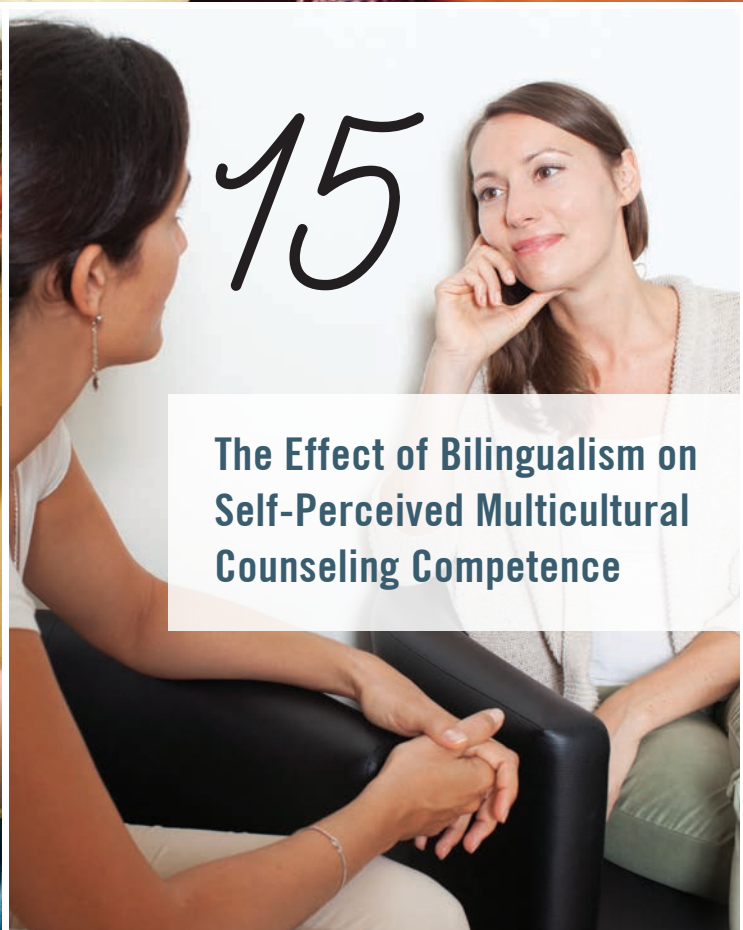# The Professional Counselor

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A Phenomenological Investigation of Master's-Level Counselor Research Identity Development Stages

Maribeth F. Jorgensen
Kelly Duncan

Previous researchers have found that participants benefit from integrating their professional identity with a research orientation. There are innate components to the counseling process that are similar to the research process, making the integration relatively simple. In 1985, Howard suggested that practitioners are often more aware of and concerned with the systematic ways of human behavior than researchers. When working with a client, counselors explore the problem, experiment with the problem by utilizing various interventions and test hypotheses by observing how interventions unfold with the client. Professional counselors are researchers, but do not necessarily conceptualize their professional identity in a way that acknowledges and fosters the researcher within.

Recent ethical developments in the field of professional counseling suggest more urgency to understand the concept and development of research identity (RI). The 2014 American Counseling Association Code of Ethics has emphasized the importance of counselors utilizing research to best inform their practices. Specifically, counselors who use techniques, procedures and modalities that are not grounded in theory and lack an empirical or scientific foundation must define the techniques as unproven or developing, explain the potential risks and ethical considerations of using such techniques, and take steps to protect clients from possible harm. Ultimately, it is essential for professional counselors to evaluate the utility and scientific support for interventions and techniques, which may be more of a function of the research identity dimension.

There has been much left to learn and understand about a research dimension of professional counselor identity. A few studies have examined research identity and have demonstrated that it may be a developmental process in which one comes to know oneself as a researcher in addition to one's primary professional identity. In 2004, Reisetter et al. examined the research identity of counselor education doctoral students.

Participants stated that exposure to qualitative methodology affirmed a sense of knowing and viewing self-as-researcher. Further, in 2015 Jorgensen and Duncan found that research identity is complex, is on a continuum, and is fostered by both internal (e.g., motivation, interest, research self-efficacy) and external variables (e.g., faculty, program elements, peers, supervisors). Based on their grounded theory, the authors offered a foundation for better understanding the concept of RI and suggested that future research explore the different levels of RI.

The aim of this study was to further explore the phenomenon of research identity in master's-level counseling students and master's-level practicing counselors. A total of 12 participants were involved in individual interviews, while six participants were involved in a focus group interview. The data sources supported the emergence of three stages of research identity: stage one, stagnation; stage two, negotiation; and stage three, stabilization. The implications of this research relate to counselor education programs, counselor educators, and counselors-in-training and practicing counselors (both mental health and school).

Maribeth F. Jorgensen, NCC, is an Assistant Professor at the University of South Dakota. Kelly Duncan, NCC, is an Associate Professor at the University of South Dakota. Correspondence may be addressed to Maribeth F. Jorgensen, 414 East Clark Street, Vermillion, SD 57069, Maribeth.Jorgensen@usd.edu.

Effect of Participation in Student Success Skills on Prosocial and Bullying Behavior

Melissa Mariani
Linda Webb
Elizabeth Villares
Greg Brigman

Bullying, the most common form of aggression experienced by school-aged youth today, remains an ever-growing concern for students, parents and educators. Peer aggression can result in a myriad of long-term consequences (academic, behavioral, emotional, social, psychological) for bullies, victims and bystanders alike. As leaders in the school community, school counselors are well qualified and positioned to offer interventions and support services to students to combat this problem. School counselors provide comprehensive programming that includes classroom guidance lessons on an array of developmental topics. Anti-bullying efforts can be effectively addressed in these settings, providing students with the knowledge, skills and support needed to reduce peer tensions and foster a positive, safe and friendly school climate.

A variety of anti-bullying interventions have been developed, ranging in their levels of effectiveness. Recent studies cite the need for interventions that incorporate the whole school in an effort to address school culture. These comprehensive, systematic, long-term approaches seem more promising given their focus on education, as well as on the incorporation of strategies that develop prosocial skills in students. The Student Success Skills (SSS) 4–12 program is a comprehensive, evidence-based program that supports development of key skills (cognitive, social and self-management) in students. These key skills are taught in the context of a positive, safe and caring learning environment, which is less likely to promote aggressive behaviors such as bullying. Evidence suggests that SSS positively affects student achievement as well as student behavior; however, to date, comparison studies have not been conducted on the behavior aspect. The researchers of the current study intended to link the SSS program to an increase in student prosocial behaviors, a decrease in bullying behaviors, increased engagement in school success skills and improved perceptions of classroom climate, outcomes that expand the SSS research line.

This article reviews the findings of a quasi-experimental study conducted over the 2010–2011 school year, which involved fifth-grade students (N = 336) from five public elementary schools in one Florida school district. Researchers sought to investigate differences in prosocial behaviors, bullying behaviors, engagement in school success skills and perceptions of classroom climate between students in the treatment group, who received the school counselor-led SSS classroom guidance program, and those in the comparison group, who did not receive the intervention. SSS consists of five 45-minute classroom guidance lessons designed to be delivered a week apart, beginning in the fall, followed by three monthly booster lessons to be implemented in the spring. Student outcomes were investigated using the following three instruments: the Peer Relations Questionnaire, the Student Engagement in School Success Skills survey and the My Class Inventory–Short Form Revised. Findings resulted in statistically significant differences in several measures (p values ranged from .000 to .019) along with partial eta-squared effect sizes ranging from .01 (small) to .26 (quite large). Evidence supported the SSS classroom program as a positive intervention for affecting student engagement, perceptions and behavior.

Melissa Mariani is an Assistant Professor at Florida Atlantic University. Linda Webb is Research Faculty III at Florida State University. Elizabeth Villares is an Associate Professor at Florida Atlantic University. Greg Brigman, NCC, is a Professor at Florida Atlantic University. Correspondence may be addressed to Melissa Mariani, 777 Glades Road, COE 47, 274, Boca Raton, FL 3343, mmarian5@fau.edu.

Read full article and references:

Mariani, M., Webb, L., Villares, E., & Brigman, G. (2015). Effect of participation in student success skills on prosocial and bullying behavior. *The Professional Counselor*, *5*, 341–353. doi:10.15241/mm.5.3.341

Differences in College Greek Members' Binge Drinking Behaviors

A Dry/Wet House Comparison

Kathleen Brown-Rice
Susan Furr

Research findings indicate that college students affiliated with the Greek system consume more alcohol and experience more alcohol-related problems than students who are not members of the Greek system. In particular, self-reported binge drinking is significantly higher among members of this community. Interventions to reduce drinking in Greek systems have focused on residential living. However, there has been little research to determine whether alcohol-free Greek housing reduces risky drinking in this population. The purpose of the current study was to investigate the alcohol consumption in alcohol-free Greek housing (dry) and alcohol-allowed Greek housing (wet) for two independent samples.

Recruitment of participants was conducted to obtain two independent samples in fall and spring of an academic year. A total of 385 Greek members took part in the fall and a total of 379 Greek members in the spring. The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test-Consumption (AUDIT-C) was utilized to obtain information on participants' alcohol use. For both the fall and spring samples, AUDIT-C scores differed significantly across the three houses, with sorority dry house members having significantly lower scores than the fraternity dry house and the fraternity wet house members. However, the AUDIT-C scores were not significantly different between the fraternity dry house and the fraternity wet house members.

While the findings of this study provided insight into the risky drinking patterns of Greek house members, there are some limitations. First, this study used a convenience sample of Greek members from one university that is not likely to represent the population of all Greek members. Second, volunteers may have answered the survey questions differently than members of the population who did not agree to participate. Another limitation is that the samples might not be truly independent; some participants could have filled out the survey in both the fall and spring. The final limitation is related to the survey being a self-report measure. Despite these limitations, important considerations for future research have emerged. First, given that some Greek members do not reside in Greek housing, assessing drinking patterns among Greek members in non-Greek housing would be beneficial. Second, examining where the drinking occurs and how the alcohol is obtained would be valuable. A third research consideration is related to other communities of which the Greek members may be a part (e.g., college athletics). Little is known about whether there are differences between drinking behaviors of Greek members who are athletes and those who are not. The final research consideration relates to gaining a better understanding of how individual Greek members' drinking patterns change over an academic year. Therefore, future studies should include identifiers for participants in order to determine whether individual changes occur.

In the current study, regardless of where Greek-affiliated students lived, drinking levels appeared to be high and exceed what is considered safe on the AUDIT-C for both men and women. These results appear to show that banning alcohol in Greek housing does not reduce levels of drinking. Directions for future interventions may include challenging the established drinking norms in ways that encourage students to drink safely, and helping students focus on the deeper meaning of Greek membership, which promotes a sense of community and enhances the values of the fraternity or sorority.

Kathleen Brown-Rice, NCC, is an Assistant Professor at the University of South Dakota. Susan Furr is a Professor at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. Correspondence may be addressed to Kathleen Brown-Rice, 414 E. Clark Street, Vermillion, SD 57069, kathleen.rice@usd.edu.

Examining Intimate Partner Violence, Stress and Technology Use Among Young Adults

Ryan G. Carlson
Jessica Fripp
Christopher Cook
Viki Kelchner

This manuscript presents the findings of a study conducted utilizing survey data from 138 young adults located at a large university in the Southeastern region of the United States. The study examined the constructs of risk for partner violence, attitudes toward violence, use of technology and perceived stress. Study participants included undergraduate and graduate college students who reported a current or recent relationship. The study purported to understand the relationships among variables, as well as the contribution each variable makes to risk of partner violence. Young adults use technology as a means to communicate in their relationships. However, limited research exists regarding the relationship between technology and partner violence in young adult relationships. Previous researchers have focused on methods used to communicate via technology, but have not considered factors that may influence communication (such as stress or acceptance of couple violence), or how technology is used to resolve relational conflict. Additionally, the current study aimed to consider findings in the context of preexisting partner violence typology research conducted with adult couples by administering a partner violence risk assessment that has helped discriminate between more extreme forms of partner violence.

Results indicated that stress, attitudes toward violence (i.e., acceptance of violence) and use of technology were all predictors of risk for partner violence among young adults. The use of technology in relationships was the largest predictor of partner violence risk. The direction of the relationship, however, was somewhat surprising. Participants who reported less overall use of technology indicated greater risk of partner violence. Additionally, results indicated that participants who used technology to monitor the whereabouts of a partner or argue with a partner demonstrated greater risk for partner violence. We concluded that technology use in young adult relationships may be an expectation, thus contributing to additional stress when not utilized. However, the exception to this conclusion is the use of technology to monitor or argue with a partner. Therefore, counselors working with young adult couples or individuals need to consider technology's influence on clients' relationship functioning. Moreover, counselors should include discussions of healthy technology use in young adult relationships.

Ryan G. Carlson, NCC, is an Assistant Professor at the University of South Carolina. Jessica Fripp is a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina. Christopher Cook is a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina. Viki Kelchner, NCC, is a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina. Correspondence may be addressed to Ryan G. Carlson, University of South Carolina, College of Education, Wardlaw 258, Columbia, SC 29208, rcarlson@sc.edu.

Learner-Centered Pedagogy

Considerations for Application in a Didactic Course

Randall M. Moate
Jane A. Cox

For the past decade, there has been a call in higher education for educators to shift from teacher-centered methods of teaching to learner-centered pedagogy. As of yet, learner-centered pedagogy has not been thoroughly addressed in the literature in counselor education. We believe that integrating learner-centered teaching practices into pedagogy can help counselor educators prepare their students for the demands of working as a professional counselor.

Students who graduate from master's counseling programs must have a tolerance for ambiguity and be able to demonstrate independent and reflective thinking when entering the workplace. Counselor education programs prepare students to meet these challenges by teaching students important content knowledge and clinical skills. Content knowledge has traditionally been taught in didactic-oriented courses (e.g., counseling theories, couples counseling, diagnosis, ethics), and clinical skills have been taught in smaller experiential courses (e.g., prepracticum, practicum, internship). Some researchers have suggested that counselor trainees find experiential and applied learning more helpful than acquisition of content knowledge. Thus, counselor trainees may benefit from traditional didactic-oriented courses being taught in a more experiential and applied manner.

Experiential and applied learning are two important aspects of learner-centered pedagogy. Instructors who incorporate these aspects diversify didactic-intensive approaches to teaching content-oriented courses. Their use of a learner-centered approach to teaching can help students take deeper approaches to learning. Instructors who use a learner-centered approach encourage students to learn with depth and meaning rather than expecting students to reproduce large amounts of factual information with precision. This type of learning can help counseling students develop the critical and reflective thinking skills required of professional counselors.

In contrast to didactic-intensive, teacher-centered methods of instruction, instructors who use learner-centered pedagogy seek to engage students as active participants in their learning experience. Lecture and coverage of course content serve as tools for starting intellectual exploration rather than being the predominant focus in the classroom. Teachers provide students with greater freedom to explore areas of interest, and strive to help counselor trainees develop how they think (e.g., critically, reflectively, complexly) rather than simply what they think (i.e., memorization of specific content).

It may be particularly challenging for counselor educators to incorporate learner-centered teaching strategies into didactic courses that are traditionally heavy in content versus smaller experiential courses such as practicum and internships. We provide a case study to demonstrate how a learner-centered approach may be applied to a traditionally didactic counseling course.

The intent of this manuscript is to help counselor educators reflect on teaching practices that can help prepare their students for the demands of working as professional counselors. We believe that incorporating learner-centered teaching approaches in content-oriented courses in counselor education programs can help students develop deeper approaches to their learning, which may increase their capacity for reflection and independent thinking. We believe that it is helpful for counselor educators to consider their teaching practices and to consider learner-centered pedagogy, regardless of what pedagogical approaches they prefer. Learner-centered pedagogy is broad enough that instructors can integrate it with other approaches to teaching.

Randall M. Moate, NCC, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas-Tyler. Jane A. Cox, NCC, is an Associate Professor at Kent State University. Correspondence may be addressed to Randall M. Moate, Department of Psychology and Counseling, University of Texas-Tyler, 3900 University Blvd., Tyler, TX 75707, randallmoate@gmail.com.

Sibling Abuse

A Study of School Counselors' Shared Attitudes and Beliefs

Diane M. Stutey

In accordance with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, the American School Counselor Association Ethical Standards, and the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics, school counselors must report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect to child protective services or law enforcement. According to a review of the literature and an examination of the training that school counselors receive, the focus was consistently on the abuse of a child by an adult. However, abuse of children by adults may not be as prevalent as other forms of abuse against children. A less commonly explored form of family violence is sibling abuse. In the past, sibling abuse was considered a normal rite of passage that most children experience and was often misidentified as sibling rivalry.

School counselors are in a position to advocate for all children and protect them from harm; yet one source of harm of which counseling practitioners and educators may be unaware stems from aggression between siblings, which can become abusive. The combination of possible normalizing attitudes toward sibling aggression coupled with a lack of training and guidelines on identification and intervention is problematic. A lack of awareness and professional training standards about sibling abuse might ultimately result in counselors not reporting it as abuse, leading to long-term psychological harm for children and adolescents.

The purpose of this study was to examine and gain further insight into and awareness of current school counselors' attitudes and beliefs about sibling abuse. Based on a review of the literature, it also was imperative to understand whether there might be exterior influences impacting school counselors' ability to work with students experiencing sibling abuse. The two overarching questions for this study were the following: (1) How do school counselors describe their attitudes and beliefs about sibling abuse? (2) What contexts or situations have influenced or affected school counselors' attitudes and beliefs about sibling abuse?

Data were gathered through semistructured interviews conducted with eight school counselors in one Western state. Seven themes emerged supporting school counselors' perceptions of their role to respond to sibling abuse and their beliefs about factors contributing to sibling abuse. Findings revealed that sibling abuse is not something school counselors often encounter due to what they perceive as a normalization of sometimes aggressive interactions between siblings. While participants were able to draw upon their knowledge of child abuse to advocate for students experiencing sibling abuse, a need was revealed for more specific training, ways to efficiently collaborate with others and systemic change in order to advocate for all students. Recommendations on ways to advocate for children and adolescents experiencing sibling abuse are offered for counselor educators, counselors-in-training and counseling practitioners, particularly school counselors.

Technology in Counselor Education
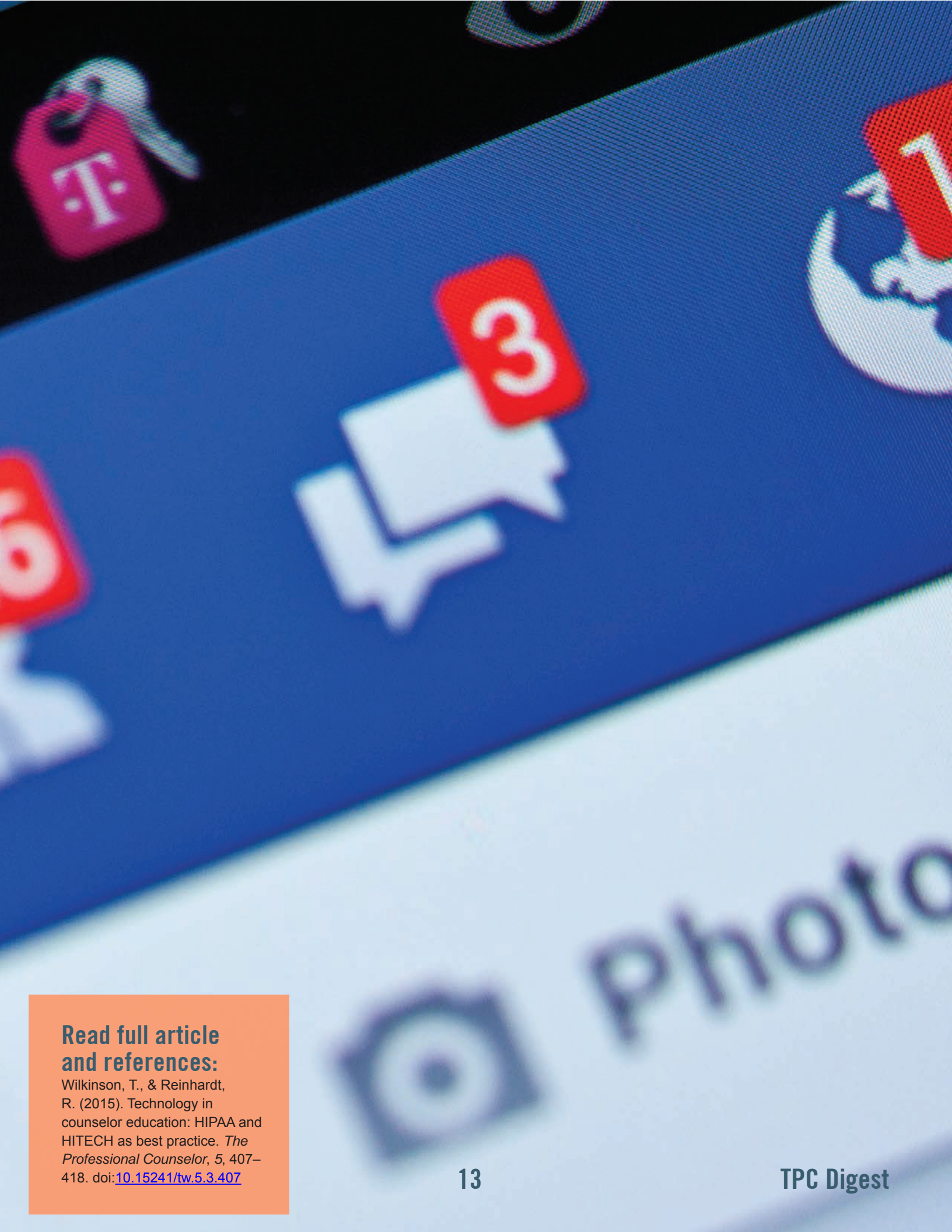## HIPAA and HITECH as Best Practice

Tyler Wilkinson
Rob Reinhardt

The Final Omnibus Rule for the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH; 2009) went into effect in 2013 (Modifications to the HIPAA Privacy, 2013). This final ruling crystallized penalties for those who violate the guidelines of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and HITECH. Notably, individuals who claim that they "did not know" (Modifications to the HIPAA Privacy, 2013, p. 5583) they were in violation of these laws can be fined up to $50,000 per incident. Counselors are now without excuse if they find themselves in violation of the laws and regulations of HIPAA and HITECH.

 Additionally, laws like HIPAA and HITECH continue to emphasize the movement in health care toward increasing use of technology, especially as it relates to the storage, transmission and disposal of electronic protected health information. Recent discussion in the literature has focused on the impact of technology as it relates to counselors in practice (Lawley, 2012). Since 2013, the final HITECH rulings have gone into effect and the American Counseling Association (ACA) has released the latest Code of Ethics (2014). One of the notable changes to this new version is the introduction of Section H: "Distance Counseling, Technology, and Social Media." The inclusion of this section recognizes the increasing importance for counselors to be aware of the ethical and legal implications of using technology and digital media in practice. We believe that counselor training programs must be mindful to include these new codes in the preparation of counselors. Ethical counselors are expected to understand the laws and statutes as they relate to the use of technology in their practice (ACA, 2014, H.1.b). They also need to understand the unique nature of security (H.2.d) and confidentiality (H.2.b) in the use of technology (ACA, 2014).

Many counselor training programs use technology to some extent, especially in clinically oriented classes (e.g., counseling skills, practicum, internship). The language of HIPAA and HITECH provides an excellent framework from which counselor educators can work to develop a set of policies and procedures regarding the ethical use of technology and digital media in their counselor training programs. This article assumes that many counselor education programs would not legally be considered covered entities as described in HIPAA; however, utilizing the standards, recommendations and guidelines of HIPAA and HITECH can be seen as best practice. The authors believe that incorporating policies and procedures into the counseling program enables the integration of ethical training throughout the counseling program. This practice helps adhere to Section H of the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) and provides applicable learning opportunities for students to become more familiar with HIPAA and HITECH.

Tyler Wilkinson, NCC, is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Mercer University. Rob Reinhardt, NCC, is in private practice in Fuquay-Varina, NC. Correspondence may be addressed to Tyler Wilkinson, 3001 Mercer University Drive, Atlanta, GA 30341, Wilkinson_rt@mercer.edu.

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Read full article and references:
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The Effect of Bilingualism on Self-Perceived Multicultural Counseling Competence

Nathaniel N. Ivers
José A. Villalba

For more than 3 decades, we as a counseling profession have placed an emphasis on training counselors who can work effectively with culturally diverse clients. However, ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities continue to underutilize and prematurely terminate counseling services at higher rates than their racial, ethnic and linguistic majority counterparts. Thus, although as a profession we have made great strides toward training culturally competent counselors, it is essential that we continue to work toward discovering and uncovering new variables that influence counselors' multicultural counseling competence (MCC).

One variable that has received very limited attention in the counseling literature in relation to MCC is bilingualism. This fact is somewhat surprising, considering that theorists both inside and outside the counseling profession have described language as inextricably connected to culture. One notable example is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which was developed by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. Sapir and Whorf purported that language and thought are intertwined, and that language determines individuals' thoughts, their conceptualizations and even their culture. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was very popular from the 1930s through the 1960s, but lost favor and was largely discarded by the 1990s. However, aspects of the hypothesis have been revived by the Neo-Whorfians, who contend that language does influence significantly the way in which people perceive the world around them. The Neo-Whorfians have supported their contentions with empirical studies, which have revealed, for example, that language affects people's representations of time, perceptions of cause and responsibility, and beliefs about agency. If culture and language are indeed related, as the Neo-Whorfians and others have suggested, one may deduce that learning a second language exposes one to diverse cultural values and beliefs. This exposure, in turn, may facilitate multicultural counseling competency development. The purpose of our study was to explore quantitatively the effect of second language acquisition (being bilingual) on counselors' self-perceived MCC, using the following research question: Do bilingual counseling students significantly self-rate their multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness higher than monolingual counseling students when controlling for ethnicity and multicultural training?

Study results indicate that, while controlling for participants' ethnicity and their multicultural training, bilingual counseling students self-rated their multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness higher than did their monolingual counterparts.

Controlling for ethnicity and multicultural training was important in this study because previous studies have revealed a strong relationship between MCC and these variables. It was important to indicate that bilingual participants self-rated their multicultural knowledge and awareness higher than their monolingual peers because of their bilingual abilities rather than because of their ethnicity or their multicultural training. The effect of bilingualism on multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness may be explained at least in part by the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and by contact theory. The sustained exposure to the deeper elements of culture sewn into the fabric of language arguably increases second-language learners' awareness of their own culture and other cultures, as well as enhances their knowledge of cultural principles.

These results have implications for counseling training and practice, as well as for future research. Regarding training, it may be important for counselor educators to consider, where feasible and appropriate, recruiting and training prospective counseling students who are bilingual. Also, where feasible, it would be helpful for counseling programs to provide language training opportunities to students, such as second-language training courses, bilingual counseling courses and bilingual supervision. Concerning counseling practice, an increase in the number of bilingual counselors may not only improve access to counseling services for non-English speaking populations, but also enhance the cultural sensitivity of counseling services provided. Concerning future research, additional studies are needed to support and expand these findings, such as examining moderating variables between bilingualism and MCC.

Nathaniel N. Ivers, NCC, is an Assistant Professor and Associate Chair at Wake Forest University. José A. Villalba is a Professor and Associate Dean at Wake Forest University. Correspondence may be addressed to Nathaniel N. Ivers, Wake Forest University, Department of Counseling, P.O. Box 7406, Winston-Salem, NC 27109, iversnn@wfu.edu.

Read full article and references:

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