

REPORT OF RATIONALE & METHOD

**College Counseling Knowledge-Base:
Comprehensive Database of College Counseling Research Publications
In the College Counseling, Counseling Psychology, College Health,
College Student Development and Professional Counseling Literatures
1998-2017**

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Abstract

College counseling is a well-established professional specialty. As a specialty, the field requires a professional literature that serves as a theory and practice knowledge-base. A potential hurdle is that the specialty spans several overlapping but distinct professional identities – and therefore different literatures. To promote the college counseling knowledge-base, this project provides researchers, practitioners, and students with a major compilation of college counseling journal articles from the college counseling (*Journal of College Counseling*, *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*), counseling psychology (*Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *The Counseling Psychologist*), professional counseling (*Journal of Counseling & Development*, *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*), college health (*Journal of American College Health*), and student development (*Journal of College Student Development*, *NASPA Journal*, *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*) literatures. The compilation covers 1998-2013.



Key Words: College counseling, college psychological services, professional literature

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This project's purpose is to provide a compilation of the college counseling and psychological services knowledge-base comprising five professional literatures: college counseling, counseling psychology, professional counseling, college health, and college student development. Over the past several decades, college counseling and psychological services has established itself as a vital specialty field (Archer & Cooper, 1998; Davis & Humphrey, 2000; Lippincott & Lippincott, 2007).

Background: College Counseling Specialty

College and university counseling and mental health centers are specialized offices providing student services in a very specific institutional context (May, 1988). They support their institution's academic mission by "helping students work through psychological and emotional issues that may affect their academic success and personal development" (Dungy, 2003; p. 345). Likewise, college health centers provide students with public health services, including psychiatric and mental health services, in the context of a college or university institutional community (Reifler, Liptzin, & Fox, 2006). On one hand, much of today's college psychotherapy work takes the form of one-on-one student services such as individual and group counseling, psychological testing and assessment, and emergency services (Davis & Humphrey, 2000; Lippincott & Lippincott, 2007); on the other hand, modern college counseling roles also include prevention, psychoeducation, and developmental intervention, as well as institutional

crisis responses in which “the entire campus environment is the client” (Archer & Cooper, 1998; p. 8; Van Brunt, 2012). Typically, there is a counselor to student ratio of 1:1600 on U. S. campuses (Gallagher, 2012).

The need for services to address traditional college student adjustment and developmental needs, as well as the demand for more intensive mental health services on today’s campuses, is well documented. In fact, based on National Survey of College Counseling Center Directors data, an estimated 2.2 million U. S. college and university students (10.4%) utilized counseling services in a recent year (Gallagher, 2012). At least half of these student clients presented severe psychological problems, including diagnosable mood disorders and suicidality, anxiety disorders and panic, and other concerns – and increasing numbers of clients present impairing concerns such as self-injury or eating disorders, or report impairing events such as sexual assault and or peer violence (AUCCCD, 2012; Gallagher, 2012). Although there is some debate in the college counseling specialty about the specific degree to which the level of student psychopathology has progressively increased, there is agreement that the severity of student concerns has been a least steady over recent years (Swartz, 2006; Jenks Kettman et al., 2007) and that college clients’ needs clearly have become increasingly complex, demanding, and exhaustive of counseling resources (AUCCCD, 2012; Gallagher, 2012; Rudd, 2004). Many of these student clients would be unable or unlikely to remain in, and succeed in college, without the support of mental health services (AUCCCD, 2012; Gallagher, 2012; Rudd, 2006).

Rationale for Building the Database

The database project was conceived based on the perspective that college counseling professionals need access to ongoing research that accurately describes their changing clientele and constituencies, and suggests the comparative benefits of different approaches to meeting

these students' needs (Wampold, 2001) – and on the previously established idea that the type of summary we undertook can assist counseling professionals to “keep pace with the field’s change” and address “key developments in theory, research, and practice” (Walsh, 2008). To our knowledge, very little work has been done to bring together the five literatures of most importance to college counseling professionals, and, in turn, articulate a unifying set of themes, findings, and remaining questions to guide day-to-day counseling practices. We undertook the current research project to begin filling this gap.

As a professional specialty, college counseling requires a theory and research literature than that can serve as a knowledge-base to inform day to day practice. Nidiffer (2002) underscored the importance of establishing an intellectual foundation (generating and researching college student theories) and creating a professional literature (creating a knowledge, research-, and practice-base) for college student development professionals. More specifically, to be effective, college health and mental health professionals require a literature that extends practitioners' knowledge by increasing the field's understanding of which theoretical models seems to explain, and which practices seem to lead to, expected client and student outcomes (Hanna & Puhakka, 1991; Hanna & Ritchie, 1995; Schwitzer, 1997; 2002; 2009). An evidence-based knowledge-base is needed that can help guide practices distinguishing “methods for effective work in a variety of campus roles and institutional relationships” (Schwitzer, 2009; p. 99). Further, college and university counseling centers, health centers, and related offices are required to make critical resource decisions and demonstrate intended student outcomes as part of their planning, funding, and operating process – and as a result the college counseling and psychological services literature also must inform efforts to be accountable, show the effects of interventions, conduct assessments of service outcomes, and demonstrate the essential

contributions college counseling professionals make to their institutions' missions and to student success (Bishop, 2006; Hunt, Watkins, & Eisenberg, 2012; Schwitzer, 1997, 2002; Guinee & Ness, 2000). Calls for critical examinations to inform the college counseling specialty have further increased following the highly visible trauma experiences at Virginia Tech and elsewhere (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007; Van Brunt, 2012).

Multiple Literatures

However, a potential hurdle in this area is that the college mental health specialty spans multiple overlapping but distinct professions – and in turn, encompasses several related but unique literatures. In particular, professionals working in college mental health comprise clinical and counseling psychologists, psychiatrists, professional counselors and clinical social workers, student development specialists, and other identities (Gallagher, 2012). Reflecting this professional diversity, the professional identities of counseling center directors comprise counseling psychologists (38%), clinical psychologists (24%), professional counselors (19%), social workers (8.5%), and other professionals (4%) (Gallagher, 2010). Counseling staff also reflect this blend of professions, although the numbers of professional counselors and clinicians with master's degrees is expanding (Sharkin, 2012; Vespia, 2007). Unfortunately, this can present formidable formative challenge when defining and describing the field's literature, since articles are published in journals from psychology, health, professional counseling, college student development, and other disciplines – and a practical challenge for college counseling center professionals arriving from various disciplines when they attempt to stay professionally current. In response, in this article, we report on our qualitative research effort to examine and analyze the content of the most relevant literatures (over a select ten-year period) in a single, integrated manner. First, we offer background and rationale, and explain the method we used to

select and examine the literatures. Next, we summarize the research we found in each of the individual fields we examined. Then, we summarize the aggregated themes that occurred across the different literatures taken together. Finally, we present limitations and conclusions.

Method and Process for Building the Database

We conducted straightforward reviews of the relevant literatures, collecting and analyzing the contents of a comprehensive group of published articles that informed or dealt with college counseling issues. Previously published research summaries and content analyses (such as in the fields of counseling psychology, counseling, and college student development) served as models to guide our process (Blancher, Buboltz, & Soper, 2010; O'Neil, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Walsh, 2008). Further, our overall approach was informed by contemporary qualitative analytical methods (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2001).

Selection of Professional Fields, Journals, and Time-Frames for Analysis

First, we selected a universe of professional fields which we believed contributed most actively to college counseling. We did this by identifying the professions most highly represented among college and university mental health practitioners. Based on our review of annual surveys (American College Counseling Association, 2012; Gallagher, 2012) and professional organization website information, we identified: college counseling, counseling and clinical psychology, professional counseling, college health, college student development, and clinical social work. All of these fields are highly represented among college and university health and mental health center directors and practitioners. Next, we conducted an initial cursory scan of the literature. On this basis, we eliminated both clinical psychology and clinical social work from our literature review because the journals of these fields published college counseling articles only sparsely. Further, we did not consider auxiliary fields which publish articles

relevant to college students but have only a narrow context that is not closely identified with a broader professional identity (for example, although articles about college students appear in the international eating disorders literature, we did not include the *International Journal of Eating Disorders*). Thus, we defined a target group comprising five fields: (1) college counseling, (2) counseling psychology, (3) professional counseling, (4) college health, and (5) college student development.

Next, to decide on specific journals within each discipline, we used the following criteria: we sought journals that (a) were peer-reviewed, (b) appeared in relevant indices, (c) were publications of a national or international organization defined by a professional identity, and (d) published college counseling articles frequently enough to be of interest. On these bases, some target journals were eliminated from the study: for example, among psychology journals, *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* was eliminated because it publishes college counseling articles relatively infrequently and is not closely associated with the American Psychological Association Counseling Psychology specialty; among student affairs journals, *The Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition* was eliminated because it was not closely affiliated with a professional identity; etc. (We made one exception, namely, for the *NASPA Journal*. Although the *NASPA Journal* met the criteria of being peer-reviewed, indexed, and affiliated with a national professional organization, we discovered during our research that this outlet published college counseling articles sparsely during the time-period we examined; however, since we discovered this later in our analysis, and because the journal is a prominent target publication in the college student services professional arena, we included it.) On this basis, our final group included nine journals from the five professional fields. The target journals and their affiliations are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1**Professional Identities, Affiliations, and Journals Included in the Database.**

Professional Identity	Affiliations	Journals
College Counseling	American College Counseling Association (ACCA)	<i>Journal of College Counseling</i>
	American Association of University and College Counseling Center Directors (AAUCCCD)	<i>Journal of College Student Psychotherapy</i>
Counseling Psychology	American Psychological Association (APA) Society of Counseling Psychology (Division 17)	<i>Journal of Counseling Psychology</i>
		<i>The Counseling Psychologist</i>
Professional Counseling	American Counseling Association (ACA)	<i>Journal of Counseling & Development</i>
		<i>Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling & Development</i>
College Health	American College Health Association	<i>Journal of American College Health</i>
College Student Development	American College Personnel Association (ACPA) Commission on Counseling and Psychological Services (CCAPS)	<i>Journal of College Student Development</i>
	National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)	<i>NASPA Journal/Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice</i>

Finally, we followed 3 publication timeframes within which to work. In our Phase I, we were interested in a large enough sample across time to reflect the field's ongoing development rather than themes of narrow momentary interest, but a small enough sample to be reasonably manageable; we settled on a ten-year review. We were interested in selecting a ten-year timeframe that was relatively current, but also one which could be delineated on some rational basis. We selected the time-frame 1998-2008. This time-frame extends from (a) the publication of Archer and Cooper's (1998) *Counseling and mental health services on campus*, which essentially laid out the modern college counseling field identity, to (b) the beginning of the post-Virginia Tech era, which we believed was likely to have ushered in a substantive transition in college counseling and therefore would be a good stopping point. The time-frame allowed us to meet our goals of reviewing literature from a rationally selected span of ten years. In our Phases II & III, we updated the database collections twice by reviewing articles from 2009-2013 and 2014-2017 respectively (nearly to the present moment, allowing for the time-lag needed to complete our work).

Data Analysis and Credibility

The journal articles' contents and topics provided data for analysis. The data were analyzed using constant comparative methodology (Glasser & Straus, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The constant comparative method is an inductive process for forming a categorical model to describe the data collected in a study. The method "stimulates thought that leads to both descriptive and explanatory categories" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; p. 34). The analysis moves in a continuously developing process from examining individual units of information to constructing a descriptive model.

The data were organized and reorganized over a series of steps, into progressively fewer but more meaningful categories to construct a model that was a progressively better fit with the situation described, i.e., the journals' contents (Glasser & Straus, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, to ensure the reliability of the data, each article was saved and coded. Two reviewers independently reviewed the data and resolved any record-keeping discrepancies. In the second step, a team of two researchers who were familiar with college counseling performed a coding task that involved assigning articles to categories based on similarity. Third, a team consisting of a researcher from the previous step and one new researcher, completed additional rounds of sorting by examining relationships among the categories generated in the first coding step and grouping different categories together into a smaller number of more meaningful, key categories. When continued review produced no new descriptive value, categories were defined to be sufficiently well-represented or saturated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility in qualitative research is equivalent to internal validity in empirical research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There is the potential for high internal validity with qualitative methods when the analyses proceed directly from the data. Several strategies were used in the present project to increase credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hays & Singh, 2012). First, the researchers were sufficiently familiar with the college counseling profession to conduct the study and the analysis. This is referred to as prolonged engagement. The lead researchers included a past editor of a national college counseling journal, and a past senior administrator who was a former Vice President of Student Affairs who worked closely and extensively with college counseling and health centers. The assistant researchers were knowledgeable graduate students in counseling and higher education with psychology backgrounds. Based on their familiarity, the researchers were able to make persistent observations; that is, they were able to sort out themes

in an increasingly incisive manner. Next, a modified type of member check was used. Member-checking involves reviewing the data with the respondents who provided it; in this study, the data and themes were presented at a national convention program for an audience of college counseling professionals and feedback was solicited; then, the analysis was posted on a website and the program audience and their colleagues were invited to perform additional review and provide additional feedback. Finally, a peer debriefing strategy was used. Peer debriefing is the use of multiple researchers to analyze the data to produce analyses that are relatively free of individual researcher bias.

Products

College counseling professionals can find 2 products associated with the database: First, a major comprehensive compilation of all articles collected from all 5 literatures over both phases of the study is provided with annotated bibliography and references. Second, for each separate literature (college counseling, counseling psychology, etc.), a disaggregated compilation which includes annotated bibliographies organized by themes (using constant comparative analyses) and references appear. Readers can access and search the major comprehensive compilation; or search individual literatures (by phase and themes).

Limitations, Future Steps and Conclusion

This is of course a limited ongoing project. To our knowledge, this is the first report organizing and examining the primary literatures contributing to the college counseling and psychological services knowledge-base. As such, it should be viewed as a preliminary effort. As with any examination of this type, the analytic decisions made must be rationally supported. Naturally, other researchers might make different decisions when defining the relevant professions or selecting the relevant journals. They might use different criteria to decide which

articles from the universe of affiliated journal articles fit the college counseling category. Differing choices about an article's topic and the theme in which it fits could be made: for example, when an article addressed a presenting concern exclusively in the context of a specialized population, a decision is needed as to where to place the article (does an article on the counseling needs of Latina/o students belong with presenting concerns or specialized populations?). In the college counseling literature, our sub-theme, gender and ethnicity, combined these 2 forms of individual difference because so many studies combined them (examining, for instance, the experiences of African American women or Asian men). In each of these cases, our approach was to be as consistent as possible following predetermined criteria, and to rely on peer debriefing and then member checking among a national audience to enhance credibility.

In our Phase I, we investigated the rationally selected timespan 1998-2008, a period beginning with publication of Archer & Cooper's (1998) counseling and mental health handbook, and ending with the Virginia Tech violence. Then, as a follow-up, we investigated in our Phases II & III the trends in the literature from the post-Virginia Tech period to the present (stopping with 2017 to allow for the time-lag to complete the work).

Ideally, in the future, the type of literature summary we attempted should become a regular mechanism by which college psychotherapy professionals periodically self-reflect. It also would be valuable for future research to micro-analyze and critique the literature for method or other limitations (use of convenience samples, report of effect sizes, balance of empirical and other articles, etc.), since these were beyond the scope of our project.

Taken together, college and university counseling and psychotherapy professionals have a robust, informative set of literatures on which to rely. The college counseling literature itself

seems to take the lead; is strongly supported by the counseling psychology, professional counseling, and college health literatures; and is further augmented in important ways by the *Journal of College Student Development*. These professional literatures appear to be successful partners establishing a theory-to-practice foundation, as is needed for day-to-day college counseling work (Nidiffer, 2002; Schwitzer, 2002; 2009). Likewise, the topical areas which emerged are a close fit with the field's professional interests represented in various college counseling texts and therefore should have day-to-day implications for practice [Archer & Cooper, 1998; Davis & Humphrey, 2000; Lippincott & Lippincott, 2007)]. With the college counseling literature taking the lead, the knowledge-base needed for evidence-based and best practices seems well-established, which should enhance college counselors' work supporting clients and other students and, in turn, their institution's missions (Schwitzer, 2002; 2009; Sharkin, 2009).



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