The Professional Counselor

Summer 2016

Digest

Volume 6, Issue 2

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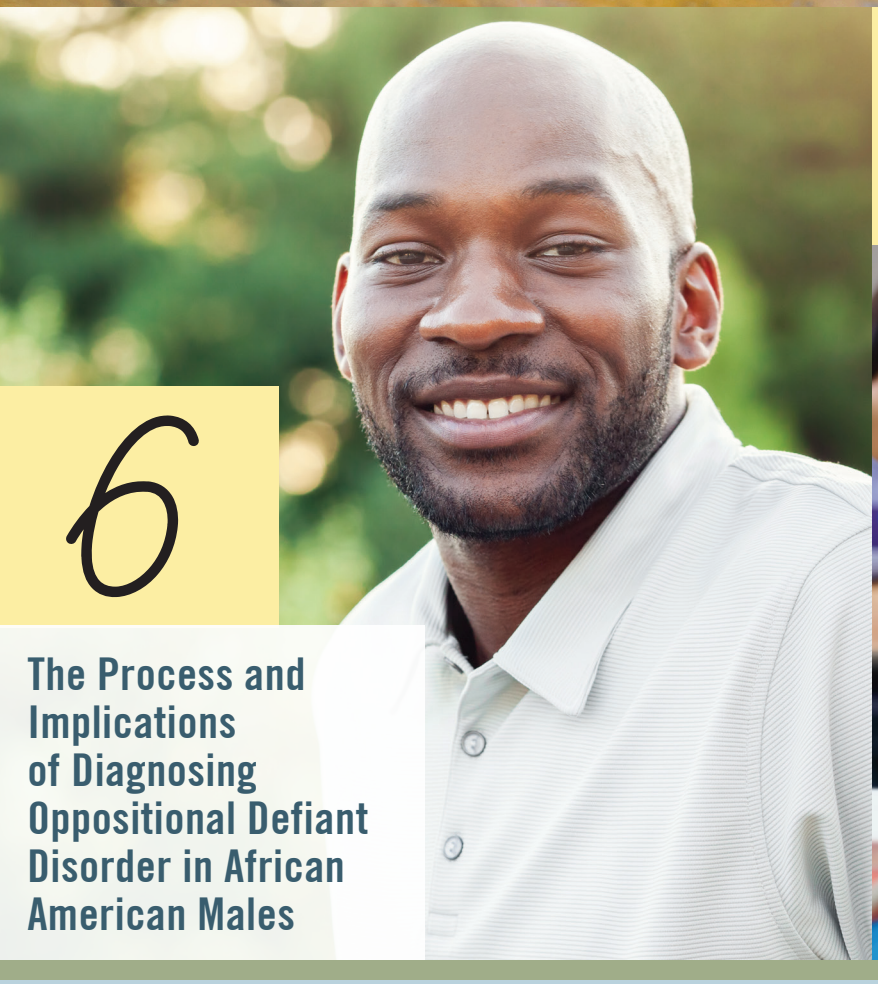
NATIONAL BOARD FOR CERTIFIED COUNSELORS®



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The Professional Counselor DIGEST is an abbreviated version of the journal, *The Professional Counselor*, intended for the general public. The National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc. and Affiliates publishes *The Professional Counselor* and *The Professional Counselor DIGEST*.

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The Professional Counselor™

The Professional Counselor Digest

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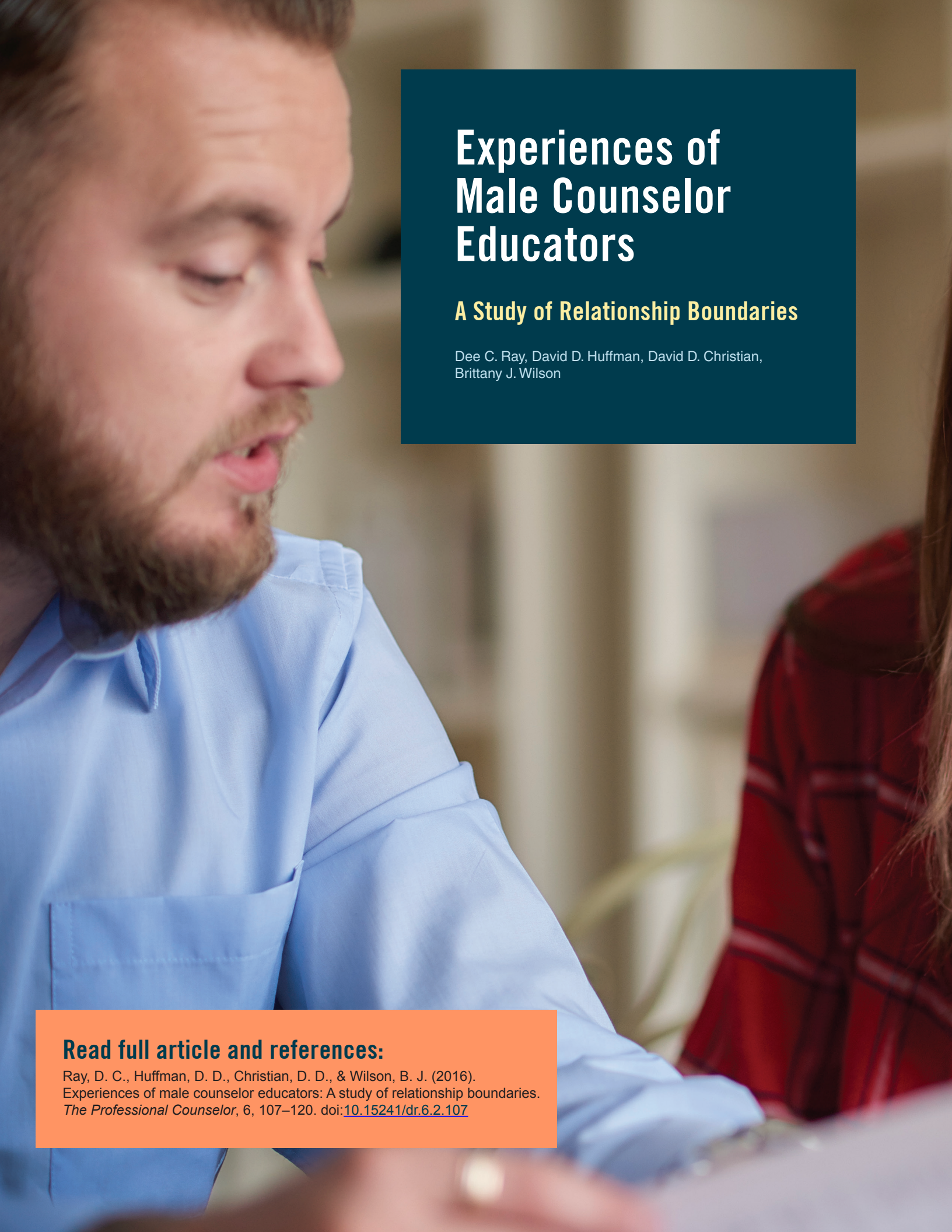

Experiences of Male Counselor Educators

A Study of Relationship Boundaries

Dee C. Ray, David D. Huffman, David D. Christian, Brittany J. Wilson

Read full article and references:

Ray, D. C., Huffman, D. D., Christian, D. D., & Wilson, B. J. (2016). Experiences of male counselor educators: A study of relationship boundaries. *The Professional Counselor*, 6, 107–120. doi:10.15241/dr.6.2.107

Male counselor educators comprise approximately one fourth of the total number of counselor educators today. Despite their limited representation among faculty members, male counselor educators face unique challenges in professional relationships and in their work with students, including the emergent number of female counseling students in conjunction with the decreasing number of male faculty. Regardless of such challenges, counselor educators are called to build relationships with students that lead to improved self-awareness, personal development and interpersonal learning, which may inform their work as counselors. In order to facilitate such student experiences, counselor educators must often be willing to form and maintain strong student relationships, be open to vulnerability and be willing to have honest conversations with students. In the current environment of legality and ambiguous ethical guidelines with respects to such issues, male counselor educators may feel isolated, misunderstood and even fearful in their roles as faculty members. The changing context of counselor education may present unique challenges for male faculty to navigate with little guidance.

The purpose of this study was to discover attitudes and practices of male counselor educators regarding faculty-student relationships. Our research questions included: (a) what are the practices and attitudes of male counselor educators related to relationships with students and colleagues? and (b) what specific practices do male counselor educators employ to maintain boundaries with students? The present study supports the premise that although encouraged, providing such conditions for students may be difficult for male counselor educators as many experience ongoing barriers related to being male with respect to faculty-student relationships. Results of this mixed methods study support the premise that many counselor educators believe being male both presents unique challenges as well as alters their relational behaviors with students. Qualitative analyses indicated that participants expressed a diversity of attitudes and practices regarding the impact of being male upon professional relationships.

Specifically, some male counselor educator respondents reported behavioral modifications in efforts of avoiding the appearance of impropriety. Such strategies included consultation, engagement in group activities and avoidance of being alone with students to ensure appropriate teacher-student boundaries. Conversely, other male counselor educators indicated experiencing no difference at all in their interactions with students or colleagues related to being male. A lack of consensus among surveyed male counselor educators reflects the need for increased exploration into this relatively understudied phenomenon. Implications of the present research study include a better understanding of the experiences of counselor educators that may lead to enhanced job satisfaction for males, best practices to improve faculty student relationships and possible areas for further investigation. If male counselor educators experience greater job satisfaction, more males may choose to enter into the counseling field, as they observe possible role models with whom they identify. Ultimately, providing male counselor educators with environments of safety, support and understanding of their unique experiences may enhance their propensities towards providing these same conditions to students.

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Assessing the Accuracy of the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory-3 Using *DSM-5* Criteria

John Laux, Robin M. DuFresne, Allison K. Arnekrans, Sylvia Lindinger-Sternart, Christopher P. Roseman, Amy Wertenberger, Stephanie Calmes, Darren W. Love, Andrew M. Burck, Jim Schultz

The Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory-3 (SASSI-3; Miller & Lazowski, 1999) is a substance use screen that does a better job at identifying alcohol use disorders than other screens. Also, the SASSI-3 allows users the added benefit of screening for drugs use other than alcohol. The SASSI-3 includes seven subscales to help arrive at a decision. It is the substance use screen most frequently used by Master Addictions Counselors certified by the National Board for Certified Counselors. However, the SASSI-3 was standardized using *DSM-IV* substance dependence criteria. The *DSM-5* merged the criteria formerly associated with abuse and dependence onto one substance use disorder (SUD) continuum and added one new criterion—craving. Due to these changes, we wanted to examine how well the SASSI-3 could accurately assess SUDs using these new *DSM-5* criteria. To find this out, we conducted diagnostic interviews and administered SASSI-3s to 241 people who were either clients at one of two SUD treatment centers or university students. We found that the SASSI-3s did not positively identify as many people as having a SUD as did the counselors. Those people that the SASSI-3 missed are called "false negatives." We wondered why the instrument produced so many false negative decisions. We thought that this might be because the instrument requires too high of a score in order to recommend a diagnosis. To test this idea, we lowered the cut scores to see if we could improve the SASSI-3 and clinician agreement rate.

One of the SASSI-3's scales performed well and did not need adjusting. Two other scales' agreement with counselors improved when their cut scores were lowered. The final two scales could not be improved by adjusting their cut scores. By adjusting down the two scales, the SASSI-3's overall agreement with the counselors' diagnoses improved.

These results elicit deliberation about whether substance use disorder counselors would be better served by a SUD screening instrument that over- or under-predicts SUD diagnoses. An over-predictive instrument could waste counselors' time by forcing them to conduct full-diagnostic interviews with clients who don't need it, and clients might be unnecessarily inconvenienced by this process. Alternatively, counselors using a scoring method that under-predicts would have fewer clients unnecessarily inconvenienced and spend less time assessing persons who do not need SUD treatment. The unfortunate trade-off is that persons with a SUD that might benefit from assessment and treatment would otherwise be sent home without an appropriate recommendation. Counselors would benefit from a screening instrument with high sensitivity and specificity. When that goal cannot be achieved, counselors and agencies may want to consider which of these two is more important.

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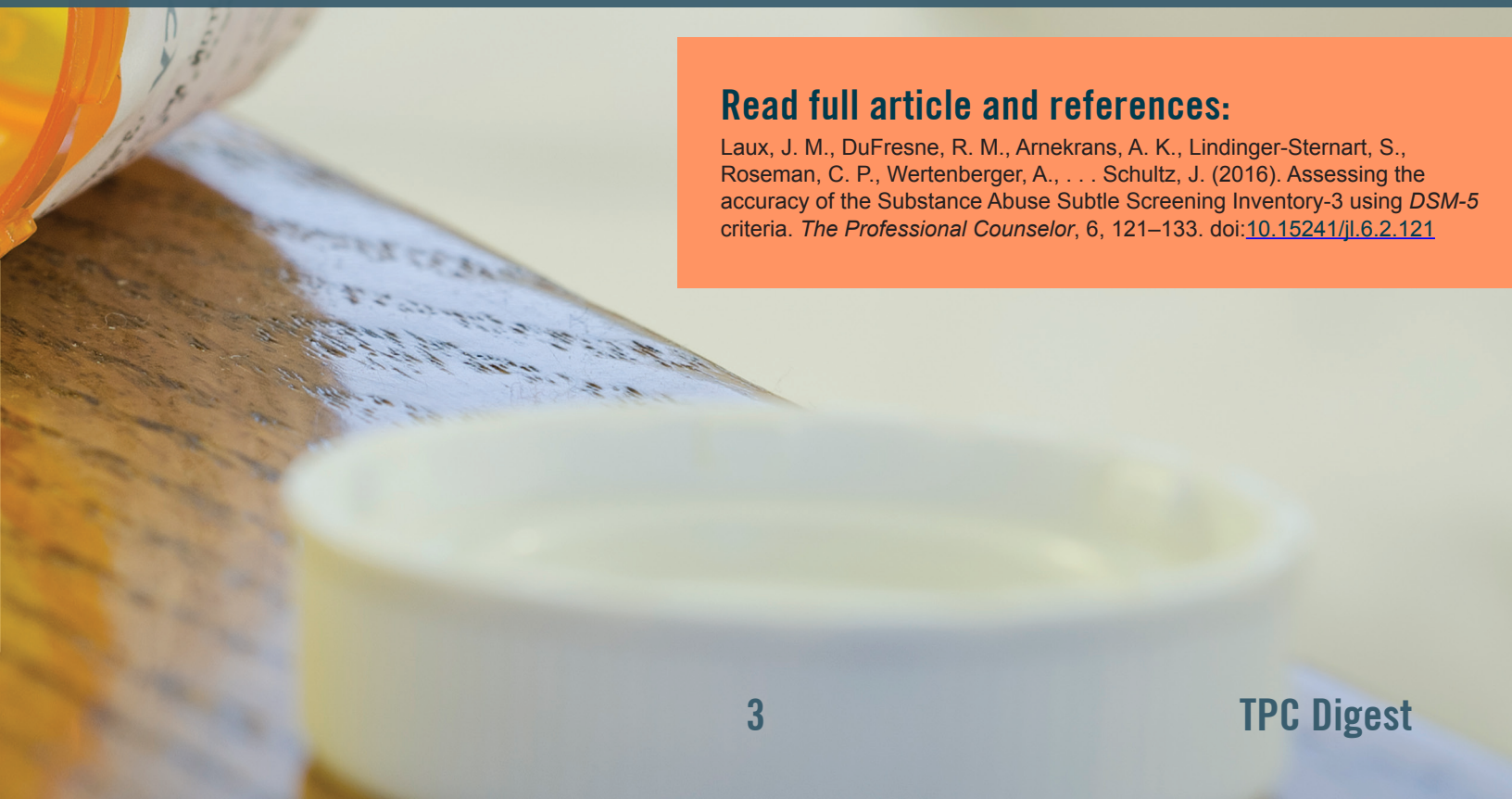

Read full article and references:

Laux, J. M., DuFresne, R. M., Arnekrans, A. K., Lindinger-Sternart, S., Roseman, C. P., Wertenberger, A., . . . Schultz, J. (2016). Assessing the accuracy of the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory-3 using *DSM-5* criteria. *The Professional Counselor*, 6, 121–133. doi:10.15241/jl.6.2.121

The American Counseling Association *Code of Ethics* and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards emphasize the importance of students demonstrating appropriate academic performance, professional development and personal development. Gatekeeping refers to the process of evaluating students in terms of professional competence and preventing those with inadequate skills and dispositions from entering the profession. The overall purpose of this study was to investigate types of master's students' problems of professional competency (PPC), counselor educators' in CACREP-accredited programs knowledge of master's students' PPC and counselor educators' perceptions of roadblocks that interfere with their ability to engage in the gatekeeping process. Thus, 370 counselor educators teaching in CACREP-accredited programs completed the Problems of Professional Competency Survey – Counselor Educator Version (PPCS-CE).

The majority (91%, *n* = 338) reported that they had observed students with PPC in their programs. The most frequently identified problematic behaviors included *inadequate clinical skills, inadequate interpersonal skills, inadequate academic skills, inability to regulate emotions and unprofessional behavior*. Those behaviors ranked less impactful were *unprofessional behavior, unethical behavioral, psychological concern, personality disorder, and substance use disorder*. Fifty-three percent (*n* = 197) reporting struggling emotionally to balance being empathetic with a student demonstrating PPC and their gatekeeping duties. When looking at addressing PPC with a student who is culturally different from the participant, 38% (*n* = 141) stated they were reluctant to do so due to the fear they would appear culturally insensitive, and 36% (*n* = 137) were reluctant to do so due to the fear of allegations of discrimination. Regarding being supported by others, 13% (*n* = 47) provided they did not feel supported by their chair to address a student who demonstrated PPC, and 13% (*n* = 47) stated they did not feel supported by their colleagues to address a student who demonstrated PPC.

The results demonstrate that counselor educators are aware of students with PPC in their programs and know what they are supposed to do if a PPC has been clearly delineated; however, they struggle with identifying problematic behavior that reaches a threshold of needing to be formally addressed and taking action related to these problematic behaviors. The gap between the recognition that a student is not meeting expectations and the point where formal action is initiated may be filled with the counselor educators own beliefs about how they can fix the problem as well as their own anxieties related to the barriers discovered in this study. The recognition and intervention of students with PPC can be further complicated by counselor educators having to negotiate faculty politics. It would seem that more attention is needed on assisting counselor educators in negotiating these barriers to ensure that students do not gateslip.

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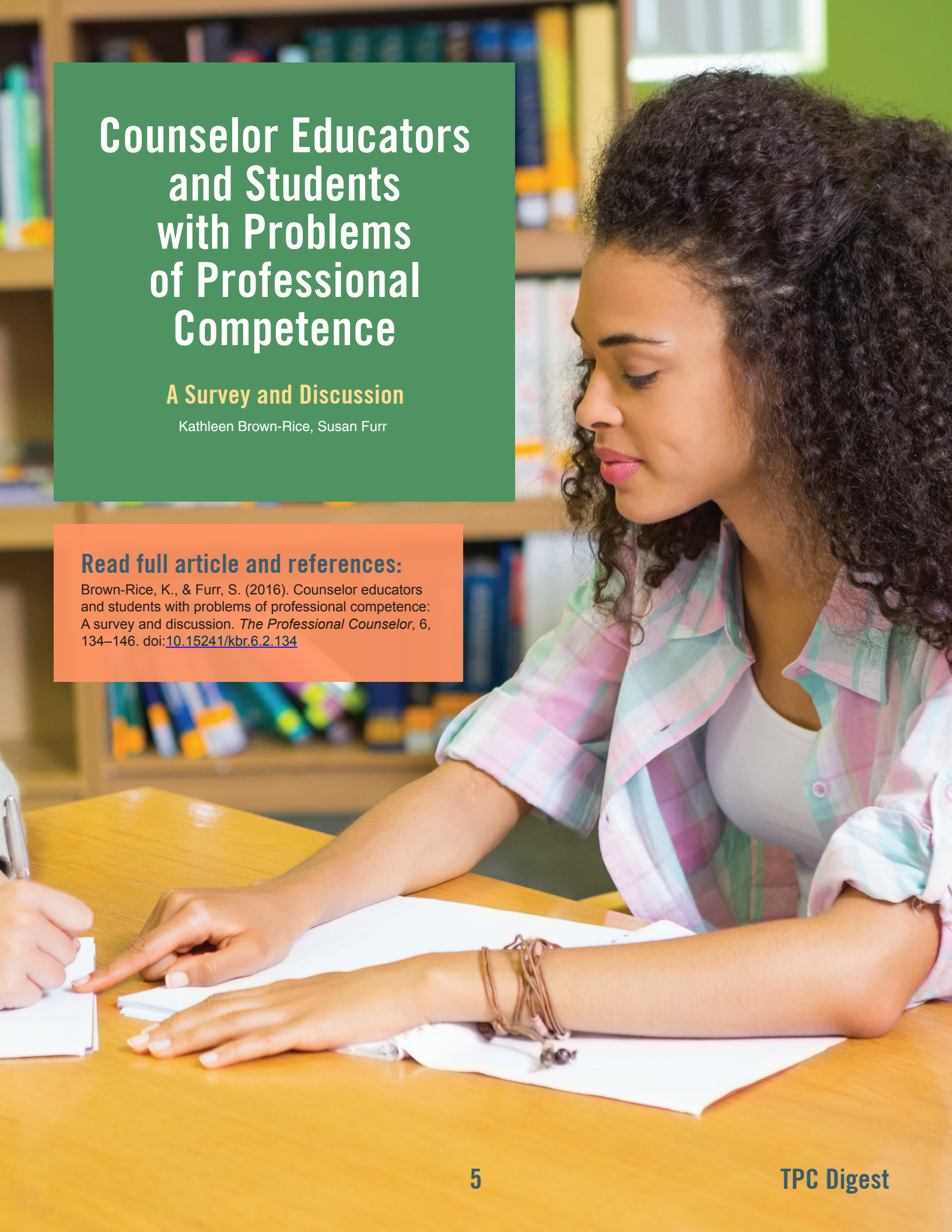

Counselor Educators and Students with Problems of Professional Competence

A Survey and Discussion

Kathleen Brown-Rice, Susan Furr

Read full article and references:

Brown-Rice, K., & Furr, S. (2016). Counselor educators and students with problems of professional competence: A survey and discussion. *The Professional Counselor*, 6, 134–146. doi:10.15241/kbr.6.2.134

The Process and Implications of Diagnosing Oppositional Defiant Disorder in African American Males

Marc A. Grimmett, Adria S. Dunbar, Teshanee Williams, Cory Clark, Brittany Prioleau, Jen S. Miller

Research studies indicate that the number of African Americans diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) is disproportionately higher than other demographic groups. One potential contributing factor for this discrepancy is racial diagnostic bias, when counselors who hold stereotypical beliefs about clients selectively attend to client information, which influences the assessment process. White American clients, for example, presenting with the same disruptive behavioral symptoms as African American clients, tend to be diagnosed with adjustment disorder.

African American masculinity stereotypes of criminal mindedness, violent behavior, aggression and hostility contribute to implicit biases. Clinical assessment may be influenced by personal and societal biases, resulting in misdiagnosing client symptoms. Counselors with limited multicultural and social justice counseling competence can easily over-diagnose African American males with ODD. Counselors working with African American families need to consider the African American family's unique stressors, worldviews and burdens; possible inclusion of the extended family; possible therapist biases that conflict with client worldview; and strength-based factors that foster competency, resilience, self-reliance and health in African American populations. An appropriate ODD diagnosis in African American males, then, requires culturally competent assessment and treatment planning, including the consideration of contextual factors beyond clinical symptoms reported.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to: (a) understand and explain some of the contextual factors, diagnostic processes and counseling outcomes associated with the diagnosis of ODD in African American males; and (b) identify, describe and make meaning of patterns and trends in mental health care systems that may be associated with the apparent over-diagnosis of African American boys with ODD. Study findings represent an in-depth analysis of the perspectives of six licensed mental health professionals with experience diagnosing and working with clients who are diagnosed with ODD that may apply to others working with similar populations and contexts. These findings suggest that a diagnosis of ODD can result from more factors than client symptoms fitting the diagnostic criteria.

Four domains emerged related to diagnosing ODD: (a) *insurance influence*—the role of insurance companies and managed care in the diagnostic process; (b) *ODD diagnostic criteria*—the relative malleability of the ODD criteria listed in the DSM-5; (c) *assessment, diagnosis, and treatment*—not accounting for family, community and other contextual problems affecting client mood and behavior; and (d) *ODD stigmatization*—negative stigmatization associated with an ODD diagnosis. African American males are particularly vulnerable to diagnostic stigmatization due to multiple marginalizations that can occur when intersecting with other forms of oppression (e.g., racial bias, stereotypes, prejudice).

Thinking through the diagnostic process and beyond the diagnosis requires mental health counselors to consider and balance the needs of the client, provision of ethical and effective mental health services, expectations and requirements of employers, and earning a living. Contextual explanations, including historical and systemic contexts, must be considered before a diagnosis is given. Attending to the role of counselor bias to prevent over-diagnosis is an ethical responsibility for which counselor educators and practicing counselors must hold themselves accountable.

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Read full article and references:

Grimmett, M. A., Dunbar, A. S., Williams, T., Clark, C., Prioleau, B., & Miller, J. S. (2016). The process and implications of diagnosing oppositional defiant disorder in African American males. *The Professional Counselor*, 6, 147–160. doi:10.15241/mg.6.2.147

Examining the Practicum Experience to Increase Counseling Students' Self-Efficacy

James Ikonomopoulos, Javier Cavazos Vela, Wayne D. Smith, Julia Dell'Aquila

Master's-level counseling programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) require students to complete practicum and internship courses that involve group and individual or triadic supervision. Although clinical supervision provides students with effective skill development, counseling students may begin practicum with low self-efficacy regarding their counseling abilities and skills. Given the importance of clinical supervision and counselor self-efficacy, the purpose of this study was to examine effectiveness of the practicum experience encompassing direct counseling services, group supervision and triadic supervision to increase counseling students' self-efficacy.

Counseling self-efficacy refers to one's beliefs or judgments about their capabilities to effectively counsel a client. Counselor self-efficacy also can refer to students' confidence regarding handling the therapist role, managing counseling sessions and delivering helping skills. Researchers identified relationships between practicum students' counseling self-efficacy and various client outcomes in counseling. Self-efficacy is positively related to performance attainment, perseverance in counseling tasks, less anxiety, positive client outcomes and counseling skills development.

The current study intended to evaluate the practicum experience by using a Single-Case Research Design (SCRD) to measure the impact on students' self-efficacy. Researchers and practitioners can use SCRDs to make inferences about the impact of treatment or experiences. We addressed the following research question: To what extent does the practicum experience encompassing direct counseling services, group supervision and triadic supervision influence counseling graduate students' self-efficacy?

We conducted this study with a sample of 11 Mexican American counseling graduate students enrolled in a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the Southwestern United States. Participants (four men and seven women) ranged in age from 24 to 57. All participants were enrolled in practicum. The Counselor Activity Self-Efficacy Scale was used by participants as a self-report measure of counseling self-efficacy. Participants responded to items on exploration skills, session management and client distress, with higher scores reflective of higher levels of self-efficacy.

Over the course of a 14-week semester, participants received 12 hours of triadic supervision and approximately 25 hours of group supervision. During triadic supervision meetings with two practicum students, the instructor of record conducted wellness checks assessing students' well-being and level of stress, listened to concerns about clients, observed recorded sessions, provided support and feedback, and encouraged supervisees to provide feedback. All students obtained a minimum of 40 direct hours while working at their university counseling and training clinic where services are provided to individuals with emotional, developmental and interpersonal issues.

The results of this study found that in all 11 cases investigated, the practicum experience ranged from moderately effective to very effective for improving or maintaining counselor self-efficacy during practicum coursework. For most participants, counseling self-efficacy continued to improve throughout the practicum experience. Participants shared that the most helpful experiences during practicum to improve their counselor self-efficacy came from direct experiences with clients. Other helpful experiences included processing counseling sessions with a peer during triadic supervision, obtaining feedback during triadic supervision from peers and instructors after observing recorded counseling sessions, and case conceptualization and treatment planning during group supervision.

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Read full article and references:

Ikonomopoulos, J., Cavazos Vela, J., Smith, W. D., & Dell'Aquila, J. (2016). Examining the practicum experience to increase counseling students' self-efficacy. *The Professional Counselor*, 6, 161–173. doi:10.15241/ji.6.2.161

An Exploration of Career Counselors' Perspectives on Advocacy

Melissa J. Fickling

Promoting social justice is a core value of the counseling profession, yet little is known about practitioners' perspectives on the use of advocacy interventions. Career counselors may have a particularly unique and vivid perspective on the role of advocacy in promoting social justice, as the worker role is one that carries significant social meaning and economic consequences for clients. It appears that although career counselors value social justice and are aware of the effects of injustice on clients' lives, they are acting primarily at the individual rather than the systemic level. Advocacy is challenging and multifaceted and is viewed as a central component of good counseling work; however, more research is needed if we are to understand how valuing social justice translates to use of advocacy interventions in career counseling practice.

In this study, the researcher used Q Methodology to ask 19 career counselors about the relative importance of various advocacy behaviors in their everyday work. Participants later engaged in a semi-structured interview with the researcher to provide meaning and depth to the Q sample items. This mixed methods research design allowed for an objective analysis of participants' subjective points of view. Results of the factor analysis revealed two perspectives. One factor, labeled Focus on Clients, emphasized the importance of empowering individual clients and teaching self-advocacy. Another factor, labeled Focus on Multiple Roles, highlighted the variety of skills and interventions career counselors use in their work.

Participants on factor one (Focus on Clients), who emphasized the importance of individual clients, tended to perceive it as difficult to have conversations about social justice with their peers or supervisors. In contrast, participants on factor two (Focus on Multiple Roles) were more likely to cite a lack of knowledge or skills regarding their reasons for not engaging in more advocacy behaviors beyond the client level. Factor one participants viewed engaging at the community level as more important, whereas participants on factor two viewed conversations with colleagues and clients about social justice as more important to their work. Understanding where career counselors agree and disagree about the importance of advocacy interventions can inform training efforts and spark conversation about those facets of advocacy that may be neglected.

All participants identified barriers to advocacy as well as the strengths of career counselors as advocates. Barriers included lack of time, lack of institutional support, lack of skill and some negative associations to advocacy work. Strengths of career counselors included the ability to create meaningful one-on-one relationships, multicultural competence and the perceived accessibility of career counseling, which makes it approachable to clients who may be reluctant to seek help elsewhere.

This research adds empirical support to the notion that additional conversations and training around advocacy are wanted and needed among practicing career counselors. Participants overwhelmingly viewed advocacy as important and desired additional skills. Counselor educators, supervisors and career development leaders can model advocacy by initiating critical discussions on how best to serve clients in the work domain where inequality plays out in material ways. This will add to the social justice discourse and move the profession toward a more integrated understanding of how career counselors view the advocate role and how they can work toward making social justice a reality.

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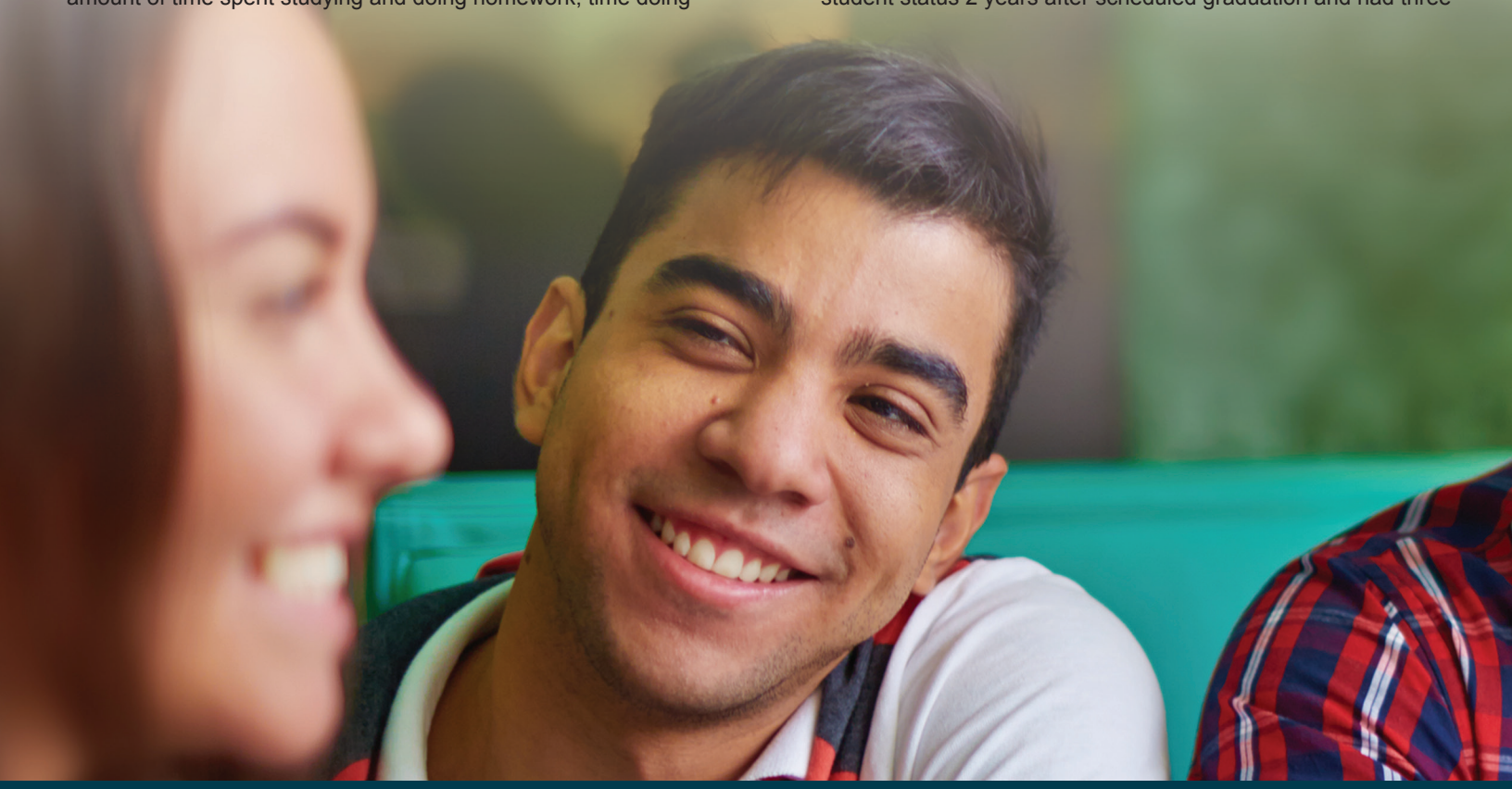
Read full article and references:

Fickling, M. J. (2016). An exploration of career counselors' perspectives on advocacy. *The Professional Counselor*, 6, 174–188. doi:10.15241/mf.6.2.174

College persistence is a major concern in our society. While more students than ever before transition from high school to college, many do not graduate and even less do so within a four-year period. Studies show that approximately one in four students do not return to a second year in the college where they started. Therefore, studies have examined factors on the college level that might be responsible for persistence. Such factors on the college level include academic performance, support programs, financial aid, interaction with faculty and peers, quality of residential living, and social interaction in the form of extracurricular and social involvement. In regards to high school performance having a predictive value upon persistence, studies have shown that, within the academic realm, the intensity of the high school curriculum and GPA are predictive of academic success in college. However, little is known about the predictive effect upon persistence of other high school experiences and skills such as engagement in extracurricular activities, interaction with faculty, amount of time spent studying and doing homework, time doing paid and volunteer work, and the amount of social and academic support. Research has shown these factors in college to have a relationship to persistence; yet little if any research has shown whether such factors in high school are predictive of college persistence. This study seeks to answer the following question: do the same factors at the college level that have a relationship to persistence also have a predictive value for persistence when measured at the high school level?

Data came from the 2002–2006 Educational Longitudinal Study and included students who enrolled in either a two-year or four-year institution upon graduation from high school. The study employed nine predictor variables: speaks with English teacher outside of class, speaks with math teacher outside of class, went to school counselor for information about college, social and academic support, and number of hours doing volunteer and community service, homework, working, and performing extracurricular activities. The criterion variable measured student status 2 years after scheduled graduation and had three



High School Predictors of College Persistence

The Significance of Engagement and Teacher Interaction

Daniel T. Sciarra, Holly J. Seirup, Elizabeth Sposato

categories: (a) leaver (enrolled after high school but not enrolled in January of 2006, (b) still enrolled in a two-year institution, and (c) still enrolled in a four-year institution.

Results showed that the two variables with the greatest predictive value upon persistence were time spent in extracurricular activities and speaking with the math teacher outside of class. Those involved in extracurricular activities on the high school level are more likely to be involved in activities in college, which helps integration into college life, and integration is a major factor in persistence. The same argument can be made about speaking with the math teacher. High school students who speak with their teachers outside of class will have a greater likelihood of doing so on the college level and, in turn, a greater likelihood of persisting in college since interaction with professors is an important factor in persistence.

The study implies that counselors working with high school students who wish to increase their chances of persisting in college should encourage participation in extracurricular activities and help students feel comfortable in approaching their teacher for help outside of class, especially with a teacher whose subject matter students might find challenging. For many students, this may be the math teacher and may explain why the present study found that talking to a high school math teacher outside of class positively predicted persistence in college.

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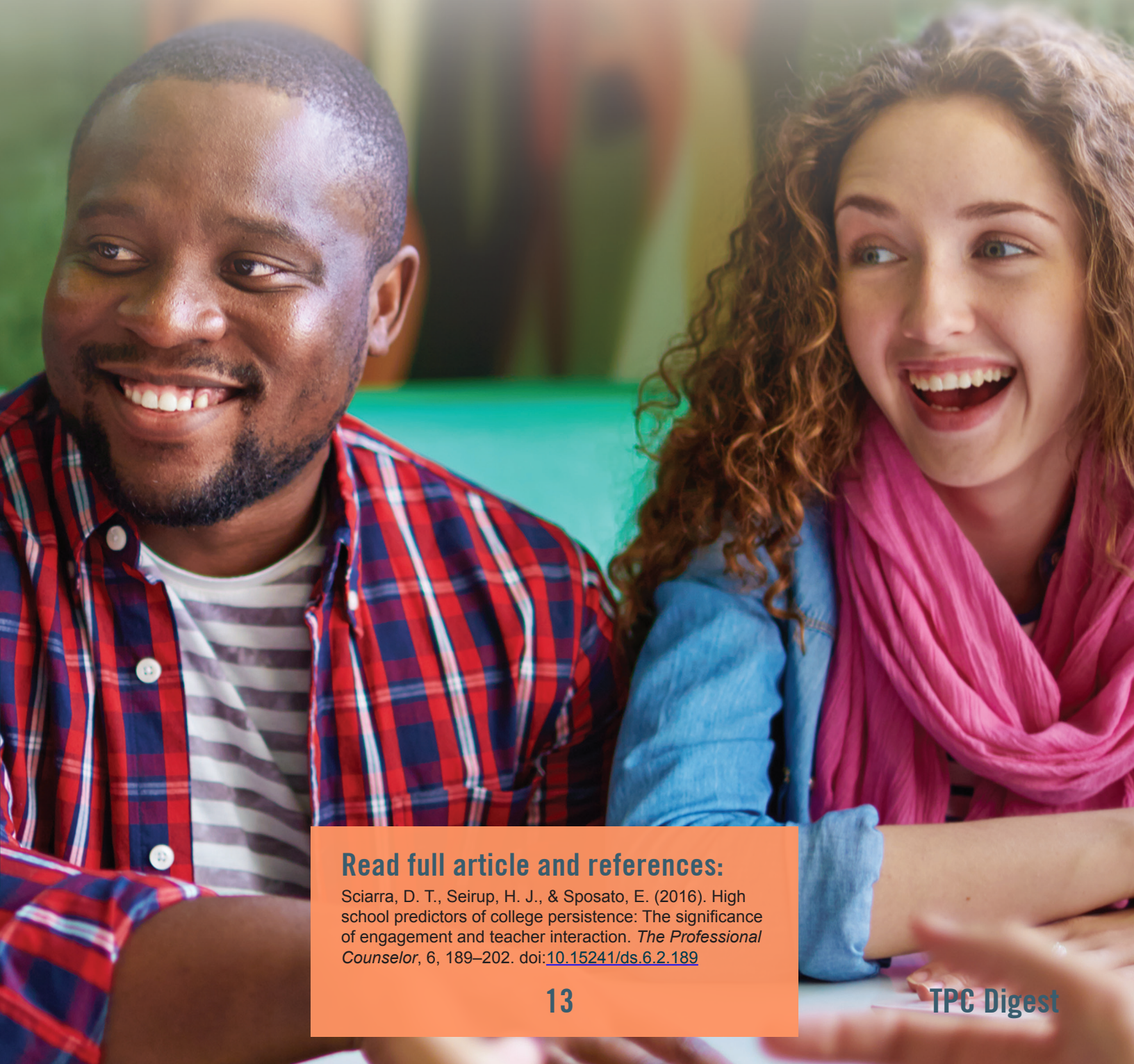
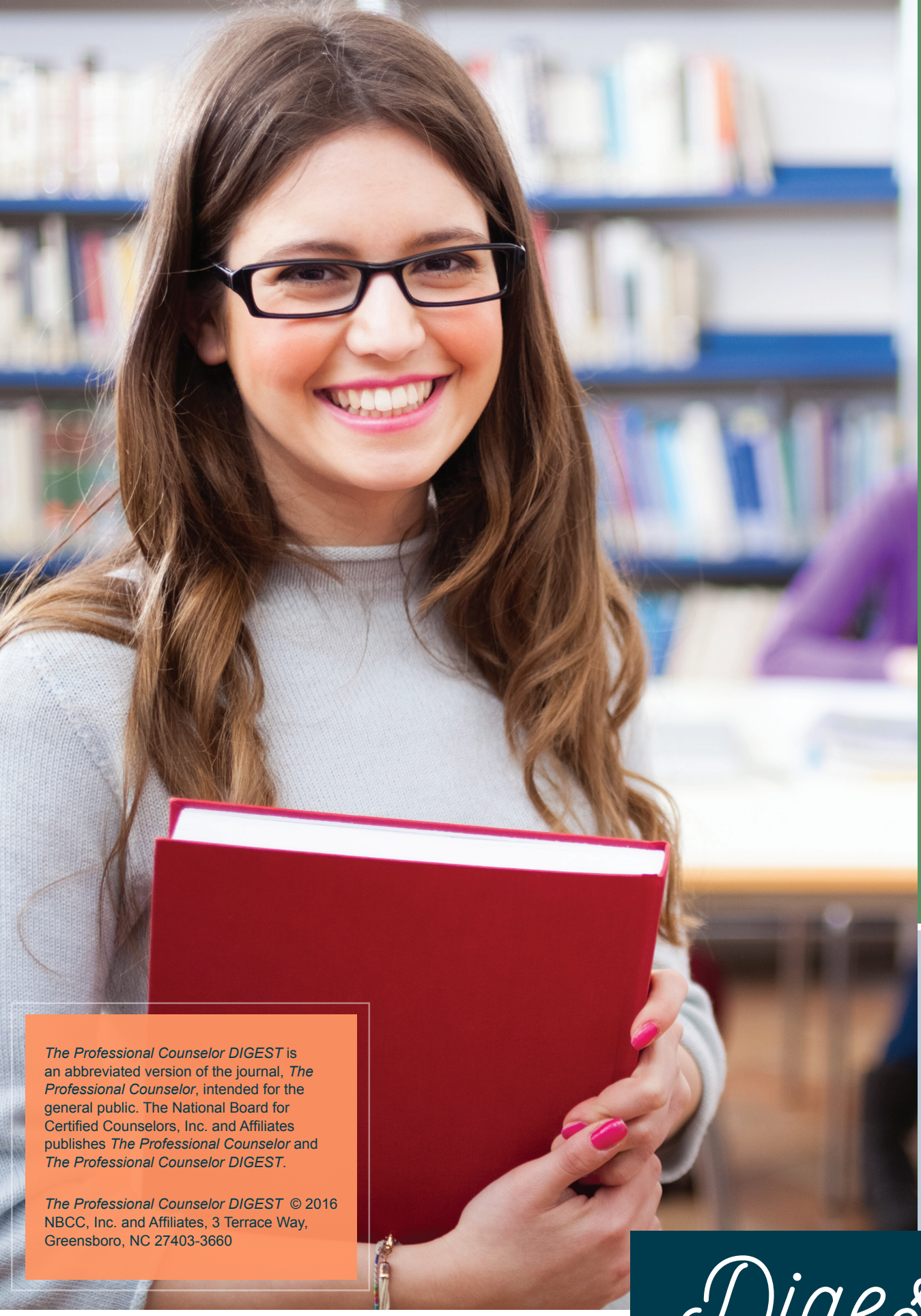


Read full article and references:

Sciarra, D. T., Seirup, H. J., & Sposato, E. (2016). High school predictors of college persistence: The significance of engagement and teacher interaction. *The Professional Counselor*, 6, 189–202. doi:10.15241/ds.6.2.189



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