

# The Professional Counselor™

Summer  
2024



## *Digest* Volume 14, Issue 2



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### **Read full article and references:**

Peck, M., Dumas, D. M., & Midgett, A. (2024). Examination of the Bystander Intervention Model among middle school students: A preliminary study. *The Professional Counselor, 14*(2), 119–134.  
doi: [10.15241/mp.14.2.119](https://doi.org/10.15241/mp.14.2.119)

# Examination of the Bystander Intervention Model Among Middle School Students: A Preliminary Study

Matthew Peck, Diana M. Dumas, Aida Midgett

**S**chool bullying is a significant problem in the United States, with one out of four students reporting bullying and approximately 80% observing bullying as a bystander. Bullying victimization and witnessing bullying are related to depressive symptoms and anxiety, among other adverse effects. Bystanders can respond to bullying in several ways, including encouraging the bully by directly acting as “assistants” or indirectly acting as “reinforcers,” walking away from bullying situations acting as “outsiders,” or attempting to intervene to help the target by acting as “defenders.” Bullying decreases when bystanders intervene; however, four out of five bystanders will not intervene.

Prior research has focused primarily on specific factors that contribute to this outcome. The current study uses the Bystander Intervention Model as a conceptual framework to understand the process for bystanders to intervene to help targets of bullying. This model outlines five sequential steps that a bystander must undergo in order to take action: (a) Notice the Event, (b) Interpret the Event as an Emergency, (c) Accept Responsibility, (d) Know How to Act, and (e) Decision to Intervene. We examined the Bystander Intervention Model among students trained in the STAC program. STAC is a brief bullying bystander intervention that stands for four bystander intervention strategies: Stealing the Show, Turning It Over, Accompanying Others, and Coaching Compassion.

This is the first study to examine bystander training within the context of the Bystander Intervention Model. We examined the following research questions: (a) Are there differences in student engagement in the five steps of the Bystander Intervention Model from baseline to the 6-week follow-up between bystanders and non-bystanders? (b) Is there a difference in defending behavior from baseline to the 6-week follow-up between bystanders and non-bystanders? and (c) Which of the five steps uniquely predict defending behavior at the 6-week follow-up?

Middle school participants ( $N = 79$ ) in grades 6–8 completed surveys before the training and 6 weeks following. Results indicated students trained in STAC reported changes in engagement in three of the five steps of the model and an increase in defending behavior from baseline to follow-up assessment. Further, two of the five steps of the model were uniquely associated with defending behavior post-training.

These findings are particularly promising, as the steps Notice the Event and Decision to Intervene both increased from baseline to the 6-week follow-up for students who witnessed bullying post-training. Thus, among students who witness bullying as bystanders, the STAC intervention was effective in increasing the two steps of the bystander model that are uniquely associated with defending behavior.

Counselors can conceptualize bystander behavior using the Bystander Intervention Model, assessing engagement in each step of the model and providing education to enhance engagement in each step as needed. By focusing on specific steps within the Bystander Intervention Model, counselors can break down the complex process of bullying bystander behavior and have a better understanding of what enables students to intervene when they witness bullying.

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# Centering Social Justice in Counselor Education: How Student Perspectives Can Help

Sapna B. Chopra, Rebekah Smart, Yuying Tsong, Olga L. Mejía, Eric W. Price

**M**umerous scholars in the field of counseling have called upon counselor educators to integrate social justice advocacy into their curriculum, course materials, and overall training for counseling students. Counselor educators are themselves products of the larger sociopolitical environment and may inadvertently uphold and reinforce dominant patriarchal, cisheteronormative, Eurocentric norms in their teaching. For example, most counseling training is focused on the individual and often overlooks the role of systemic oppression in clients' distress and the need for social justice advocacy beyond the counseling room.

For this study, we used an online survey to gather feedback from beginning counseling students in their first semester and from advanced students who had started seeing clients. The research process was guided by the overarching question: What are beginning and advanced counseling students' perceptions of their multicultural and social justice training, and how can their feedback be used to improve their counselor education program?

Overall, both beginning and advanced students felt supported by their professors and appreciative of the available Spanish/Latinx emphasis within the program. Students expressed humility and a desire to learn more about social justice advocacy, with some feeling overwhelmed and exhausted by the extent of societal inequities. Students reported growth in the core areas of awareness, knowledge, skills, and action, with more growth in awareness and knowledge than in social justice action. Although beginning students identified personal biases, the theme of self-awareness was more complex later in the program, suggesting that a longer time spent in the program had contributed to personal growth. The advanced students wrote about clinical application as well and made overt statements about their commitment to social justice. Although students expressed mixed opinions about their social justice training, a greater number of advanced students reported that they thought multicultural and social justice issues were well integrated in the program when compared to the number of student critiques. Though fewer students offered critiques of their training, these responses are important to amplify because some of these concerns are rarely solicited or acknowledged. For example, students of color noted a lack of representation in their faculty, classmates, and curriculum, paired with feelings of marginalization when microaggressions in the classroom went unchecked as well as when instruction centered around the needs of White students.

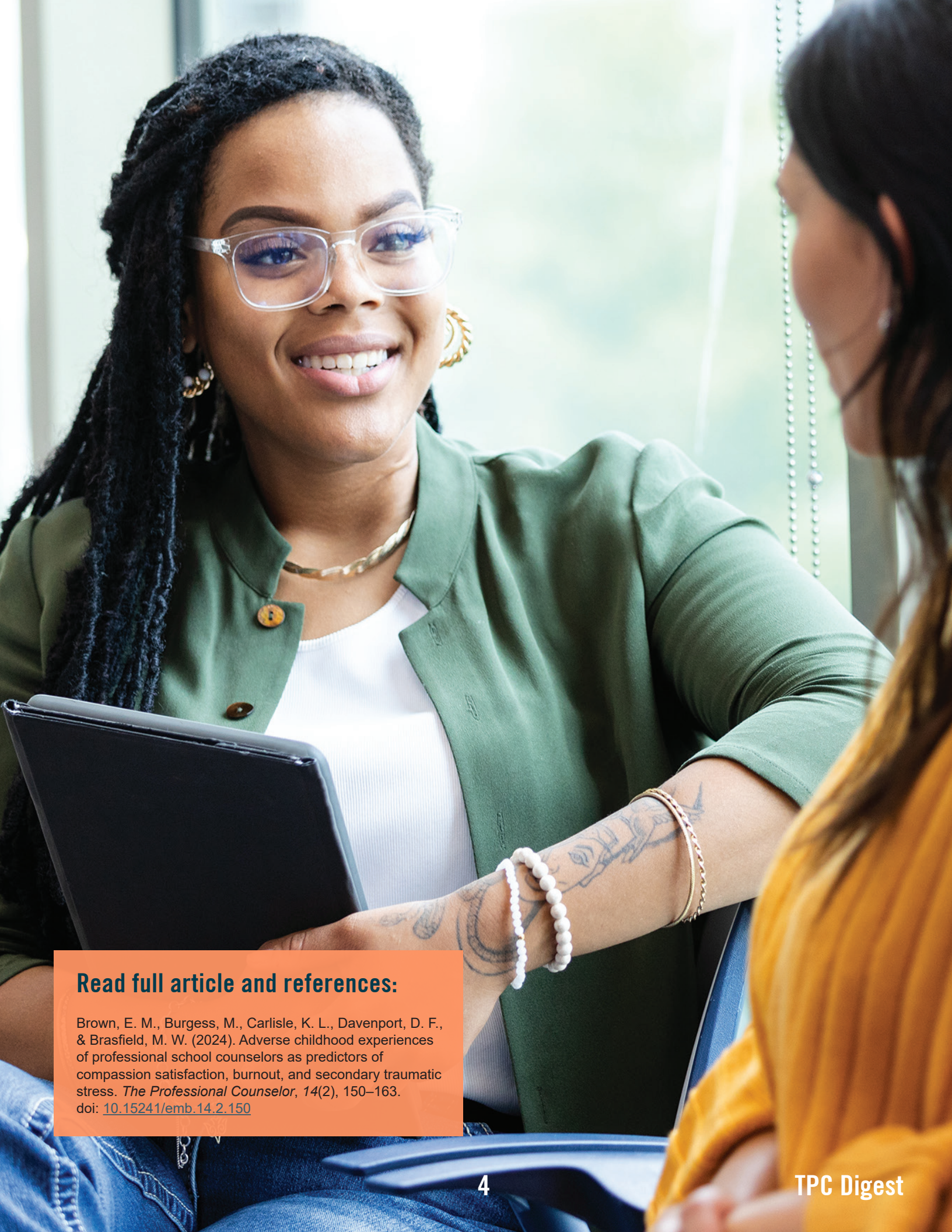
Listening to students' experiences and perceptions of their training offers educators an opportunity to model cultural humility, gain useful feedback, and make necessary program changes. The process of counselor educators humbling themselves and inviting and integrating student feedback is an important step not only in centering social justice in counselor education, but also in better serving students, clients, and communities. This article offers counselor educators a model for how to assess program effectiveness in multicultural and social justice teaching in addition to practical suggestions for improving social justice education.

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### Read full article and references:

Chopra, S. B., Smart, R., Tsong, Y., Mejía, O. L., & Price, E. W. (2024). Centering social justice in counselor education: How student perspectives can help. *The Professional Counselor*, 14(2), 135–149. doi: [10.15241/sbc.14.2.135](https://doi.org/10.15241/sbc.14.2.135)



### Read full article and references:

Brown, E. M., Burgess, M., Carlisle, K. L., Davenport, D. F., & Brasfield, M. W. (2024). Adverse childhood experiences of professional school counselors as predictors of compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress. *The Professional Counselor, 14*(2), 150–163. doi: [10.15241/emb.14.2.150](https://doi.org/10.15241/emb.14.2.150)



# Adverse Childhood Experiences of Professional School Counselors as Predictors of Compassion Satisfaction, Burnout, and Secondary Traumatic Stress

Eric M. Brown, Melanie Burgess, Kristy L. Carlisle, Desmond Franklin Davenport, Michelle W. Brasfield

**S**chool counselors work closely with students and are often the first point of contact regarding traumatic experiences. It is generally understood that exposure to students' pain and trauma may lead to burnout and secondary trauma in professional school counselors (PSCs). Burnout and secondary traumatic stress have been shown to negatively affect the professional functioning of PSCs and have a detrimental effect on both their own lives as well as that of their students. Therefore, we felt it imperative that we have a fuller understanding of what contributes to the burnout and secondary traumatic stress of PSCs.

Several studies have examined structural factors that contribute to school counselor burnout, such as student caseload and number of duties that are not counseling-related. Few, if any, studies have examined personal factors within PSCs' own personal history that may make them more vulnerable to burnout and secondary traumatic stress. In this study we examined the rates of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that PSCs may have encountered in their development.

Adverse childhood experiences, a term coined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, have been correlated with numerous mental and emotional struggles such as depression, anxiety, PTSD symptoms, and suicide. For this reason, ACEs have been considered one of the most significant public health crises of our time. Our goal in this study was to examine whether there is a relationship between ACEs of PSCs and their experience of burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

This study is unique in that it surveyed 240 PSCs to discover their own rates of ACEs and how their ACEs may relate to their tendency toward burnout and secondary traumatic stress. We found that close to half of the PSCs in this study had personal histories of four or more ACEs, which is significantly higher than the general public and passes the threshold for significant risk for both mental and physical illness. Furthermore, the results of this study indicated that PSCs with higher ACEs scores were more likely to suffer from burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

The results of this study do not suggest that the problem of burnout is solely or primarily a result of the personal history of PSCs. Furthermore, it should not draw attention away from the numerous systems-level factors that contribute to burnout, such as high caseloads, but can serve as an indicator of who may be more vulnerable to those systemic factors. School counselors may benefit from identifying their own ACEs and engaging in helpful forms of self-care such as personal therapy, self-advocacy, and seeking administrative support to lessen the emotional workload that contributes to burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

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# Black People's Reasons for Becoming Professional Counselors: A Grounded Theory

Michael D. Hannon, LaShawn M. Adams, Natalie Nieves, Estefanie Ceballo, David Julius Ford, Jr., Linwood G. Vereen

Counseling researchers have published very little about why people choose to become counselors. This is especially true for Black counselors, who, compared to White counselors, are significantly outnumbered in the profession. To this end, our research team sought to answer a critical question using a grounded theory research design: What motivates Black people to become professional counselors? We learned, from a group of 28 Black counselors and counseling students, that there were a range of experiences, influences, and variables that inspired them to join the profession.

To justify our investigation, we drew on past research that has documented how Black counseling students and faculty describe counseling program climates; reported contemporary and historical barriers that continue to exclude Black students from graduate education, which might contribute to a shortage of Black counselors; and examined the upsurge in Black people seeking counseling treatment and preferring to be treated by Black counselors. Our goal was to begin to provide a theoretical grounding to explain Black counselors' motivation to join the profession. We framed our study with concepts from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Theory of Nigrescence for an integrated theoretical framework. CRT posits that racism and White supremacy is embedded in everyday structures and systems and impacts the lived experiences of people of color.

A photograph of two Black men in a professional setting. The man on the left is wearing a light-colored, patterned button-down shirt. The man on the right is wearing a red and grey striped polo shirt. They are both looking towards the right. The man on the right is holding a clipboard and a pen. The background is a bright window with a view of trees and a building.

## Read full article and references:

Hannon, M. D., Adams, L. M., Nieves, N., Ceballo, E., Ford, Jr., D. J., & Vereen, L. G. (2024). Black people's reasons for becoming professional counselors: A grounded theory. *The Professional Counselor*, 14(2), 164–180. doi: [10.15241/mdh.14.2.164](https://doi.org/10.15241/mdh.14.2.164)

Furthermore, we contend that Black people who choose to become professional counselors are further along in their racial identity development, per Nigrescence Theory. Both theories assisted us in more deeply understanding Black people's awareness of the deleterious effect of racism on their lives and the connection Black people make in their decision to join the counseling profession.

By leveraging concepts from these two theories, we discovered the salient reasons for 28 Black people becoming professional counselors. These Black counselors were motivated to join the profession based on their inspiration to challenge cultural mandates (i.e., grounding motivator), to disrupt Black underrepresentation (i.e., secondary motivator), and to live out their personal and professional convictions (i.e., secondary motivator).

The results from this and similar studies can assist the profession to work from an evidence base to develop programs, interventions, and other forms of support to attract a more racially diverse workforce. Actualizing the courage to empirically investigate the reasons Black and other socially, economically, and linguistically diverse people choose to become professional counselors can benefit our preparation programs, our practicing counselors, and our ever-evolving research base.

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# A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselors' Experiences in Personal Therapy

Dax Bevly, Elizabeth A. Prosek

**S**elf-awareness is a fundamental part of the counseling profession. Counselor educators often recommend self-growth experiences such as personal counseling to increase counselor trainees' self-awareness in preparation for professional practice. Counselor self-awareness relates to awareness of the counseling relationship; such awareness may be helpful to client satisfaction and growth. In addition to increasing self-awareness, some counselors may seek personal therapy due to mental health concerns. Compassion fatigue, difficult clinical work, and interpersonal struggles may put counselors at risk for mental health concerns related to occupational and personal stressors.

The psychological needs of counselors coupled with the emphasis on gaining self-awareness highlight the necessity for counselors' personal therapy. Scarce research exists regarding counselors' decision-making processes in seeking personal therapy. The following questions guided our phenomenological inquiry: 1) What contributes to counselors' decisions to seek personal therapy? and 2) How do professional counselors make meaning of their experiences in utilizing personal therapy? We interviewed 13 professional counselors who had seen a professional mental health therapist within the last 3 years and analyzed the data using descriptive phenomenology.

The research team identified six major themes and 11 subthemes. Participants detailed their motivations for starting personal therapy, citing mental health concerns like grief, trauma, and life transitions. They sought therapists based on both practical factors like location and affordability and quality attributes such as credentials and experience. Therapy led to cognitive and emotional growth, reduced distress, and improved emotional regulation. This growth extended to interpersonal relationships, both personal and professional, with improved boundaries and connections. The therapeutic alliance fostered healing through nurturing, normalization, vulnerability, and transference experiences. Despite challenges like financial barriers and stigma, participants generally found therapy beneficial, though some struggled with the dual role of client and counselor.

Based on our findings, we offer several suggestions for mental health professionals who may encounter clients who are professional counselors. Interventions related to goals and focus of treatment, reflective questions, stigma reduction, and policy changes are recommended. For example, participants emphasized the challenge of role adjustment when in a client role; it could be beneficial for clinicians to address this shift in power dynamics within the counseling relationship. Strategies like the Wheel of Wellness Model and self-care interventions can aid counselors in balancing personal and professional concerns. Normalizing stigma around seeking counseling among counselors is crucial; incorporating anti-stigma interventions in training and professional development can help. Additionally, mandating personal therapy postgraduate training, akin to continuing education credits, could reduce stigma and promote counselor wellness. This study underscores the importance of supporting counselors in therapy and advocating for policy changes to enhance their well-being.

In sum, counselors face many challenges in their clinical work, including occupational stressors and the need for self-awareness. The current descriptive phenomenological study serves to provide an understanding of the lived experiences of counselors who utilize personal therapy, including their motives to engage and meaning made while engaged. We offer direct clinical suggestions within the counseling relationship, steps to reduce stigma, and recommendations for facilitating self-care strategies among counselor trainees and professional counselors directly from the voices of counselors who have accessed personal therapy.

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## Read full article and references:

Bevly, D., & Prosek, E. A. (2024). A phenomenological exploration of counselors' experiences in personal therapy. *The Professional Counselor, 14*(2), 181–197. doi: [10.15241/db.14.2.181](https://doi.org/10.15241/db.14.2.181)



# Factorial Invariance of Scores on the Inner Wealth Inventory: A Nationwide Sample of Adults in the United States

Michael T. Kalkbrenner, Stephanie L. Zackery, Yuxuan Zhao

*P*

Professionals can use standardized tests as one way to measure their clients' progress throughout the counseling process. Counselors are encouraged to use screening tools that focus on people's strengths, instead of only measuring how much they're struggling or symptoms of mental health issues. The Inner Wealth Inventory (IWI) is a strengths-based screening tool that measures inner wealth (IW), which is the extent to which test takers are feeling enriched, fulfilled, and inherently valued. The IWI was developed and normed with samples of child welfare professionals. The way screening tools measure what they are supposed to measure can change over time and/or depending on who is being tested. Accordingly, counselors need to check that screening tools give accurate and consistent results, especially when they're used with new groups of people. To this end, the primary aim of the present study was to test the validity of scores on the IWI with a national sample of adults living in the United States. Validity evidence of test scores involves the extent to which tests accurately measure what they were designed to measure.



As a normative sample, U.S. adults comprise a diverse group of people who come from very different walks of life. In fact, there are a number of social, economic, and cultural differences between U.S. adults with different gender identities, ethnoracial identities, help-seeking histories (whether or not someone has attended one or more sessions of counseling), income, and levels of education. In other words, the meaning of IW might differ between U.S. adults with different social, economic, and/or cultural backgrounds. Factorial invariance testing is a statistical method for investigating the extent to which the meaning of test scores remains equal between different subgroups of a larger sample. In this study, we found that the meaning of IW remained the same between U.S. adults with different gender identities, ethnoracial identities, help-seeking histories, income, and levels of education.

Now that scores on the IWI have been normed with a national sample of U.S. adults, counselors can use it as one way to measure their clients' levels of IW. This is an important implication for practice because showing that treatments work is becoming more and more important in many counseling and health care settings. Counselors are expected to demonstrate that their clients are getting better, and the IWI can help them do that. For example, the Nurtured Heart Approach is a comprehensive intervention for increasing IW. Professional counselors can use the IWI to track the extent to which the Nurtured Heart Approach is associated with increases in their clients' IW. More specifically, counselors can administer the IWI to clients before, during, and after treatment and potentially use the results as one way to demonstrate progress.

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## Read full article and references:

Kalkbrenner, M. T., Zackery, S. L., & Zhao, Y. (2024). Factorial invariance of scores on the Inner Wealth Inventory: A nationwide sample of adults in the United States. *The Professional Counselor*, 14(2), 198–211. doi: [10.15241/mtk.14.2.198](https://doi.org/10.15241/mtk.14.2.198)



### Read full article and references:

Irvine, T. J., & Labarta, A. C. (2024). Enhancing counselor trainee preparedness for treating eating disorders: Recommendations for counselor educators. *The Professional Counselor*, 14(2), 212–226. doi: [10.15241/tji.14.2.212](https://doi.org/10.15241/tji.14.2.212)



# Enhancing Counselor Trainee Preparedness for Treating Eating Disorders:

## Recommendations for Counselor Educators

Taylor J. Irvine, Adriana C. Labarta

Eating disorders (EDs) are increasingly prevalent and pose major public health challenges. However, there are significant deficits in how counselor education programs prepare trainees to assess, conceptualize, and treat EDs. As a result, many counselors report feeling incompetent and distressed when working with clients struggling with EDs. This article proposes a conceptual framework, the 3 Cs of ED Education and Training, to enhance counselor trainee preparedness in this area. The 3 Cs are: 1) cultivating trainee self-awareness through practices like reflective journaling and deliberate skill development, 2) capturing contextual and sociocultural factors through centering of culturally responsive theories and approaches, and 3) collaborating with interdisciplinary professionals while strengthening counselors' unique professional identity. Cultivating trainee self-awareness is vital because counselors must examine their own beliefs, assumptions, and emotional responses when treating EDs in order to avoid projecting biases or causing unintentional harm. Reflexive exercises and deliberate practice strategies focused on building specific ED counseling skills can facilitate this self-discovery and competency development process. Given the diversity of ED experiences across cultures, genders, and backgrounds, counselors must also learn to integrate contextual factors and sociocultural theories like intersectionality and relational-cultural therapy. These approaches deepen understanding of how systemic inequities and oppression shape one's relationship to food and body image. Effective ED treatment also requires collaboration across disciplines such as medicine, psychology, and nutrition. Counselor educators should prepare trainees to effectively contribute their unique developmental, prevention-focused perspectives to these interdisciplinary teams while advocating for inclusion in the counseling profession.

The authors provide specific examples of classroom activities and assignments aligned with each of the 3 Cs that counselor educators can incorporate into existing curricula, especially if offering a full course for EDs is not feasible. Potential challenges and future research directions are also discussed. Ultimately, the 3 Cs framework aims to bridge the gap in counselor training on EDs to ensure ethical, culturally competent care for this vulnerable population across treatment settings. We argue this enhanced preparedness is crucial for upholding professional standards and preventing further client harm from a lack of understanding around these complex, life-threatening disorders.

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# The Professional Counselor™

Summer  
2024



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## Digest

Volume 14, Issue 2



The Professional Counselor™



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