The authors used data from interviews with experienced counselors to examine ineffective supervision practices. The data yielded 6 overarching principles (e.g., unbalanced, intolerant of differences, untrained/immature) that permeated 3 general spheres of lousy supervision (e.g., technical/cognitive).

Worthington's (1987) landmark review of the literature on supervisory practices in the development of counselors and supervisors included the observation that "A good theory of lousy supervisor behaviors is missing" (p. 203). Authors of numerous entries in professional literature have identified transcending attributes and practices that contribute to effective clinical supervision (e.g., Allen, Szollos, & Williams, 1986; Borders, 1994; Carfio & Hess, 1987; Leddick & Dye, 1987; Worthen & McNeill, 1996). Although less attention has been given to the qualities and behaviors that are detrimental to supervisees' professional development, authors have endorsed the importance of examining such variables (Allen et al., 1986; Worthington, 1987).

Corroborating Worthington's (1987) challenge, Watkins (1997) identified qualities of ineffective supervision in the context of his supervisor complexity model. Within this developmental model, Watkins suggested that ineffective supervisors are intolerant, nonempathic, discouraging, defensive, and uninterested in training or consultation to improve their supervisory skills. Despite these helpful descriptors, supervisors are still left with Worthington's (1987) observation concerning a good theory of lousy supervisor behavior. The present exploratory study focused on two central questions: (a) What behaviors lead to the perception of ineffective supervision? and (b) What, if any, patterns emerge from these behaviors? Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify counterproductive supervisory behaviors and to develop a schema for categorizing these behaviors.

**METHOD**

Because this line of inquiry was in the descriptive stage, qualitative research methods were viewed as necessary and appropriate (Holloway & Hosford, 1983). Based on the assumption that practical, broad, and extensive experience would enable participants to more accurately assess the efficacy of supervision, the sample was limited to individuals who had been professional counselors for a minimum of 5 years. Thus, the researchers followed Patton's (1990) recommendations for participant selection, using a combination of intensity, critical case, and opportunistic strategies; the researchers' anticipation that candidates would contribute rich insight became a transcending selection criterion.

**Research Team**

The research team consisted of three professors of counselor education who were licensed as professional counselors and credentialed as supervisors. The first and second authors taught in an accredited doctoral and master's level program in a large public supported regional university. The third author taught in a masters level program at a state-supported historically Black university. As academicians, the researchers espoused a preference for formality in supervision structure and process (e.g., materials, documentation, systematic sequencing, scheduled meetings) rather than informal consultation in supervision. They further embraced a preference for developmental perspectives in supervision.

**Participants**
The participants were 11 counselors who represented various professional experiences (see Table 1). Participants were selected to reflect diversity in geographic location, work setting, professional experiences, and cultural background. On the basis of the assumption that counselor educators and practitioners would assess the efficacy of supervisory experiences from different perspectives, the researchers included representatives from both groups. The 8 men and 3 women resided in four states (Alabama, Arkansas, Oregon, and Texas) and represented three ethnic groups (African American, Hispanic, and European American). The participants taught in counselor education programs or practiced in private settings, schools, university counseling centers, and juvenile correction facilities. Ten participants were experienced clinical supervisors.

**Data Collection**
The research team collected data during individual interviews, five of which were conducted by telephone to achieve greater geographic diversity of participants. Interviews lasted from 45 to 75 minutes. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Copies of the transcripts were sent to individual participants with a request to verify and supplement their comments.

Semistructured research protocols (Kvale, 1983; McCracken, 1988; Patton, 1990) ensured consistent sequencing from a general review of participants’ experiences as supervisees to more specific details about less productive or nonproductive supervision they had encountered. Representative prompts included, ”I would be interested in knowing about things you might have experienced in supervision that hindered your learning and professional development” and a culminating request “to imagine a worst case scenario in counseling supervision, particularly focusing on the supervisor, and describe or characterize a lousy supervisor.”

**DATA ANALYSIS**
The size of the sample and the limited scope of inquiry allowed for conventional coding procedures as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) rather than electronic analysis (Jackson, 1999). Following recommended procedures, the researchers analyzed the data throughout the investigation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After independently reviewing the initial transcripts to identify emergent themes, the researchers analyzed data and prepared a preliminary coding and classification system. Throughout the investigation, the researchers followed the procedure of analyzing transcripts independently before collaboratively coding and classifying the data. As recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the third author assumed and maintained a skeptical attitude toward the classification system and any hypotheses that were generated during the early phases of the inquiry, thereby decreasing the likelihood of imposing a priori assumptions on the data.

The qualitative research principles of member checks (i.e., obtaining participants' verification of researchers' understanding) and saturation (i.e., recurring and repetitive comments and concepts in the absence of new information) guided the processes of data collection and interpretation. The reviewers used member checking strategies by summarizing, clarifying, and requesting verification of information provided during the interviews and asking for additional clarification during the analysis. When similar data were consistently and frequently encountered, such patterns were interpreted as indicators of saturation. Themes and categories (later called overarching principles and general spheres) were identified in response to corroboration of data from multiple participants.

**RESULTS**
Analyses of the interview data yielded two broad categories of findings: (a) overarching principles of lousy supervision and (b) general spheres of lousy supervision. The overarching principles represented six aspects of supervision that were both prominent and repetitive in the participants' comments concerning lousy supervisor behaviors (Table 2). With near uniformity among participants, descriptions of the overarching principles of lousy supervision emerged as the basis for further categorization of participants' comments.

Three general spheres of lousy supervision were also identified from participants' comments: organizational/administrative sphere (i.e., planning, structuring, and managing procedures); technical/cognitive sphere (i.e., instructional, scholarly, and skill-building activities); and relational/affective sphere (i.e., personal, confidential, and emotional investments). The general spheres emerged as circumstances or domains in which the overarching principles were uniquely perceived as lousy supervision (Table 3). Thus, an overarching principle of lousy supervision seemed to occur differently in the various general spheres. An examination of these results is provided in the following sections. To assist readers in their review of the contributions, the authors codified educators' and participants' comments as referenced in Table 1.

**Lousy Supervision: Overarching Principles (OP)**
OP 1: Unbalanced. Participants frequently emphasized the importance of balance and the counterproductive effect of overemphasizing some elements of supervision experiences and excluding others. For example, Practitioner 5 offered a representative comment:

Balance has to do with being able to focus on the specific with the systemic in mind. If we focus just on one thing, like acquiring skills, then we're overbalanced or overfunctioning in that one area, but we don't have a good, balanced way of thinking about what's going on. If we focus too much on how we think about something, then we get into situations in which we don't have a good background in reality.

Similarly, Practitioner 1 observed that the "unbalanced" supervisor is hung up on detail ... doesn't understand the big picture."

OP 2: Developmentally inappropriate. This principle emerged from suggestions that lousy supervisors fail to recognize or respond to the dynamic and changing needs of supervisees. Practitioner 5 described this phenomenon by saying, "It was not conveyed that learning and developing skills represents a lifelong process." Similar and frequent comments emphasized that the static nature of lousy supervision is incongruous with the skills and needs of supervisees.

OP 3: Intolerant of differences. Intolerance as an overarching principle was verified in various contexts. Practitioner 3 illustrated intolerance by saying, "The supervisee must jump through the hoops to be a small replica of the supervisor." Stated another way, "They would want you to do exactly what they do ... and not allow you an opportunity to be innovative" (Practitioner 7). Other participants noted attributes such as impatience, rigidity, depersonalization, and inflexibility throughout the general spheres of the schema.

OP 4: Poor model of professional/personal attributes. Many of the contributions that led to the identification of this overarching principle related to boundary violations, intrusiveness, and exploitation. Practitioner 3 referred to a supervisor who attempted to use the supervision time as a forum for providing individual therapy. Practitioner 2 referred to a supervisor who initiated a sexual relationship with a supervisee in a group setting. The former supervisee asked, "How can he judge our behavior ... when he is using so little judgment?" Professor 4 recalled an experience when confidential information she had revealed in supervision was disclosed, thereby irreparably damaging the supervisory relationship.

Other aspects of professionalism were also addressed. For example, Practitioner 5 noted an absence of professional modeling, by saying, "It didn't teach me the professional side of our profession." Similarly, Practitioner 3 lamented the fact that none of his supervisors had been a counselor.

OP 5: Untrained. Many and diverse contributions referred to persons who conducted supervision without adequate preparation and professional maturity. For example, Professor 4 attributed ineffective practices of her former supervisors to lack of formal preparation, stating, "I know they didn't have any [training in supervision]. ... These guys were trained in the 1940s and 1950s ... so there wasn't any supervision training then. I tried to take that into consideration ... although I can't say that I always did a good job of it."

Similarly, Professor 3 addressed this overarching principle when she described an unskilled and inexperienced supervisor who seemed to be uncomfortable with assuming supervisory responsibilities by noting, "If I didn't say a whole lot, then supervision was not very long, and it was over. The [lack of] readiness of the supervisor was something that ... hindered my own growth in counselor training."

OP 6: Professionally apathetic. Participants frequently characterized a lousy supervisor as someone who was "lazy." Practitioner 2 expanded on this theme by noting that a lousy supervisor was "Not committed to the profession [and] not committed to the growth of the supervisee, or more importantly, to that future client." This participant referred to a time when he was providing site supervision for practicum students and learned that the professor did not critique tapes. This participant's succinct comment was, "I thought that was criminal,"

Practitioner 1 described another professionally apathetic supervisor. She suggested that a missing element was "a personal commitment to see that every person that he let out of the program had the skills that he or she needed."

Lousy Supervision: General Spheres (GS).
As mentioned previously, aspects of the overarching principles were evidenced differently in the various general spheres of the supervisory relationship. An example is noted in OP 4 (i.e., poor model of
professional/personal attributes). Within the technical/cognitive sphere, which is discussed in greater detail in this section, the supervisor might demonstrate inadequate basic listening skills throughout the supervisory relationship. In the relational/affective sphere, the supervisor might avoid discussing pertinent issues that exist between the supervisor and the supervisee. In both instances, OP 4 is demonstrated by the supervisor, though in different spheres of the supervisory relationship. Another example of an overarching principle being manifested differently in general spheres can be seen in OP 3 (i.e., intolerant of differences). In this regard, OP 3 might be reflected in the technical/cognitive sphere by the supervisor failing to appreciate the supervisee's theoretical model or orientation as well as in the relational/affective sphere by the supervisor imposing a personal agenda on the supervisory relationship. Examples derived from the data follow. GS 1: Organizational/administrative. Contributions in this sphere emphasized supervisors' failure to establish parameters within which the supervision would be conducted. For example, Professor 1 recalled feeling anxious in supervisory situations when no standards for accountability were articulated or when expectations were not clarified. He described his first master's level practicum by saying, "I don't remember any forms or structure for evaluating the process ... I would have liked a little more idea of how we were judging things ... I didn't get a sense that I knew how I was doing ... We didn't know what to expect."

Lousy supervisors were also described as neglecting initial assessment procedures to identify supervisees' needs. Reportedly, they fail to recognize that "supervisees are so unique in who they are" and where they are developmentally (Practitioner 6). Practitioner 5 recalled an experience when "the assumption of knowledge was greater than what was actually there, particularly on an experiential level. ... The supervisor was not even able to address whether a supervisee knew something or not, but just assumed they knew the skills, beliefs, awareness."

Participants suggested that lousy supervisors would approach supervisory sessions without adequate preparation or a design for continuity between sessions. Representative comments included, "Coming to the supervision with no particular goal in mind" and "Not having a focus on continuity" (Practitioner 2). Practitioner 3 suggested that a lousy supervisor would not review notes before meeting with a supervisee.

Three participants offered contributions that were based on their experiences in ineffective group supervision. Professor 3 spoke of group supervision in an academic setting that she experienced as lousy. Reportedly, the supervisor was "unable to conduct the supervision as if [he or she] were conducting a group ... to moderate. We did not get equal air time. And sometimes [I left] group supervision feeling my needs were not met." This participant suggested that the supervisor failed to determine whether the issues addressed in the group setting were relevant and useful to all group members and that the supervisor did not provide an opportunity to process how the material could affect or apply to everybody else. Similarly, Practitioner 3 suggested that his group supervisor seemed to "... pit the supervisees against each other. The squeaky wheel got the supervisor's grease. ... If an individual was a bit dramatic ... the entire hour would be on that case."

GS 2: Technical/cognitive. Participating counselors characterized lousy supervisors as unskilled practitioners, unskilled supervisors, and unreliable professional resources. For example, Practitioner 1 offered contrasting descriptions of excellent and lousy supervisors: "I value my professors, and when I run into a problem I tend to call and ask ... what they think or how they can help. And I would never call him." This participant also described "supervision from hell" by referring to a supervisor who "had no idea of what counselors are supposed to do."

Practitioner 6 likened supervisors' personal and professional limitations to counselors' limitations. He suggested that supervisors would have difficulty facilitating supervisees' development of skills and knowledge beyond their own levels of effectiveness. Similarly, Professor 1 asserted, "It's fair to say that a person lacking technical skill would very much limit what you would learn."

Vague, global, and abstract feedback was addressed in several of the interviews and always in the context of lousy supervision. The comment of Professor 3 was representative: "I had ... a supervisor who would listen to the tapes and provide very global kinds of feedback. ... That was not always helpful simply because it was not specific ... especially as a beginning counselor-in-training, that was frustrating."

Providing an example of the overarching principle unbalanced in the technical/cognitive sphere of lousy supervision, Practitioner 2 suggested that the exclusive focus on facilitative conditions was inadequate because "there was no development of therapeutic skills." In contrast, this participant recalled an experience when supervision was centered around a specific technique or theory, and added, "I didn't see that as developing me as a person as much. It was developing a technique or a skill."
Supervisors who rely on a single primary model, disregarding the orientations that inform the supervisee's approach to counseling, were also classified as lousy. For example, Professor 4 suggested that a lousy supervisor is "unwilling to look at any other perspective." Similarly, Practitioner 6 characterized a lousy supervisor as "Someone who isn't able to work within the supervisee's ... theoretical orientation or the nuances of that orientation."

GS 3: Relational/affective. Participants emphasized the importance of providing a safe environment by humanizing the supervision process. Professor 1 suggested that "If humanization of the process isn't important, let's do this on the Internet or whatever. Let's just do correspondence courses and save a lot of money." Similarly, Professor 4 recalled an experience when "... the relationship was not important. You were ... told what to do and if you disagreed, God help you. ... When you're called names, browbeaten, and told you're stupid, dumb, worthless, inferior ... it's very difficult to hear anything else the person is saying."

Other participants spoke of lousy supervisors who were overly critical. Practitioner 6 disclosed, "The most difficult situations for me were those in which I only heard the negative." Similarly, Professor 4 stated that a lousy supervisor was "unable or unwilling to communicate to the supervisee that they have worthwhile ideas ... that they do good work, that they are a capable individual. The focus is totally on the negative." At the same time, participants emphasized the importance of accurate, specific, and abundant feedback as more of a relational rather than a technical component of productive supervision, noting the absence of such qualities as reflective of lousy supervision. Practitioner 5 offered the following representative comment: "I needed more criticism ... to see what I was doing and what I was not doing. Most of the time I had to figure out what I wasn't doing. This was hard because I didn't have as much structure ... It didn't give me any boundaries."

Professor 2 related an observation that "A lot of people won't be honest. ... Someone will be doing terrible, and [the supervisor] ... will soft peddle it." Practitioner 4 asserted that "The supervisor who allows [supervisees] to come and go when they please, not be punctual, not do paperwork ... is their worst enemy."

Several contributions related to lousy supervisors' insensitivity to supervisees' professional and developmental needs. For example, Professor 1 characterized a lousy supervisor as "someone who failed to understand that the [client] is not the only person who is struggling here ... that [the supervisee] is too." Similarly, Professor 3 described a supervisor who was "not open to my development in what was unique to me, as opposed to developing in ... the same direction as they are." She added, "The focus is not on [the supervisee's] skills, needs, and personal and professional development."

Practitioner 5 referred to a former supervisor's inability or unwillingness to address personal concerns that interfered with the supervisory relationship.

The supervisor was dealing with issues and was unable to address them. ... It was like the elephant in the living room. It made it difficult for me to address issues. It was like, "If they can't deal with it, either I must be wrong as a supervisee" or "Who am I to say what they need to do or what they don't need to do?" To me it goes back to a deeper level, to the difficulty we have in being up-front and direct about positives and negatives in relating to other individuals.

Participants classified lousy supervisors as those who perceive supervision as a sterile necessary activity to satisfy externally imposed criteria for a credential. For example, Practitioner 5 said, "We just basically did supervision until we met the requirements" with minimal attention to what was needed in order to become a proficient counselor. He interpreted this stance to mean, "Let's get this done so we can get on with the process of therapy."

Practitioner 1 spoke of a "worst case person" as someone who "had a personal agenda, like a power agenda." This participant suggested that lousy supervisors "would step on children, counselors, and everyone else to get where they wanted to go." Exemplifying a supervisor-imposed agenda in the context of a supervisee's expressed desire to discuss a case, Professor 3 said a lousy supervisor would "ignore it or gloss over it quickly."

In summary, these three general spheres emerged as separate categories with indicators to distinguish the unique manner in which the overarching principles emerged.

DISCUSSION
The authors acknowledge inherent limitations in this preliminary inquiry based on data acquired and analyzed using subjective procedures. Although the rigors of conventional qualitative methods were observed, caution should be exercised in making generalizations based on the data. Another cohort of counselors would likely emphasize different experiences and perceptions of lousy supervision. Another research team may infer a different configuration of categories and themes from the data. Indeed, such a preliminary effort is neither exhaustive nor definitive.

Despite the tentative nature of these findings, the schema of overarching principles and elements of the general spheres of supervision seem to provide an initial response to Worthington's (1987) challenge regarding a theory of lousy supervision. These overarching principles and the practices identified within the general spheres of supervision can be further examined in two discreet aspects of lousy supervision: (a) the absence of factors previously associated with effective supervision and (b) the presence of factors suspected, but not yet demonstrated, to be counterproductive. However, it seems that lousy supervision is more complex than either the presence of ineffective practices or the absence of effective practices. Rather, lousy supervision seems to result from a combination of both factors, with lousy supervision anchoring one extreme of a continuum that ranges to an opposite and equally complex construct of excellent supervision. It is important to acknowledge, however, that lousy supervision may be uniquely experienced by supervisees and that it may relate to supervisees' previous experiences and attitudes toward supervision. Thus, identification of supervisory factors and behaviors that are detrimental at all times will enhance the integrity of further research on lousy supervision. Such findings will contribute to further research on supervisor training strategies that foster excellent supervision and overt avoidance of detrimental supervisory practices.

The participants’ contributions to this study seem to corroborate Blocher's (1983) rather abrupt yet novel observation that "The possibility always exists that an immature, inadequate, and insensitive supervisor may intimidate, bully, and even damage a supervisee. No theoretical model of supervision is idiot proof and bastard resistant" (p. 30). Nonetheless, identifying potentially detrimental behaviors enhances awareness among supervisors and educators who prepare counselors to supervise. Thus, identifying more uniform behaviors and practices that could lead to lousy supervision seems to be a reasonable and a significant goal for educators and supervisors. The overarching principles and general spheres of lousy supervision described in this study seem to hold promise as possible areas for further investigation of such nonproductive practices and methods in the supervisory process.

**TABLE 1 Profile of Research Participants**

Legend for Chart:

A - Participant Code  
B - Sequence of Interview  
C - Degree Credential  
D - Number of Supervisors  
E - Experience  
F - Primary Setting  
G - Experience as Supervisor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor #1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>LPC, NCC, CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor #2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>LPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31 years</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor #3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>LPC, NCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor #4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>Provisional License</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Practitioner #1  2  MEd       School Counselor
               2  21 years  School
Practitioner #2  3  PhD       LPC, CFT, CCMHC
               6  22 years  Private Practice
Practitioner #3  6  MA        LPC, CCMHC
               3  21 years  Private Practice
Practitioner #4  7  MEd       LPC, NCC
               4  23 years  Youth Correction
Practitioner #5  8  EdD       LPC, LMFT
               3  16 years  Private Practice
Practitioner #6  9  MA/ABD    LMFT, LPC
               6  9 years   Private Practice
Practitioner #7 11  MEd       LPC
               5  14 years  Univ. Couns. Ctr.

Note. EdD = Doctor of Education; PhD = Doctor of Philosophy; MEd = Master of Education; Master of Arts;
ABD = All But Dissertation; LPC = Licensed Professional Counselor; NCC = National Certified Counselor; CRC
= Certified Rehabilitation Counselor; CFT = Certified Family Therapist; CCMHC = Certified Clinical Mental
Health Counselor; LMFT = Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist.

**TABLE 2 Overarching Principles in Lousy Supervision**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unbalanced</td>
<td>Too much or too little of all elements of supervision experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmentally inappropriate</td>
<td>Nonresponsive to changing developmental needs of supervisees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intolerant of differences</td>
<td>Failing or unwilling to be flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor model of professional/personal attributes</td>
<td>Models what not to do as a supervisor, fails to provide professional mentoring, models unethical behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untrained</td>
<td>Unprepared to manage boundaries, difficult issues, or other interpersonal exchanges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionally apathetic</td>
<td>Lack of commitment or initiative for the profession, supervisee, and client</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 3 General Spheres of Lousy Supervision**

Organizational/Administrative

Fails to clarify expectations
Fails to provide standards for accountability
Fails to assess supervisee needs
Fails to be adequately prepared
Fails to provide purposeful continuity
Fails to provide equitable environment in group supervision
Technical/Cognitive
Perceived as an unskilled practitioner
Perceived as an unskilled supervisor
Perceived as an unreliable professional resource
Provides vague and abstract feedback
Focuses primarily on microskills and techniques
Relies on a single primary model; unidimensional
Fails to appreciate supervisee's theoretical model or orientation

Relational/Affective
Fails to provide a safe environment; intrusive
Gives too much or too little corrective feedback
Gives too much or too little affirming feedback
Shows insensitivity to supervisee's professional and developmental needs
Avoids issues between supervisor and supervisee
Is guided by external criteria
Imposes personal agenda

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