

# *The Professional Counselor*™

Winter  
2025



*Digest*  
Volume 15, Issue 4





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*the team*

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## Bridging Gaps, Building Futures

### An Introduction to the Special Issue on Scholarship of the NBCCF Minority Fellowship Program

Lotes Nelson, Clark D. Ausloos, Kirsis A. Dipre

This special issue of *The Professional Counselor (TPC)* celebrates the enduring legacy of the NBCC Foundation's Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) and the remarkable contributions of its Fellows to the counseling profession. Guided by the overarching theme *Bridging Gaps, Building Futures*, this issue reflects how MFP scholars continue to advance equity, belonging, and healing across diverse communities through research, practice, and advocacy. Each article in this collection represents both an individual and collective commitment to closing the gap between awareness and action, transforming knowledge into meaningful and sustainable change. Building upon this collective vision, the selected works in this special issue are organized around two interwoven subthemes: *Threads of Transformation* and *Scholarship as Bridgework*. Together, these sections illuminate the dynamic ways in which counselors, counselor educators, and researchers are bridging identity, belonging, and access while advancing scholarship that heals, connects, and transforms. Collectively, these themes invite readers to consider how transformation and bridgework function as inseparable elements of professional identity—threads woven through practice, teaching, and research. In this spirit, the articles in this issue form a tapestry of insight and inspiration, reminding us that meaningful change emerges through the ongoing continuum of reflection, action, and connection that lies at the heart of the counseling profession.

This first theme, *Threads of Transformation*, captures how MFP Fellows weave identity, belonging, and access into their research, teaching, and clinical practice. Across schools, families, and communities, these scholars actively transform systems of care into more inclusive, culturally responsive, and healing-centered practices. Their work reflects the commitment of MFP Fellows to bridge awareness with action and to ensure that nondominant populations are supported in spaces that have too often excluded them, including within helping professions. The studies that comprise this theme speak to the transformative power of belonging, connection, celebrating cultural identity, and fostering resilience and growth across generations and communities.

In "A Pilot Study Examining Xinachtli: A Gender-Based Culturally Responsive Group Curriculum for Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Secondary Students," Vanessa Placeres and colleagues explore how culturally grounded interventions can serve as restorative spaces for Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous (CLI) youth. Guided by a healing-informed and gender-responsive framework, *Xinachtli*—meaning "germinating seed" in Nahuatl—nurtures identity development, life skills, and a sense of belonging among middle and high school students. The study's preliminary outcomes underscore the feasibility of implementing culturally responsive group counseling within K–12 schools and affirm the importance of integrating feminist traditions in CLI youth development.

In "Parenting Across Racial Lines: The Lived Experiences of Transracially Adoptive Parents of Black Children," Charmaine Conner and Natalya Lindo explore transformation within the family system itself. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach grounded in the Cultural-Racial Identity Model, the authors uncover how White parents raising Black children navigate cultural humility, trauma, and identity development. Participants' reflections reveal both the challenges of transracial parenting and the transformative potential of intentional cultural socialization, advocacy, and learning. Through their process of "becoming," these parents model transformation through love, humility, and accountability.



In “See the Girl: Girls’ Perceptions of Listening and Helpfulness in a Relational–Cultural Theory Grounded School-Based Counseling Program,” Ne’Shaun Borden and colleagues extend this theme by centering the lived experiences of African American girls in elementary school. Drawing on years of program data from *See the Girl: In Elementary*, findings reveal that authentic presence, empathy, and support were key to the girls’ sense of being heard and valued. Through the lens of Relational–Cultural Theory, this study reminds us that relational connection is itself a pathway to belonging and healing.

In “‘Deep in the Hollers’: LGBTQ+ Narratives of Addiction and Recovery in Appalachia,” Jacob Perkins and Harley Locklear amplify voices from rural queer communities navigating addiction and recovery. Through narrative inquiry, Perkins captures stories of resilience, chosen family, and the reimagining of wellness amid systemic and cultural marginalization. Participants’ narratives illuminate how isolation, stigma, and restrictive norms around identity and substance use intersect in rural regions. The article also demonstrates that recovery can emerge from solidarity and creative redefinitions of care. By positioning queer Appalachian experiences as central rather than peripheral, this work transforms dominant understandings of addiction recovery and challenges counselors to consider how regional identity, sexuality, and belonging intersect within the healing process.

The second theme, *Scholarship as Bridgework*, highlights how each article contributes to collective equity and healing in our profession, inviting us to center those in the margins and amplify their voices through our privileged positions as counselors, educators, supervisors and scholars.

In “Associations Between Coping and Suicide Risk Among Emerging Adults of Asian Descent,” Afroze Shaikh and colleagues use research as a tool to bridge the lack of knowledge and amplify the invisible fight with suicidality among emerging adults of Asian descent. Grounded in the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, this quantitative study examines the associations between coping orientations (e.g., problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant) and strategies (e.g., gratitude, self-compassion, and search for meaning in life) and suicide risk (e.g., perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness). The findings underscore the importance of culturally responsive coping interventions as bridges toward understanding and addressing suicide risk factors, urging us to center and uplift the voices of those made invisible by dominant societal norms and expectations.

Finally, Shadin Atiyeh examines the challenges and strategies employed by counselor educators in training students to work effectively with refugee populations in “Preparing Counseling Students to Work With Refugees: A Descriptive Analysis.” Utilizing a qualitative descriptive analysis, Atiyeh has identified several barriers to effective training in CACREP-accredited master’s programs across the United States: (a) perceived limited relevance of the topic, (b) time constraints within courses, and (c) the complexity of addressing refugee issues. The findings call us to embrace our collective responsibility to re-envision the counseling curriculum and implement creative, forward-thinking teaching practices that transcend institutional barriers, ensuring that students are well prepared to address the distinctive mental health needs of refugee populations.

Collectively, MFP Fellows demonstrate that culturally responsive practice is an active reimagining of what it means to belong, to heal, and to thrive. *The Threads of Transformation* woven throughout these studies remind us that when counselors and educators engage with identity and belonging as foundations of wellness, they reshape the systems that define who is seen, valued, and supported in our profession. Through the lens of *Scholarship as Bridgework*, these articles extend that vision by building bridges between knowledge, practice, and purpose. Our shared purpose is to prepare future counselors with the knowledge and skills to support marginalized and underserved communities while integrating equity-focused content across counseling curricula to promote social justice and collective healing. As you explore this special issue, we invite you to reflect on how these perspectives can inspire your own practice, teaching, and advocacy. What bridges can you build to move from awareness to action, and how can your work contribute to the elimination of mental health disparities? Our hope is that this collection not only informs but also inspires continued commitment to equity, belonging, and transformation within the counseling profession. Together, these works remind us that by bridging gaps and building worlds, we collectively transform the future of counseling.

## Read full article and references:

Nelson, L., Ausloos, C. D., & Dipre, K. A. (2025). Bridging gaps, building futures: An introduction to the special issue on scholarship of the NBCCF Minority Fellowship Program. *The Professional Counselor*, 15(4), 242–245. doi: [10.15241/tn.15.4.242](https://doi.org/10.15241/tn.15.4.242)





### Read full article and references:

Shaikh, A. N., Chen, M., Dhar, J., Yang, J., Sadek, K., Chang, M. K., Hsu, L.-C., Shilam, R., Varghese, A. S., & Chang, C. Y. (2025). Associations between coping and suicide risk among emerging adults of Asian descent. *The Professional Counselor*, 15(4), 246–262. doi: [10.15241/ans.15.4.246](https://doi.org/10.15241/ans.15.4.246)



# Associations Between Coping and Suicide Risk Among Emerging Adults of Asian Descent

Afroze N. Shaikh, Man Chen, Jyotsna Dhar, Jackie Yang, Katherine Sadek, Mia Kim Chang, Li-Cih Hsu, Rithika Shilam, Abigail S. Varghese, Catherine Y. Chang



Death by suicide remains a major concern for emerging adults (ages 18 to 29) in the United States, currently ranking as the third leading cause of death in this age group. Emerging adults of Asian descent exhibit the highest rates of suicidal thoughts and behavior within this age group. As one of the fastest growing ethnoracial minority groups in the United States, emerging adults of Asian descent face a myriad of intersecting stressors; these include navigating an increase in anti-Asian rhetoric and developmental vulnerability at this stage of life. Motivated by these factors and our own lived experiences as individuals of

Asian descent, we sought to better understand factors related to suicide risk within this population.

Guided by the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, this study examined the associations among coping orientations, coping strategies, and predictors of suicide desire, specifically thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness. We focused on three coping orientations, or frameworks for how someone might respond to stress: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidant coping. We also explored three coping strategies, or specific behavioral strategies to manage distress: gratitude, self-compassion, and the search for meaning in life. Prior research suggested that these coping strategies may help buffer against suicide risk by reducing psychological distress.

Data for this study came from a larger project on suicide risk among adults of Asian descent. After filtering for emerging adults (ages 18–29), the final sample included 429 participants. We ran multiple quantitative analyses to look at the relationship among coping orientations, coping strategies, perceived burdensomeness, and thwarted belongingness. Results showed that problem-focused coping (actively engaging in problem-solving strategies to reduce stress) reduced feelings of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness. In contrast, emotion-focused coping increased feelings of perceived burdensomeness, and avoidant coping orientation increased both feelings of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness. Among specific coping strategies, practicing gratitude lowered both perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness, engaging in self-compassion reduced thwarted belongingness, and searching for meaning in life was not significantly related to either outcome.

The results from our study are in line with the last few decades of scholarship on Asian and Asian American experiences, highlighting the importance of culture-specific factors in mental health service delivery. Counselors should consider integrating gratitude and self-compassion practices into interventions and remain attentive to cultural and contextual factors influencing coping and belonging. We encourage professional counselors and other professionals serving this population to read on for more details on the implications of our findings, suggestions for clinical work, and considerations for future research.

*Afroze N. Shaikh, PhD, NCC, BC-TMH, LPC, is an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin and was a 2022 Mental Health Counseling Doctoral Fellow with the NBCCF Minority Fellowship Program. Man Chen, PhD, is an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin. Jyotsna Dhar, MA, LPC, is a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and was a 2022 Mental Health Counseling Master's Fellow with the NBCCF Minority Fellowship Program. Jackie Yang, MA, is a doctoral candidate at the University of Texas at Austin. Katherine Sadek, MEd, is a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin. Mia Kim Chang, PhD, EdM, NCC, is a part-time instructor at Georgia State University. Li-Cih Hsu, MS, is a doctoral intern at Vanderbilt University. Rithika Shilam is an independent researcher. Abigail S. Varghese, BS, is a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin. Catherine Y. Chang, PhD, NCC, LPC, CPCS, is a professor at Georgia State University. Correspondence may be addressed to Afroze Shaikh, 1912 Speedway, Stop D5000, Austin, TX 78712-1139, [afroze.shaikh@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:afroze.shaikh@austin.utexas.edu).*





# A Pilot Study Examining *Xinachtli*

## A Gender-Based Culturally Responsive Group Curriculum for Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Secondary Students

Vanessa Placeres, Caroline Lopez-Perry, Hiromi Masunaga, Nicholas Pantoja

**T**his pilot study examined the feasibility, reliability, and preliminary outcomes of *Xinachtli*, a culturally responsive, gender-based group curriculum designed for Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous (CLI) secondary students. The Latinx youth population continues to increase across the United States; it is projected that by 2060, Latinas will make up nearly a third of the nation's female population. Despite their growing presence, Latina students continue to face persistent systemic barriers, as evidenced by the growing opportunity gap between Latina students and their White peers. These inequities and opportunity gaps reflect the need for culturally grounded and gender-responsive interventions that affirm identity, cultivate belonging, and promote healing for historically marginalized students.

*Xinachtli* (a Nahuatl word meaning “germinating seed”) is a healing-informed group curriculum developed by the National Compadres Network and rooted in *La Cultura Cura* (“culture heals”). Through Indigenous and community-based practices, the program fosters resilience, leadership, and positive identity development. Grounded in a transformational framework of racial and gender justice, the group engages participants in reflective dialogue, storytelling, and culturally rooted activities intended to enhance self-awareness. The present study examined the feasibility of implementing *Xinachtli* in K–12 schools and its potential effects on students’ sense of belonging, life skills, and ethnic identity.





The study included 22 middle and high school girls, ages 12 to 17, from three Southern California schools who participated in 6- to 7-week Xinachtli counseling groups. Trained school counselors facilitated weekly sessions that addressed topics such as self-esteem, emotional awareness, goal setting, healthy relationships, and celebrating personal accomplishments. Students completed pre- and post-surveys using the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure–Revised (MEIM-R) and the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM), along with open-ended reflection questions. Counselor reflections were also collected to assess feasibility.

Results indicated that despite barriers, participants expressed appreciation and described the group as a supportive and affirming space where they felt heard, valued, and connected to peers. Qualitative responses reflected growth in self-confidence, self-acceptance, communication, and cultural pride. Both the MEIM-R ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and PSSM ( $\alpha = .91$ ) demonstrated strong reliability within the CLI population. Although quantitative increases in students' sense of belonging were minimal, qualitative responses revealed deeper evidence of empowerment and enhanced cultural affirmation.

Overall, findings suggest that Xinachtli is a promising, culturally sustaining approach for school counselors aiming to create inclusive, identity-affirming spaces for CLI youth. The program's grounding in cultural healing and collective learning supports social justice and strength-based counseling practices. Although preliminary, this pilot study provides evidence that Xinachtli can enhance students' sense of belonging, life skills, and positive identity. Future research should explore broader implementation to assess long-term effects.

By centering culture, gender, and community, Xinachtli nurtures the “germinating seeds” of pride, confidence, and resilience in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous students that help them thrive in both their schools and communities.

*Vanessa Placeres, PhD, NCC, LPC, RPT, is an associate professor at San Diego State University and was a 2017 Doctoral Fellow in Mental Health Counseling with the NBCCF Minority Fellowship Program. Caroline Lopez-Perry, PhD, is an associate professor at California State University Long Beach. Hiromi Masunaga, PhD, is a professor at California State University Long Beach. Nicholas Pantoja, MS, PSS, is an alumnus of San Diego State University. Correspondence may be addressed to Vanessa Placeres, 5500 Campanile Drive, San Diego, CA 92182, [vplaceres@sdsu.edu](mailto:vplaceres@sdsu.edu).*

### Read full article and references:

Placeres, V., Lopez-Perry, C., Masunaga, H., & Pantoja, N. (2025). A pilot study examining Xinachtli: A gender-based culturally responsive group curriculum for Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous secondary students. *The Professional Counselor*, 15(4), 263–278. doi: [10.15241/vp.15.4.263](https://doi.org/10.15241/vp.15.4.263)



# Parenting Across Racial Lines

## The Lived Experiences of Transracially Adoptive Parents of Black Children

Charmaine L. Conner, Natalya Ann Lindo

This study explores how White adoptive parents perceive and navigate the experience of raising Black children. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, the research sought to understand parents' lived experiences without imposing preconceived ideas. The study was guided by the Cultural-Racial Identity Model, which explains how racial identity develops within transracial adoption contexts.

Six White adoptive parents (four women and two men) participated in in-depth, hour-long interviews. Their children, ranging from ages 3 to 17 years old, were all Black and adopted through foster care or international adoption. The parents lived in mostly White communities and had been adoptive parents for 1 to 9 years. Interviews explored how these parents understood their children's racial and cultural identity development and how they experienced the parent-child relationship.

Through detailed data analysis, six major themes emerged:

1. *Parent-Child Relationship*: Parents described deep affection for their children but often struggled to address behavioral challenges and feelings of inadequacy. Although they recognized their children's intelligence, creativity, and resilience, some felt unprepared for the emotional and cultural complexities of parenting across racial lines.
2. *Impact of Trauma*: Many of the children had experienced trauma prior to adoption, such as multiple foster placements, neglect, or parental substance use, which shaped their attachment and behavior. Parents linked their children's trauma histories to emotional and behavioral difficulties.
3. *Becoming a Transracially Adoptive Parent*: Parents discussed the challenges of the adoption process, feelings of frustration with limited support, and the emotional weight of raising a child of a different race. Although some initially minimized race as a factor, most later recognized its significance and the need for preparation and ongoing learning.
4. *Cultural, Racial, and Ethnic Identity Development*: Parents reflected on how adoption reshaped their understanding of race and culture. Many acknowledged developing greater racial awareness and a commitment to creating inclusive family environments. They also noticed their children's awareness of physical and cultural differences, including hair texture and skin tone, and their impact on belonging.
5. *Encounters with Microaggressions*: Parents described witnessing or hearing about racist comments or subtle discriminatory acts toward their children. These incidents occurred in schools, communities, or within extended families. Parents often struggled with how to respond, expressing anger, sadness, and uncertainty.
6. *Cultural Socialization Practices*: All parents shared how they exposed their children to Black culture through books, hair care, community events, and diverse educational settings. However, most questioned whether these efforts were sufficient to prepare their children for racism and identity challenges.

The study highlights a need for culturally responsive education and support for adoptive families. Adoption agencies and counselors should provide specialized training on racial identity, trauma-informed parenting, and antiracist practices. Counselor education programs can strengthen this work by integrating adoption-competence training, experiential learning, and diverse family case studies.

Overall, this study fills a significant gap in counseling research, as most prior work on transracial adoption appears in social work literature. It emphasizes that supporting transracially adoptive families, especially those raising Black children, requires more than love and good intentions; it demands sustained learning, open dialogue about race, and professional guidance to help children develop a strong, positive sense of identity and belonging.

Charmaine L. Conner, PhD, NCC, LPC-S, CCPT-S, CPRT-S, is the founder and owner of Embrace Counseling and Wellness, PLLC, and was a 2018 Doctoral Fellow in Mental Health Counseling with the NBCCF Minority Fellowship Program. Natalya Ann Lindo, PhD, LPC-S, CCPT-S, CPRT-S, is a professor and Chair of the Department of Counseling and Higher Education at the University of North Texas. Correspondence may be addressed to Charmaine Conner, 5900 Balcones Dr., Ste. 100, Austin, TX 78731, [dr.charmainelconner@gmail.com](mailto:dr.charmainelconner@gmail.com).





### Read full article and references:

Conner, C. L., & Lindo, N. A. (2025). Parenting across racial lines: The lived experiences of transracially adoptive parents of Black children. *The Professional Counselor*, 15(4), 279–295. doi: [10.15241/clc.15.4.279](https://doi.org/10.15241/clc.15.4.279)







# See the Girl

## Girls' Perceptions of Listening and Helpfulness in a Relational–Cultural Theory Grounded School-Based Counseling Program

Ne'Shaun J. Borden, Natalie A. Indelicato, Jamie F. Root, Lanni Brown



Today, more than ever, girls are facing a mental health crisis; depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, family challenges, body image concerns, and the relentless pressures of social media are just the tip of the iceberg. These factors contribute to vulnerability for increased mental health concerns among young girls, and although all girls are affected, girls from marginalized racial backgrounds and low socioeconomic status families are disproportionately impacted.

With an increase in youth needing mental health support, schools in the United States have become the largest providers of mental health services for children and adolescents; however, behavioral manifestations of mental health issues are often still treated solely as disciplinary violations rather than opportunities for mental health intervention. Despite a substantial body of research demonstrating the harmful effects of punitive discipline and suspension on school-aged children, such policies remain widespread. Students from historically marginalized communities, particularly Black and Brown girls, are disproportionately impacted by these disciplinary practices. Although some schools have begun adopting more inclusive approaches aligned with schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), many still rely on exclusionary and punitive measures that undermine student well-being and equity.

Our article highlights the See the Girl: In Elementary (SGIE) program, a school-based program grounded in Relational–Cultural Theory developed and implemented in the Southeastern United States. SGIE has demonstrated success in reducing out-of-school suspensions, strengthening girls' coping skills, fostering a sense of connectedness, and positively influencing school culture. By highlighting the experiences of girls in the SGIE program, our article contributes to a critical gap in the literature that calls for understanding outcomes directly through the perspective of those participating in direct care services.

Girls in the SGIE program articulated how they knew their counselor was listening to them and which aspects of the SGIE program they found most helpful. They identified active listening, therapeutic support, and authenticity as key indicators of being heard. Additionally, the girls identified the development of coping skills, the cultivation of meaningful relationships, and the creation of a safe space to navigate challenges both at home and at school as beneficial components of the program.

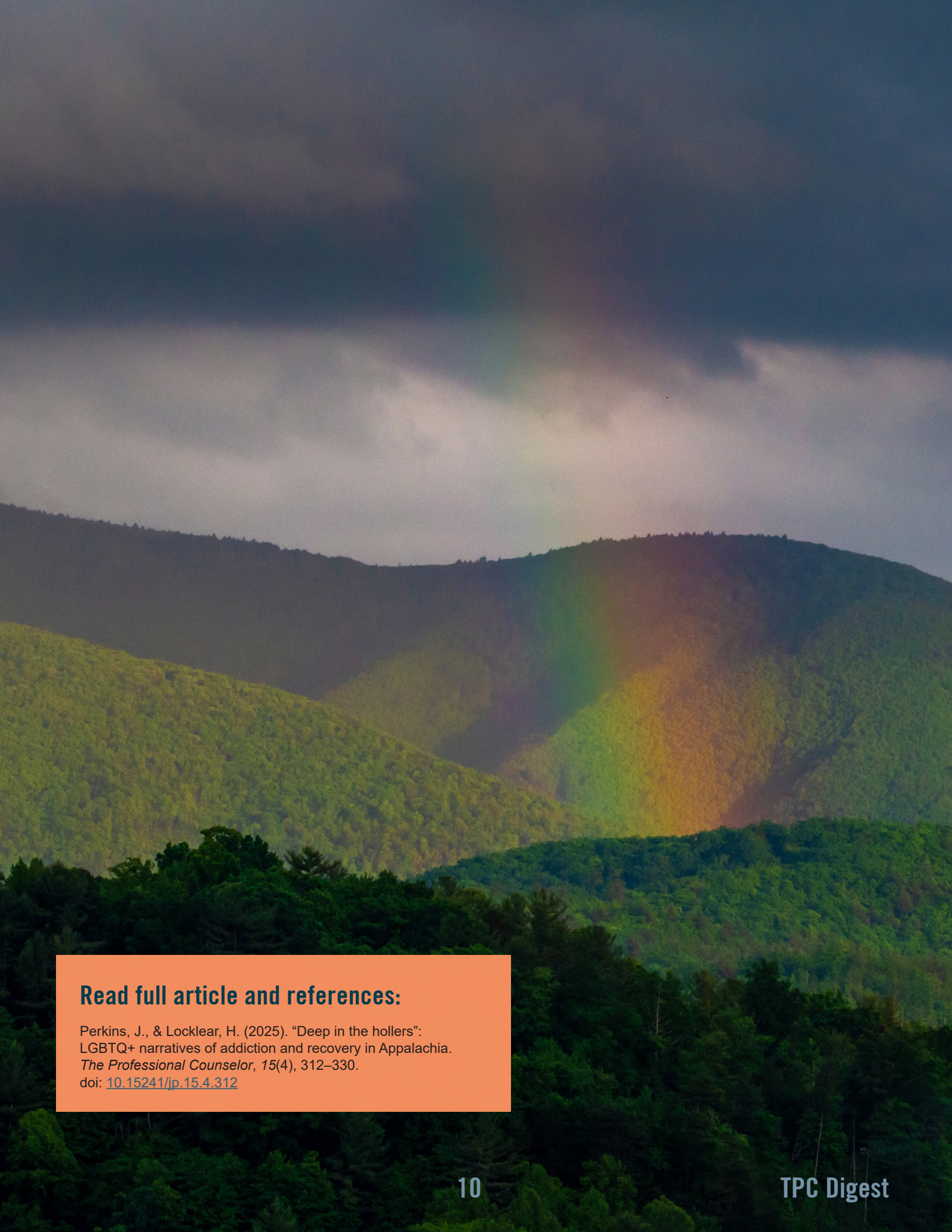
Drawing on the girls' feedback and the well-documented benefits of PBIS, we offer targeted recommendations for counselor educators, counselor supervisors, and school-based mental health professionals. These suggestions aim to strengthen the effectiveness of our work with girls and inspire practitioners to actively amplify the voices of the girls they serve.

*Ne'Shaun J. Borden, PhD, LMHC (FL), is an assistant professor and program director at Jacksonville University and was a 2019 Doctoral Fellow in Mental Health Counseling with the NBCCF Minority Fellowship Program. Natalie A. Indelicato, PhD, LMHC, is a professor at Jacksonville University. Jamie F. Root, BSc, RMCHL, is a registered mental health counseling intern in Florida. Lanni Brown, BS, is a counseling student at Jacksonville University. The authors would like to acknowledge the Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center for partnering to conceptualize this project and provide the de-identified program data used for analysis. Correspondence may be addressed to Ne'Shaun J. Borden, 2800 University Blvd. N., Jacksonville, FL 32211, [nborden@ju.edu](mailto:nborden@ju.edu).*

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Borden, N. J., Indelicato, N. A., Root, J. F., & Brown, L. (2025). See the girl: Girls' perceptions of listening and helpfulness in a relational–cultural theory grounded school-based counseling program. *The Professional Counselor*, 15(4), 296–311. doi: [10.15241/njb.15.4.296](https://doi.org/10.15241/njb.15.4.296)





### Read full article and references:

Perkins, J., & Locklear, H. (2025). "Deep in the hollers": LGBTQ+ narratives of addiction and recovery in Appalachia. *The Professional Counselor*, 15(4), 312–330.  
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# “Deep in the Hollers”

## LGBTQ+ Narratives of Addiction and Recovery in Appalachia

Jacob Perkins, Harley Locklear

Substance use disorders (SUDs) remain a significant public health concern in the United States, disproportionately affecting LGBTQ+ individuals. This population faces unique stressors tied to stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion. While research has supported the relationship between minority stress and substance use, most scholarship centers urban contexts where affirming care is more accessible. A paucity of attention has been given to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in rural areas, particularly Appalachia—a region marked by sociopolitical conservatism, religiosity, and limited access to culturally responsive recovery resources. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in Appalachia navigating addiction and recovery, with attention to how identity, geography, and community shape these trajectories.

Using narrative inquiry, the authors conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six LGBTQ+ adults residing in the Appalachian United States. Inclusion required that they were in recovery for at least 90 days. We constructed five themes that collectively depict a developmental arc of identity, addiction, and resilience: becoming in Appalachia, seeking refuge, reaching a breaking point, recovery in the margins, and visions of wellness. Participants described formative experiences of religious condemnation, familial rejection, and societal exclusion surrounding their LGBTQ+ identities. This fostered shame, concealment, and early isolation. Many engaged with substances as a mechanism for survival and self-expression—both to numb distress and to experiment with suppressed aspects of self. Substances often provided temporary relief from internalized stigma, courage to disclose identity, or access to social connection otherwise denied by their communities.

Participants recounted pivotal breaking points during active addiction when their relationships with drugs or alcohol shifted from coping mechanisms to sources of harm, prompting the pursuit of recovery. Regrettably, their accounts revealed a devastating lack of recovery services within Appalachian communities that are affirming for LGBTQ+ individuals. Formal recovery spaces, such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, were described by the majority of participants as heteronormative and religiously charged, often mirroring the same stigma that contributed to addiction. In the absence of LGBTQ+—affirming programs, many turned to chosen family, peers, and harm-reduction practices to sustain sobriety. These informal networks—anchored in trust and mutual care—served as essential lifelines where authenticity and safety could coexist.

Participants ultimately envisioned recovery as a collective process rather than an individual outcome. They called for sober spaces and programs that integrate Appalachian culture with LGBTQ+ affirmation, including outdoor, art-based, and peer-led activities. Recovery was framed not simply as abstinence, but as a reimagining of wellness rooted in belonging, visibility, and service to others. Several participants described transforming their lived experience into professional or advocacy work, supporting peers through counseling, mentorship, and community organizing.

This study expands understanding of addiction and recovery by illuminating how structural marginalization and geographic isolation intersect with LGBTQ+ identities. Findings highlight the necessity of culturally responsive and community-embedded recovery supports in rural Appalachia. We encourage counselors to assess the sociocultural context of clients' substance use, incorporate chosen family and peer networks into treatment planning, and design interventions that honor both LGBTQ+ identity and Appalachian traditions.

*Jacob Perkins is an MAEd candidate at Virginia Tech University and was a 2024 Master's Fellow in Addictions Counseling with the NBCC Minority Fellowship Program. Harley Locklear, PhD, NCC, LCMHCA, LSC, is an assistant professor at Virginia Tech University and was a 2022 Doctoral Fellow in Mental Health Counseling with the NBCC Minority Fellowship Program. Correspondence may be addressed to Jacob Perkins, 1750 Kraft Dr., Blacksburg, VA 24061, [jacobperkins988@vt.edu](mailto:jacobperkins988@vt.edu).*



# Preparing Counseling Students to Work With Refugees

## A Descriptive Analysis

Shadin Atiyeh



y the end of 2024, over 42 million people were living as refugees globally—a staggering number that continues to grow. Yet, despite this humanitarian crisis, many counseling students graduate without learning how to effectively support the mental health needs of those who have fled conflict and persecution.

In this study, I examined how counselor educators prepare their students to work with refugees. Through surveys and focus groups with 15 counselor educators across the United States, I found that refugee issues are often sidelined in counseling programs, leaving future mental health professionals unprepared to address the unique challenges this population faces.

The study identified several barriers preventing comprehensive refugee training in counseling programs. First, many educators view refugee issues as too specialized or not relevant enough for general coursework. Second, packed curricula leave little room for additional topics; there's simply not enough time to cover everything. Third, the complexity of refugee experiences, which involve trauma, cultural adjustment, language barriers, and legal challenges, makes the topic intimidating to teach.

This training gap has serious consequences. Refugees often arrive with mental health needs stemming from war, persecution, dangerous journeys, and the stress of resettlement. They face barriers to accessing care, including language differences, cultural stigma around mental health, and unfamiliarity with health care systems. When counselors lack proper training, refugees may receive inadequate support or avoid seeking help altogether.





The educators who successfully integrate refugee topics into their teaching use creative approaches. Case studies bring refugee experiences to life, helping students understand complex situations through real-world examples. Experiential learning, such as partnerships with refugee resettlement agencies, allows students to work directly with refugee families. Guest speakers can provide powerful firsthand perspectives that textbooks cannot capture. These methods help students develop both knowledge and understanding.

Preparing counselors to work with refugees is not just about adding one more topic to an already full curriculum; it's about fulfilling the profession's commitment to social justice and serving underserved populations. Rather than creating standalone courses, refugee issues should be woven throughout counseling programs, appearing in classes on trauma, multicultural counseling, family therapy, and ethics.

As global displacement continues to rise, the need for culturally competent counselors who can support refugees becomes increasingly urgent. By addressing the barriers identified—making refugee issues relevant to students, finding creative ways to incorporate content into existing courses, and providing educators with resources and training—we can ensure that tomorrow's counselors are prepared to serve all members of their communities, including those who have survived unimaginable hardships and are seeking safety, healing, and hope.

*Shadin Atiyeh, PhD, NCC, ACS, LPC, CCC, CRC, is an assistant professor at Wayne State University and was a 2017 Doctoral Fellow in Mental Health Counseling with the NBCC Minority Fellowship Program. Correspondence may be addressed to Shadin Atiyeh, 5425 Gullen Mall, Detroit, MI 48202, [shadin.atiyeh@wayne.edu](mailto:shadin.atiyeh@wayne.edu).*

### Read full article and references:

Atiyeh, S. (2025). Preparing counseling students to work with refugees: A descriptive analysis. *The Professional Counselor*, 15(4), 331–344. doi: [10.15241/sa.15.4.331](https://doi.org/10.15241/sa.15.4.331)



# *The Professional Counselor*™

Winter  
2025



*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*.

*The Professional Counselor DIGEST*  
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3 Terrace Way, Greensboro, NC  
27403-3660



## *Digest* Volume 15, Issue 4

