive way, one word has the potential to generate a negative response, and it is important to be aware of that potential influence.

**Theme three: Being in writing and the ability to reread letters.** The third common theme for what aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees was all five students appreciated the letters being in writing and having
the ability to reread them. This theme corresponded with initial researcher assumptions about the current research prior to data collection. These assumptions included:

- Because less letters are sent and received on paper, receiving a letter on paper has a positive influence on students
- Students reread the letters, reinforcing content by rereading

A letter on paper is something that is seen as more permanent and valuable (Horowitz & Samuels, 1987; Steinberg, 2000; V. E. White & Murray, 2002; A. Wilson, 2000), and having a letter on paper helps make reading and rereading them valuable (Harris, 2009; A. Wilson, 2000). All five students appreciated the letters were in writing and they could be reread. There was value in the letters being there “forever,” and because they were in writing, they seemed “intentional.” Similar to what M. White and Epston (1990) discussed, students liked seeing in writing what they were doing and the progress they were making in practicum. Even though letters can technically be emailed (How, 2003), letters on paper are still distinct (Garfield, 2013). The current research did not explore a preference in letters from a supervisor on paper versus email, but as D. L. Cohen et al. (2011) reported, although electronic means of communication exists, writing on paper continues to hold value, and this was reflected by the current research.

Although all five students valued the opportunity to reread the letters, two students discussed not rereading the letters. However, they both discussed their intent to keep the letters in case they wanted to reread them in the future, with one student sharing where she intended to keep the letters. The location was somewhere the student intended to keep other practicum-related items, and this desire was similar to Hall et al.’s (2000)
report of children keeping letters somewhere “safe,” even two years after a study ended. Valuing the ability to reread a letter was also similar to Pyle’s (2006, 2009) report that clients appreciated letters because they could reread them. Additionally, value in rereading letters was similar to Alexander et al.’s (2008) report of practicum students writing letters to clients and clients reporting value in rereading letters, particularly in-between counseling sessions.

**Theme four: Additional instructor perspective and feedback was another form of support.** The fourth common theme for what aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees was all five students viewed the additional instructor perspective and the additional feedback in the letters as another form of support. This theme did not correspond with an initial researcher assumption about the current research prior to data collection, and it was not an initial assumption.

Desmond and Kindsvatter (2010) suggested letters could be an extension of face-to-face supervision sessions. Similar to reports by Rodgers (2009) and Alexander et al. (2008), the letters provided support outside of face-to-face meetings. The letters were viewed as an “additional” perspective that was separate and distinct. The view by students and the instructor that letters served as a separate perspective, even though the letters at times continued what the instructor discussed in person, reflects that letters provides an opportunity to add another “layer” to reinforcing and facilitating development as counselor trainees.

Although the letters were seen as another instructor perspective and feedback that was supportive, two students wanted the additional support from the letters to be spaced
out somewhat differently. The researcher and the instructor discussed in advance the approximate times during the semester the letters would be written and delivered, and gaps between letters were not the same. The gap between letters three and four was longer than the gap between any other letters due to semester schedules. The discussion of letter spacing by two students corresponds somewhat with a theme discussed previously about students wanting more feedback from the letters, and it also reflects the additional support the letters provided and the additional support two students wanted from the letters. Although expectations such as a letter every three or four weeks to a supervisee can be helpful, it is also helpful for an instructor or supervisor interested in writing letters to practicum students to recognize that additional letters may be more beneficial when they correspond with student needs that arise.

**Integration of research question two themes.** Research question two explored what aspects of the letters influenced student development. Although each of the four themes could stand on their own as a separate aspect of what influenced student development, the themes connected to answer the research question and were interrelated aspects that influenced students in their development.

Theme one reflected that personalized feedback from the instructor showed students the instructor was paying attention to them as an individual student. Knowing the instructor noticed things about them as students in class and as counselors in session mattered to students, and the letters were “evidence” of that. To some students, the effort they perceived the instructor put into personalizing letters was important. That perceived effort reflected in the choice of words the instructor included in the letters. Words that
made up the “evidence” of the instructor paying attention also included specific words that stood out to mean something more than other words (theme two). In addition to specific words standing out, the writing style the words shaped also stood out at times.

A specific word or specific words, as well as writing style that stood out in letters, was reinforced by letters being in writing and the ability to reread them (theme three). Rereading letters also reminded students of the instructor paying attention. Having then the ability to reread letters at any time in the future would reinforce the individualized feedback, specific words, and the writing style. In addition to rereading letters, being in writing made the letters more “permanent,” and even if letters were not reread, being in writing added “weight” to the letters, the words they contained, and the “evidence” of the instructor’s attention.

Even though the instructor wrote the letters, they were seen by students as an additional instructor perspective and another form of support (theme four). Being in writing and the ability to reread letters contributed to the letters being viewed as separate from the instructor. Words and writing style also contributed to letters being seen as an additional perspective and another form of support by providing an outlet for the instructor to write in a more informal way and to share observations in a different manner.

Supplemental Theme: Stress Levels and Expectations During the Semester Were Considered Unique

An additional common theme emerged. This theme did not correspond with an initial researcher assumption about the current research prior to data collection, it was not
an initial assumption, and it was not associated with either research question. It is an important theme to discuss though because along with stress and anxiety that nearly all counseling students experience when they first begin seeing clients (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003b; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Weatherford et al., 2008), students in the current research experienced stress they considered unique in comparison to other semesters. This stress—both personal and course related—was perceived as “beyond” what was anticipated and what was expected for the semester. It is possible responses to supervision letters could have been different if students experienced less stress or stress that may have been perceived as “typical.” The current research though did not compare experiences from other semesters.

**Integration of Research Question One and Two Themes and Supplemental Theme**

Two research questions resulted in four themes for each question. In addition to that, there was a supplemental theme. All themes were interrelated and contributed to the “whole” of the case.

Research question two explored what aspects of the letters influenced student development. Research question one explored how students responded to receiving letters. One of the themes from research question one was students recognized the influence letters had on development. This theme directly connected to research question two and the aspects of the letters that influenced development.

Theme one from research question one discussed that students valued receiving the letters and looked forward to receiving them. All four themes from research question two connected to that theme because personalization of letters, words in letters, writing
style of letters, being in writing, being able to reread letters, letters as an additional instructor perspective, and letters as another form of support were all aspects of the letters that influenced development and were valued by students. Additionally, in theme two from research question one, students discussed wanting more feedback from letters. With the desired feedback being related mostly to development, themes from research question two also connected to theme two from research question one.

Theme three from research question one addressed that students experienced emotional reactions that varied among letters and each other. Not only were those emotional reactions connected to the other three themes of research question one, they were also influenced by research question two themes. Specific words, personalization, supportive feedback, “permanence” of being in writing, and rereading letters all contributed to experiencing emotional reactions to letters. Those reactions also varied among letters and each other because specific words stood out to each student, letters were personalized to each student, and support from the letters applied to individual needs.

In addition to research question one themes and research question two themes being interrelated, the supplemental theme was connected to those themes. In this theme, students discussed experiencing stress levels and expectations during the semester they considered unique. Although the supplemental theme was not associated with either research question, it was connected to both research questions because the semester, the practicum class, and the experiences of the participants were all aspects of the case. However, the effect the perception of stress and expectations had on how students
responded to receiving letters and what aspects of letters influenced their development was not explored. It is possible students would have had similar responses to receiving letters from their instructor and similar aspects of the letters would have influenced development even if the stress level and expectations were not considered unique. It also may be that since stress levels and expectations during the semester were perceived as unique, receiving letters during the semester was invaluable to students.

**Implications**

Although the results applied only for participants of the current research, it could still be helpful to discuss implications for counselor educators and for practicum supervisors. Suggestions for writing supervision letters are also discussed.

**Implications for Counselor Educators**

Supervision letters can be an additional tool that supports practicum student development. When practicum students first meet with clients, they experience various stressors, and letters can help students better respond to those stressors. Letters can serve as another perspective or outlet for a practicum instructor to share information with students and ask questions of students. Letters can also be another form of support outside of class, with students being able to “see” their progress. Students would be more likely to reread a letter that was written on paper, and the content could be reinforced each time a letter is read. Letters can include details about student growth as well as suggested areas of improvement. Letters could also offer an informal means of communicating with students that not only can provide a less serious perspective, but that can also be viewed by students as proof that the practicum instructor values who they are
as individual students. The opportunity would be there to offer feedback in a more informal manner on the initial development of skills. As discussed previously though, consideration would need to be taken on word choice and individual student struggles and needs.

Supervision letters could also be a tool that assists practicum instructors to think more about students and to reflect in a different way on student progress and development. The process of letter writing can be challenging and frustrating (SmithBattle et al., 2010), and writing letters does involve a time commitment, but the benefit seems to outweigh the challenges. The practicum instructor for this study discussed that the process of writing supervision letters was a valuable experience. Similar to what Steinberg (2000), M. White and Epston (1990), and V. E. White and Murray (2002) discussed, writing them encouraged reflection of individual student progress, struggles, or feedback they might benefit from. The instructor also shared that through writing supervision letters she felt a more personal connection to students, felt more comfortable saying things in letters compared to in person, and felt letters enhanced her relationship with students.

**Implications for Practicum Supervisors**

During practicum, the instructor may also be the individual supervisor for students; however, at times the individual supervisor is not the practicum instructor. There is a distinction during practicum between group supervision with the instructor (entire practicum class) and with an individual supervisor (one-on-one or triadic). Even though there are differences, and the current research did not explore how practicum
students responded to receiving letters from a supervisor serving only as an individual supervisor, it could be beneficial to discuss the potential implications.

Supervision letters can also be an additional tool for individual supervisors to support practicum student development. As noted above, students may have an individual supervisor who is not their practicum instructor, and this may be more so the situation if the practicum student is meeting with clients at a location external to the counseling program. Letters from an individual supervisor to practicum students could assist students in the ways similar to letters from an instructor. Additionally, similar to the instructor benefiting from writing supervision letters, the individual supervisor could also benefit.

**Supervision Letter Writing Suggestions**

If a practicum instructor or a practicum supervisor is considering writing supervision letters to students/supervisees, it may be helpful to have some suggestions. Table 2 summarizes suggestions for writing supervision letters to practicum students as well as how each suggestion was informed by the current research. Some of the suggestions are also similar to the Letter Writing Suggestions found in Appendix K. Suggestions based on the current research and the suggestions from Appendix K may not fit with every student or with every instructor or supervisor.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations to the current research. A first limitation was the instructor was also the individual supervisor for three out of the five students. It is not
clear if meeting with the instructor more or less than the amount of time it took to meet for class had an influence in how students responded to receiving letters.

A second limitation was the current research did not explore in more depth the experience of an instructor who writes supervision letters. The instructor for the current research shared that writing the letters was a process that became easier over time and that writing the letters was valuable to her as a supervisor/instructor.

A third limitation to the current research was there was no confirmation of when students completed the written letter responses. Since two of the letter responses were provided to the researcher at the check-in interview and two letter responses were provided at the ending interview, it is unclear when they were completed. It was intended that student participants complete them shortly after reading each letter in order to explore the initial reactions to each letter.

A fourth limitation to the current research was the researcher’s previous experience with letter writing. The researcher wrote a reflexive memo prior to any data collection, kept a “timeline diary” throughout data collection and analysis, and consulted with a peer debriefer throughout data collection and analysis in an effort to set aside researcher assumptions and biases as much as possible. Initial researcher assumptions were that students would receive letters favorable and the letters would influence student development as counselor trainees. It is possible initial assumptions based on the researcher’s own experience with letter writing unknowingly influenced interpretation of available data.
Table 2

Suggestions for Writing Supervision Letters to Practicum Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>How Informed By Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allocate sufficient time to write</td>
<td>The instructor discussed the additional time it took to personalize the letters and to think about each student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a letter on paper</td>
<td>Students appreciated receiving letters on paper and the ability to reread them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be cautious of wording</td>
<td>A word and/or words stood out to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain awareness of words standing out</td>
<td>Students appreciated that the letters seemed informal, and aspects on the left contributed to informality of the letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use metaphors</td>
<td>Students wanted more detail/feedback from the letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include quotes</td>
<td>Students discussed having emotional reactions to reading letters - positive and negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vary punctuation - especially include exclamation marks</td>
<td>Students noticed the letters helped influence confidence, anxiety, self-awareness, and the supervision relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect personality</td>
<td>Students valued that letters were personalized, and students viewed things in the letters that were individual to them as proof the instructor was paying attention to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide details on clinical skills, client care, strengths, and areas of improvement</td>
<td>Student responses to letters were sometimes less positive / negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain awareness of emotional reactions to letters</td>
<td>Specific words stood out to students, and they had emotional reactions to reading them, plus students also valued being able to reread them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address developmental areas in letters</td>
<td>Because of receiving letters, students expressed the desire to write letters to clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalize by noting clinical/class behaviors and individual qualities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage supervisees to write back and/or follow-up in person with any questions or concerns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proofread before delivering a letter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage student exploration of therapeutic letter writing to clients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Future Research

The current research added to the existing literature on counseling supervision and letter writing in counselor education and supervision. It did this by exploring how practicum students responded to receiving supervision letters from their instructor and by examining what it was about the letters that contributed to student development as counselor trainees. There were several areas though that the research did not explore, and it may be beneficial to explore some of these areas in the future.

A first area that may be beneficial to explore is diversity. This includes gender, cultural, and age. It may be beneficial to examine how students who identify as male, identify as a culture other than Caucasian, and who add a more diverse age range respond to receiving letters. Not only could it be potentially beneficial to look at differences in how males and females write and read letters during counselor training, but also how various cultures view and respond to receiving letters on paper and how participants of different generations respond.

A second area that may be beneficial to explore is how other practicum classes respond to receiving letters and the value they attribute or do not attribute to them. In addition, it may be beneficial to explore how other classes in a counseling program respond to receiving letters from an instructor. A third area that may be beneficial to explore is related to student development. This could include exploring developmental milestones addressed in letters and/or areas reflected on performance evaluations. This could also include exploring letters to students who do not meet various developmental milestones or who could benefit from improving on previous performance evaluations.
Additionally, it could be beneficial to explore what other aspects of development the letters could address and what may be some other areas from which students could benefit.

A fourth area that may be beneficial to explore is when a practicum instructor is the supervisor for all practicum students and/or when all practicum students have an individual supervisor who is not their instructor. A fifth area that may be beneficial to explore is the experience of the instructor who writes letters. It could be beneficial to explore the process of writing letters and how that process influences teaching and/or the development of the instructor.

A sixth area that may be beneficial to explore is how students respond to letters while reading them. It may be helpful to see how in-the-moment reactions to reading letters changes or does not change each time a letter is read. A seventh area that may be beneficial to explore is how practicum students respond to receiving letters from their practicum instructor when the researcher has little to no previous experience with letter writing.

An eighth area that may be beneficial to explore is letter writing in counseling programs that are completely or almost entirely online. A ninth area that may be beneficial to explore is how practicum students respond to receiving letters from a supervisor in another counseling environment such as a community mental health agency.

A 10th area that may be beneficial to explore is letter writing between practicum student and practicum instructor. Additionally, it could be beneficial to explore how
much influence letters have on the supervision relationship in comparison to a supervision relationship where letter writing does not occur.

An 11th area that may be beneficial to explore is the influence words, punctuation, and formal versus informal writing style influences reader response and development during practicum. This could include exploring further the value of quotes, metaphors, and punctuation in letters. It could also include exploring the perception of positive and negative words and the influence they have on students. Word “categories” exist that indicate that certain words are considered positive, neutral, or negative; it could be beneficial to explore if word “categories” and their emotional association would be similar for practicum students or if students have their own word “categories.”

A 12th area that might be beneficial to explore is a comparison of the value of letters during practicum versus face-to-face supervision. This could also include comparing the experience of receiving letters written on paper versus emailed letters as well as a comparison between typed and printed letters versus handwritten letters. This also may include exploring the influence of letters being on paper, the different perspective it provides, and the influence of rereading something on paper compared to an electronic format.

A 13th area to explore that may be beneficial is following-up on what students do with supervision letters in the future. This could also include looking at students who have received supervision letters and the prevalence of them then writing therapeutic letters to clients.
Summary

Practicum students encounter several stressors when they first begin meeting with clients, and practicum is one of the most difficult and important times in the development and training of counselors. People have written and received letters for centuries, with those letters influencing things such as relationships, love, war, communication, and literature. The longevity of letter writing and the value given to letters led to their use as therapeutic interventions. Their use as therapeutic interventions has increased in the last few decades, and the benefits of therapeutic letters informed suggestions that letters from a supervisor may assist in the training and supervision of counseling students.

The purpose of the current research was to explore how practicum students responded to receiving supervision letters from their instructor and how those letters influenced their development as counselor trainees. Five practicum students and one practicum instructor took part in the study. The current research was a single case study, and it followed qualitative data collection methods. The instructor wrote four supervision letters to each student. Students responded to a written letter response for each letter and took part in a check-in and ending interview. The instructor responded to four email check-ins by the researcher and took part in an ending interview. Analysis of data followed an interpretive inquiry approach and a constant comparative method. The researcher hoped the results of the current research would offer a better understanding of how practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor and what aspects of those letters influence their development as counselor trainees.
Students responded favorably to receiving letters. Although they liked receiving letters, students wanted more feedback from the letters that reinforced their strengths as well as addressing things students could do to continue positive development. Students experienced emotional reactions to reading and receiving letters. The reactions to letters were never the same for each letter; students liked some letters they received better than others. Each student recognized the influence letters had on counselor development, and each student’s overall response to letters was unique.

How students responded to receiving letters showed that letters made a difference and helped them in their development as counselor trainees in various ways. Even though students valued letters, they wanted even more help from them. Not only did receiving letters influence students in areas of anxiety, confidence, professional identity, self-awareness, and the relationship with their instructor, receiving them also contributed to emotional experiences that reflected the uniqueness of each student.

Several aspects of the letters influenced students in their development as counselor trainees. The first aspect was letters were viewed as evidence the practicum instructor was paying attention to them, their individual differences, and their unique needs. The second aspect was specific words stood out in the letters. The number of words varied but was at times as few as one. Words stood out mainly in a positive manner, but occasionally, a word or words were viewed by students as negative. Along with words standing out, the writing style of letters stood out because it was seen as informal.
A third aspect of letters that influenced students in their development as counselor trainees was letters were on paper and could be reread. Students appreciated “seeing” in writing details about themselves, especially personalized details. Students also appreciated being able to reread letters or knowing they could reread them in the future. The fourth aspect was letters served as additional feedback and was an additional perspective that students found supportive. Letters offered the instructor another format to provide support and feedback.

Various aspects of letters influenced student development. As a whole, the aspects that influenced development included individual pieces that applied specifically to each student. This included the personalized feedback, the words and writing style that stood out, what it meant to be in writing, opportunities to reread, and the added support and instructor perspective the letters provided.

Along with students finding letters valuable, the instructor also found letters valuable, even though writing them required a time commitment and it was more difficult to personalize them early in the semester. The time it took to write them lessened, and it got easier to personalize letters over time. Through writing, the instructor appreciated the increased focus on students, the opportunity to reflect on their development, and the distance letters provided while at the same time enhancing the supervision relationship.

The findings of the current research demonstrated how practicum students responded to receiving supervision letters from their practicum instructor and what aspects of letters influenced their development. Practicum students who participated in the current research benefited from receiving letters from their instructor and several
aspects of the letters influenced their development. The findings of the current research also contributes to the available literature on counselor training and supervision.
APPENDIX A

RESEARCHER REFLEXIVE DIARY QUESTIONS
Appendix A

Researchers Reflexive Diary Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diary Questions During Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are my reactions to situations and/or events related to the study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How could that affect the study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are my thoughts related to the study?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diary Questions During Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How could my presence in the study influence my interpretation of the data?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What could be another way of looking at the data and/or labeling the apparent themes?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC FORM
Appendix B

Demographic Form

1. What gender do you identify as? ________________________________

2. What is your age? ________________________________

3. What ethnicity do you identify with? ________________________________

4. How many years experience do you have working in the mental health field? 
   __________________________________________________________________

5. What is your preferred email address (this is only for communication with the 
   researcher and will not be disclosed)?
   __________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL EMAIL
Appendix C

Institutional Review Board Approval Email

RE: IRB # 14-571 entitled “How Counseling Students Respond to Receiving Supervision letters from their Practicum Instructors”

Hello,

I am pleased to inform you that the Kent State University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as a Level II/Expedited, category 7 project.

Approval is effective for a twelve-month period: February 24, 2015 through February 23, 2016

*A copy of the IRB approved consent form is attached to this email. This “stamped” copy is the consent form that you must use for your research participants. It is important for you to also keep an unstamped text copy (i.e., Microsoft Word version) of your consent form for subsequent submissions.

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy require that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year. The IRB has determined that this protocol requires an annual review and progress report. The IRB tries to send you annual review reminder notice to by email as a courtesy. However, please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to be aware of the study expiration date and submit the required materials. Please submit review materials (annual review form and copy of current consent form) one month prior to the expiration date.

HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); FWA Number 00001853.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at Researchcompliance@kent.edu or 330-672-2704 or 330-672-8058.

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Paulette Washko | Director | 330.672.2704 | pwashko@kent.edu

For links to obtain general information, access forms, and complete required training, visit our website at www.kent.edu/research.
APPENDIX D

POTENTIAL PRACTICUM INSTRUCTOR PARTICIPANT INVITATION

EMAIL SCRIPT
Appendix D

Potential Practicum Instructor Participant Invitation Email Script

Dear ______,

I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Counseling and Human Development Services Program at Kent State University. I am beginning to collect data for my dissertation. After discussing fall 2015 practicum instructors with my committee of Dr. Steve Rainey and Dr. Jason McGlothlin as well as the Community Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) program coordinator, it was suggested that you may have an interest in my research topic. I am exploring how beginning counseling practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor.

If you are interested in the topic and possibly participating, could we please set up a meeting time to discuss the study further. This would not mean you agree to participate. I want to offer you the opportunity to ask any questions you may have and to provide you with information in writing, including consent forms, to look over.

Please respond to this email or you’re also welcome to contact me by phone at (330) 754-9656 if you are interested in talking more about the study. I greatly appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

William Maxon-Kann

wmaxonk@kent.edu
APPENDIX E

PRACTICUM INSTRUCTOR STUDY TIMELINE
Appendix E

Practicum Instructor Study Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-Investigator &amp; Instructor Meet</td>
<td>Prior to semester beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Investigator Attends Practicum Class, Offers Opportunity for</td>
<td>Initial few weeks of semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Participation, &amp; Collects Forms (Signed and Unsigned)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Writes Letter One (Emailed to Co-Investigator or</td>
<td>Four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented at Ending Interview)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Receives and Responds to Check-In Email</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Receives Gift Card 1 (By mail or other arrangement)</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Writes Letter Two (Emailed to Co-Investigator or</td>
<td>Seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented at Ending Interview)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Receives and Responds to Check-In Email</td>
<td>Eight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Writes Letter Three (Emailed to Co-Investigator or</td>
<td>Ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented at Ending Interview)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Receives Gift Card 2 (By mail or other arrangement)</td>
<td>Ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Receives and Responds to Check-In Email</td>
<td>Eleven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Writes Letter Four (Emailed to Co-Investigator or</td>
<td>Thirteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented at Ending Interview)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Receives and Responds to Check-In Email</td>
<td>Fourteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Investigator &amp; Instructor Meet for Face–to-Face Ending Interview</td>
<td>Fifteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ Instructor Provides All Letters if Not Previously Emailed /</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Receives Final Gift Card</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Receives Email Summary of Ending Interview for Member–</td>
<td>Within 2 Weeks of Ending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check</td>
<td>Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Responds to Member-Check by Email (Offered but Optional)</td>
<td>Within 1 Week of Receipt of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

IN A RESEARCH STUDY—PRACTICUM INSTRUCTOR
Appendix F

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study—Practicum Instructor

Study Title:
How counseling students respond to receiving supervision letters from their practicum instructor.

Principal Investigator: Steve Rainey, Ph.D.

Co-Investigator: William Maxon-Kann, M. Ed., PCC-S

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you to review prior to signing.

Purpose:
The focus of this study is to explore how mental health practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor. The purpose is to explore how letters affect practicum student development and what it is about the letters that influence students and their development.

Procedures:
You will be asked to participate in a 1 hour and 30 minute interview. The interview will be with the co-investigator, be audio recorded, and be transcribed by the co-investigator. The interview will occur during the final 2 weeks of the fall 2015 semester. The interview will be at a time of your choosing and at a pre-determined room at the university. After the interview, you will receive a written summary of the interview by *email to review for accuracy. If you provide any corrections to the summary within two weeks of receiving it, the co-investigator will make necessary changes.

You will also be asked to write 4 letters to each practicum student participant throughout the fall 2015 semester. The co-investigator will request copies of the letters at the ending interview. Also, you will be asked to include questions for students to answer related to receiving the letter. This one page list of questions will be provided to you by the co-investigator. In addition to the letters, you will be asked to respond to a brief check-in *email after sending each letter. At the conclusion of all data collection, no follow-up will be required.

All documents related to this study except one will be used solely for the present research and will not be shared or used for any other purpose. The exception is the supervision...
letters. In addition to the supervision letters being used for research purposes, and since the letters are related to supervision, copies of them will need to be included with all other practicum-related evaluations and supervision documentation in the practicum student’s confidential student file maintained by the Counseling and Human Development Services Program at Kent State University. Because the letters are supervision letters and they will be included in practicum student files with all other practicum-related evaluations and supervision documentation, clients of practicum student participants must then be informed by practicum students that he or she will be receiving the supervision letters (a script and copies of the “notification of research study on supervision letters” form will be provided to student participants).

Although letters will not contain any client identifying information or details from sessions, if a client reports being uncomfortable with a practicum student receiving supervision letters, student participants shall notify you so you are aware and can make sure no letter content will address any student interventions, skills, or performance that specifically relates to that particular client only or information shared in class that relates to that client only.

*Email is not a secure form of communication. You will be offered, and you are welcome to request at any time, an alternative method of written correspondence. These methods may include but are not limited to United States Postal Service certified mail (at the co-investigator’s expense) or hand delivery (the co-investigator will travel to deliver and/or pick up).

**Audio / Video Recording and Photography:**
(Please also reference “Audio/Video Recording Consent Form” accompanying this consent form)
The interview mentioned above will be audio recorded. You must provide your consent before the recording may occur. The recording will be immediately transferred to the co-investigator’s password protected computer. The recording will not be shared, and it will be used for research purposes only.

**Benefits:**
The potential benefits of participating in this study may include a better understanding of the influence of letter writing in practicum counseling supervision, in counselor trainee development, and in counselor education. In addition, potential benefits may include increased self-reflection as a supervisor, a teacher, and a counselor.

**Risks and Discomforts:**
There are no anticipated risks for this study beyond those encountered in everyday life.

**Privacy and Confidentiality:**
Your study related information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Identifying information will be kept in a secure location. Only the co-investigator, a peer debriefer, and potentially the co-investigator’s dissertation committee will have access to
the data. The co-investigator will meet with the peer debriefor during the course of data collection and data analysis. The purpose of the peer debriefor is to strengthen the study. This will be done by the peer debriefor discussing with the co-investigator thoughts about findings, asking questions to assist the co-investigator to maintain as much objectivity as possible, and offering a second perspective. The peer debriefor for this study will also be bound by confidentiality and has completed researcher training. He or she will not have access to names or identifying information.

Confidentiality will be maintained by the use of pseudonyms. The co-investigator will not identify the location of the practicum course. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from your study data, and responses will not be linked to you. The audio recording will be kept only on the co-investigator’s password protected computer and will not be shared. Research participants will not be identified in any publication or presentation of research results. The program documents will be used solely for the purpose of this research. Your research information may, in certain circumstances, be disclosed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research at Kent State University, or to certain federal agencies. Confidentiality may not be maintained if you indicate that you may do harm to yourself or others.

**Compensation:**
You will receive a total of $50.00 in Visa gift cards from the co-investigator. The gift cards will be given in increments throughout the semester of the study. A $10 gift card will be given during week 5, a $10 one during week 10, and a $30 gift card at the ending interview of the study (within the last two weeks of the fall 2015 semester). The $10 gift cards will be delivered in person by the co-investigator prior to the beginning of practicum class during the designated week. If you prefer to receive the $10 gift cards by other means, such as United States Postal Service, that can be arranged with the co-investigator (at the co-investigator’s expense).

**Voluntary Participation:**
Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

**Contact Information:**
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact William Maxon-Kann at (330) 754-9656, Dr. Steve Rainey at (330) 672-0694, or Dr. Jason McGlothlin at (330) 672-0716. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at (330) 672-2704.
**Consent Statement and Signature:**
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions
answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand
that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

______________________________________________  ______________________
Participant Signature                   Date
APPENDIX G

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE
IN A RESEARCH STUDY—PRACTICUM STUDENT
Appendix G

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study—Practicum Student

**Study Title:**
How counseling students respond to receiving supervision letters from their practicum instructor.

**Principal Researcher:** Steve Rainey, Ph.D.

**Co-Investigator:** William Maxon-Kann, M. Ed., PCC-S

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you to review prior to signing.

**Purpose:**
The focus of this study is to explore how mental health practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor. The purpose is to explore how letters affect practicum student development and what it is about the letters that influence students and their development.

**Procedures:**
You will be asked to participate in one 30 minute interview and a 1 hour and 30 minute interview. Both interviews will be with the co-investigator, be audio recorded, and be transcribed by the co-investigator. The first interview will occur around the midpoint of the fall 2015 semester, and the second will take place within the final two weeks of the semester. They will both be at a time of your choosing and at a pre-determined room at the university. After both interviews, you will receive a written summary of the interview by *email to review it for accuracy. If you provide any corrections to the summary within two weeks of receiving it, the co-investigator will make necessary corrections.

You will also be asked to receive 4 letters from your instructor. You will be expected to bring the letters with you at the second interview. In addition to the letter, there will be a form with 4 questions on it for you to answer after you receive each letter. You will be expected to bring those forms to the second interview to turn-in to the co-investigator. If you request it, the letter responses will be returned to you. At the conclusion of all data collection, no follow-up will be required.
All documents related to this study except one will be used solely for the present research and will not be shared or used for any other purpose. The exception is the supervision letters. In addition to the supervision letters being used for research purposes, and since the letters are related to supervision, copies of them will be included with all other practicum-related evaluations and supervision documentation in your confidential student file maintained by the Counseling and Human Development Services Program at Kent State University.

Because the letters are supervision letters and they will be included in your student file with all other practicum-related evaluations and supervision documentation, clients you meet with must be informed of you receiving the letters (a script will be provided). You will need to present a “notification of research study on supervision letters” form to clients you meet with (copies of the form will be provided). Although letters will not contain any client identifying information or details from sessions, if a client reports being uncomfortable with you receiving supervision letters, you will need to notify your instructor so no letter content will address any interventions, skills, or performance that specifically relates to that particular client only or information shared in class that relates to that client only.

*Email is not a secure form of communication. You will be offered, and you are welcome to request at any time, an alternative method of written correspondence. These methods may include but are not limited to United States Postal Service certified mail (at the co-investigator’s expense) or hand delivery (the co-investigator will travel to deliver and/or pick up).

Audio / Video Recording and Photography:
(Please reference “Audio/Video Recording Consent Form” accompanying this consent form)
Both interviews mentioned above will be audio recorded. You must provide your consent before any recordings may occur. The recordings will be immediately transferred to the co-investigator’s password protected computer. The recordings will not be shared, and they will be used for research purposes only.

Benefits:
The potential benefits of participating in this study may include a better understanding of the influence of letter writing on counselor development during practicum as well as receiving additional support during practicum.

Risks and Discomforts:
There are no anticipated risks for this study beyond those encountered in everyday life.

Privacy and Confidentiality:
Your study related information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Identifying information will be kept in a secure location. Only the co-investigator, a peer
debriefer, and potentially the co-investigator’s dissertation committee will have access to the data. The co-investigator will meet with the peer debriefer during the course of data collection and data analysis. The purpose of the peer debriefer is to strengthen the study. This will be done by the peer debriefer discussing with the co-investigator thoughts about findings, asking questions to assist the co-investigator to maintain as much objectivity as possible, and offering a second perspective. The peer debriefer for this study will also be bound by confidentiality and has completed researcher training. He or she will not have access to names or identifying information.

Confidentiality will be maintained by the use of pseudonyms. The co-investigator will not identify the location of the practicum course. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from your study data, and responses will not be linked to you. The audio recording will be kept on only the co-investigator’s password protected computer and will not be shared. Research participants will not be identified in any publication or presentation of research results. The program documents will be used solely for the purpose of this research. Your research information may, in certain circumstances, be disclosed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research at Kent State University, or to certain federal agencies. Confidentiality may not be maintained if you indicate that you may do harm to yourself or others.

Compensation:
You will receive a total of $50.00 in Visa gift cards from the co-investigator. The gift cards will be given in increments throughout the semester of the study. A $10 gift card will be given during week 5, a $10 one during week 10, and a $30 gift card at the ending interview of the study (within the last two weeks of the fall 2015 semester). The $10 gift cards will be delivered in person by the co-investigator prior to the beginning of practicum class during the designated week. If you prefer to receive the $10 gift cards by other means, such as United States Postal Service, that can be arranged with the co-investigator (at the co-investigator’s expense).

Voluntary Participation:
Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. This includes if at any time you are struggling academically or the study is interfering with your academic performance. Agreement or not to participate in this study is not a course requirement and will not influence your final course grade. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

Contact Information:
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact William Maxon-Kann at (330) 754-9656, Dr. Steve Rainey at (330) 672-0694, or Dr. Jason McGlothlin at (330) 672-0716. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a
research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at (330) 672-2704.

**Consent Statement and Signature:**
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

______________________________  ______________________
Participant Signature                  Date
APPENDIX H

PRACTICUM STUDENT STUDY TIMELINE
## Appendix H

### Practicum Student Study Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-Investigator Attends Practicum Class: Discusses Research, Provides Forms, and Answers Student Questions - Collects Student Forms (if any)</td>
<td>First Few Weeks of Semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Provides Notification of Research Study on Supervision Letters Form to Clients</td>
<td>Any Week Meeting Initially with New Client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Receives Letter One</td>
<td>Four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Writes Letter Response One</td>
<td>Four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Receives Gift Card 1 (By mail or other arrangement)</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Receives Letter Two</td>
<td>Seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Writes Letter Response Two</td>
<td>Seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Meets with Co-Investigator for Face-to-Face Check-In Interview</td>
<td>Eight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Receives Summary Provided of Check-In Interview for Member–Check</td>
<td>Within 1 Week of Check-In Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Responds to Member-Check (Offered but Optional)</td>
<td>Within 1 Week of Receipt of Summary from Co-Investigator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Receives Letter Three</td>
<td>Ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Writes Letter Response Three</td>
<td>Ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Receives Gift Card 2 (By mail or other arrangement)</td>
<td>Ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Timeframe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Receives Letter Four</td>
<td>Thirteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Writes Letter Response Four</td>
<td>Thirteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Meets with Co-Investigator for Face-to-Face Ending Interview / Student Provides All Letter Responses / Student Receives Final Gift Card</td>
<td>Fifteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Receives Summary of Ending Interview for Member–Check</td>
<td>Within 2 Weeks of Ending Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Responds to Member-Check (Offered but Optional)</td>
<td>Within 1 Week of Ending Interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I

AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING CONSENT FORM
Appendix I

Audio/Video Recording Consent Form

How Practicum Students Respond to Receiving Supervision Letters from their Instructor

William Maxon-Kann, M.Ed., PCC-S

I agree to participate in no more than two audio recorded interviews about how practicum students respond to receiving personal styled letters from their practicum instructor as part of this project and for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that William Maxon-Kann may audio record these interviews. The interviews will take place at a designated room at the university. The date and time of the interviews will be mutually agreed upon.

________________________________________________________________________

Signature  Date

I have been told that I have the right to listen to the recordings of the interviews before they are used. I have decided that I:

_____ want to listen to the recordings  _____do not want to listen to the recordings

Sign below if you do not want to listen to the recording. If you want to listen to the recording, you will be asked to sign after listening to them.

William Maxon-Kann may / may not (circle one) use the audio recordings made of me.

The original recordings or copies may be used for:

_____ this research project  _____ publication  _____ presentation at professional meetings

________________________________________________________________________

Signature  Date
APPENDIX J

NOTIFICATION OF RESEARCH STUDY ON SUPERVISION LETTERS
Appendix J

Notification of Research Study on Supervision Letters

- The purpose of this form is to inform you that as part of a research study during the fall 2015 semester, the counselor in training you meet with will be receiving at least 4 supervision letters from his or her instructor in a course entitled practicum. This course includes group supervision with other counselors in training. During this supervision, the counselors in training may share some information about clients and/or show small segments of session recordings, which may or may not relate to you and your sessions. The purpose of supervision is for the professional growth and development of counselors in training and to assist with client care, and the instructor and other students in the course are bound by the same laws of confidentiality as the counselor in training you meet with.

- Supervision letters are intended to promote professional growth and development of counselors in training and to assist with client care. They will confidentially reference counselor in training performance in class and in sessions and will contain general suggestions, questions, statements, or recommendations related to the counselor in training’s development based off things he or she talks about in practicum class, the counseling skills demonstrated in sessions, and responses to class requirements.

- Supervision letters will not contain Protected Health Information, including demographic information, details of sessions, or any information that could be used for identification.

- Supervision letters will be used for research purposes by a researcher at the university. The focus of the research is how counselors in training respond to receiving supervision letters. Information gathered will aid in the development and specialization of counselors in training. The researcher for the study will receive copies of the letters and another copy of each letter will be maintained in your counselor in training’s file at the university. Again, no identifiable information will be shared in the supervision letters.

- If this form does not satisfactorily answer your questions, do not hesitate to notify your counselor in training.

- If you are not comfortable with the counselor in training you meet with receiving supervision letters from his or her instructor, please notify your counselor in training and return this form.

- I, ________________________________ (print name), have read and understand the Notice of Research Study on Supervision Letters. All questions concerning
supervision letters have been answered to my satisfaction at this time, and I understand I may ask questions later and inform my counselor in training at any time, for any reason, if I become uncomfortable with him or her receiving supervision letters.

__________________________________________________________
Client Signature
Date

__________________________________________________________
Witness/Counselor in Training Signature
Date

__________________________________________________________
Parent or Guardian Signature (if client is a minor)
Date
APPENDIX K

SUPERVISION LETTER WRITING SUGGESTIONS
**Appendix K**

**Supervision Letter Writing Suggestions *  

*These are Only Suggestions**

The Letter Format Considered Should Be:
- Typed on Computer and Printed OR Handwritten
- Placed in a sealed envelope with the student’s name on the outside of the envelope

### Writing a More Informal – Styled Letter

- Reflect some personality
- Be more individualized
- Write like talk
- Be curious
- Don’t let grammar impede expression
- Use contractions
- Include occasional asides
- Include positive comments
- Make sincere/honest comments
- Use active voice
- Write in short paragraphs
- Don’t use too much professional jargon
- Use occasional slang or colloquialisms
- Write with simple language / shorter words
- Write in short, succinct sentences (1 idea, 1 sentence)
- Inflect certain important words by underlining them
- Use many verbs: limited adjectives and adverbs
- Use concrete/specific words
- Address by name occasionally: At beginning or end of sentences
- Try to include at least one small, appropriate story or thing about yourself
- Don’t use stereotyped words / phrases (unless matches with participant individuality)

### Additional Helpful Aspects

- Compliment in first sentence of every letter
- Point out strengths
- Include recipient exact words
- Mention small and larger concrete examples of positive changes
- Include metaphors recipient relates to
- Ask at least one question
- Ask some questions acknowledging recipient struggles
- Express excitement to find out the answer
- Share “suspicions” of how things will improve for them and how they will continue to grow
- Address reported and/or observed things that reinforces their preferred story

### Developmental Content

- Normalize anxiety
- Point out strengths often
- Provide positive feedback
- Offer support
- Give specific suggestions
- Address strengths before needed improvements
- Limit to a few supervision areas at a time
- Praise at least one basic counseling skill often
- Reinforce counseling skills that would apply to all their clients
- Address role differences as a counselor vs. “friend”
- Express interest and excitement in supervisee change/development
- Point out they cannot control client change: only create space that supports client change
- Discuss supervisee fit within the counseling profession
- Include supervisee in developing goals for supervision

### After Writing

- Reread
- Check language
- Make sure are no opportunities for misunderstanding
- If possible, briefly confirm there was not a misunderstanding or concern with the letter
APPENDIX L

POTENTIAL PRACTICUM STUDENT PARTICIPANT REQUEST SCRIPT
Appendix L

Potential Practicum Student Participant Request Script

Thank you (instructor name) and all of you for allowing me to briefly talk with you today. My name is Will, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counseling and Human Development Services Program at Kent State University. For my dissertation, I am researching how practicum students respond to receiving supervision letters from their instructor. My advisors are Dr. Steve Rainey and Dr. Jason McGlothlin.

If you agree to participate, there are a few things for you to do that are not part of your class requirement. I want to stress though, that you do not have to participate, it is not part of your grade, and you can stop participating at any time.

You are all busy, and I know I am asking more than what you would have to do for this course. For those agreeing to participate and completing all tasks, you will receive a total of $50.00 in Visa gift cards. The gift cards will be given in increments throughout the semester – a $10 gift card during week 5, a $10 one during week 10, and a $30 gift card at the ending interview. I will plan to give you the $10 gift cards in person at the beginning of your practicum class during the designated week, but if you would rather receive them by mail, just please write your mailing address on a demographic form provided.

So, what am I asking of you? You would have to be willing to receive 4 letters on paper from (instructor name) during the semester, briefly respond to 4 questions about the letter, and take part in two face-to-face interviews.

The first interview is a brief check-in around mid-semester, and it will take approximately 30 minutes. The second is a longer one near the end of the semester, and it will take around one and one half hours to complete. Both of those would be individual. The time is your choice. The recording locations would be a room here on campus. All information will be confidential. You will also have the chance to read a summary of all interviews for accuracy. You do not have to give feedback to the interview summaries, but you will have the opportunity. The summaries will be emailed to you, but since email is not a secure form of communication, you can choose another method, such as the postal service or I will hand delivery and pick up correspondence.

Because the letters are supervision letters, and they will be included with all other practicum forms like supervision notes and instructor evaluations, your clients must be informed of you receiving the letters. A notification of research study form is included with all the other forms, and I’ve included a brief script for you to follow when notifying your clients. I’m also happy to meet with you at your convenience to review the script and the form. You would only need to go over the form one time with clients.
Before I pass out the forms, does anyone have any questions or concerns? If you could please take some time now and read everything over. As you read them over, you’re welcome to ask me questions or mention any concerns. If you are interested in participating, just return the signed “Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study” form and the demographic form. There are two copies of the informed consent; one for you to take with you for your reference if you’d like. If you would like to participate, also please keep the forms with a “flag” on them. If you are not interested, just return everything. If you have any questions or concerns after I leave, my contact information is at the end of the consent form. Thank you very much for your consideration. I wish you a great start to this semester and to your counseling career.
APPENDIX M

PRACTICUM STUDENT LETTER QUESTIONS FOR LETTER RESPONSES
Appendix M

Practicum Student Letter Questions for Letter Responses

1. How would you describe your reaction to reading the letter?

2. What stood out the most to you in the letter?

3. What would you have liked included in the letter?

4. What other thoughts do you have about receiving this letter?

PLEASE CONTINUE ANSWERING QUESTIONS ON THE BACK OF THIS PAGE IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED
REFERENCES
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