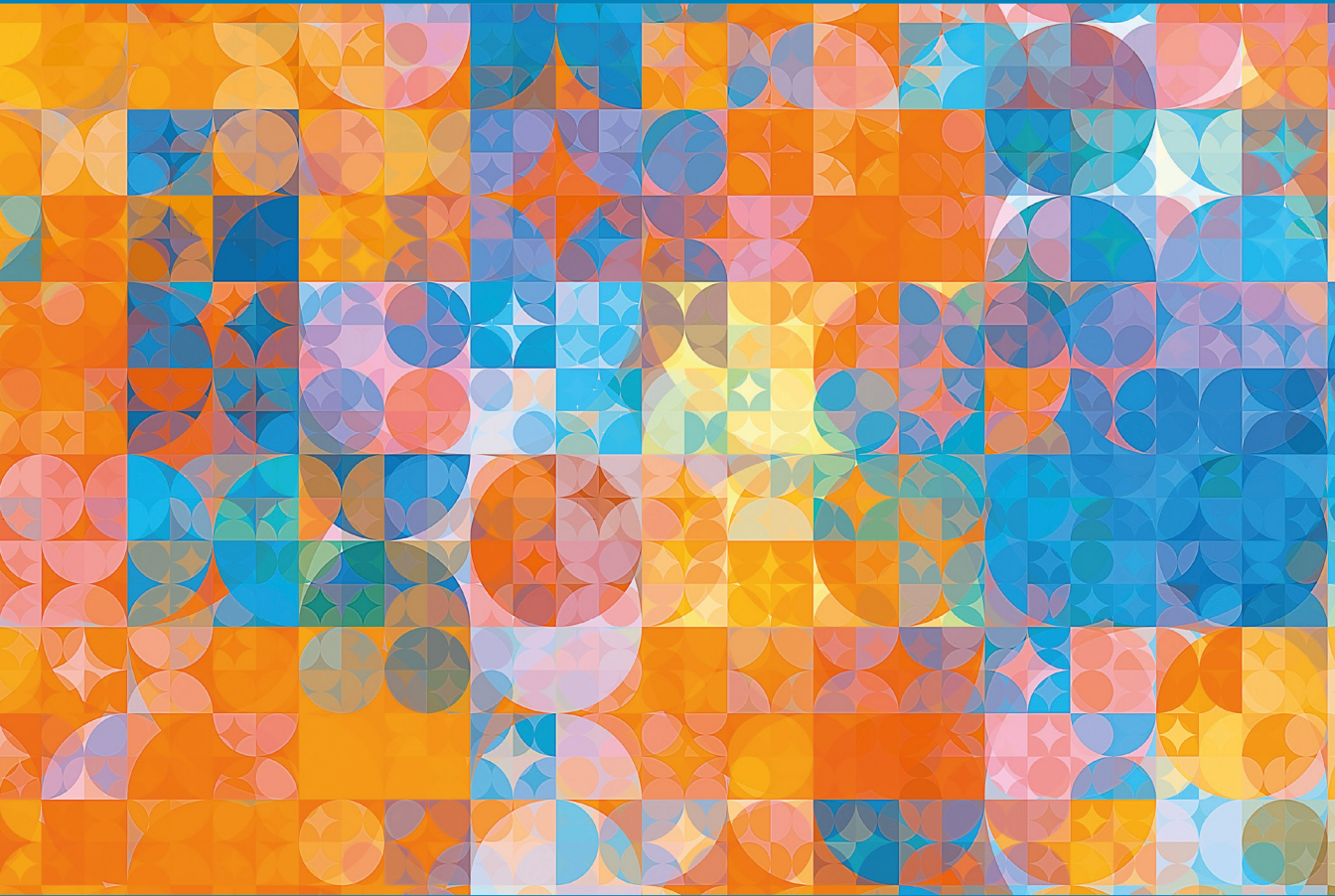


Reimagining Research

Engaging Data, Research, and Program Evaluation in Social Justice Counseling



Edited by Trevor J. Buser and Sandy Gibson



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ROUTLEDGE

"This is a refreshing text that stares the diversity dearth and disparity in counseling research in the face. Our organization is pleased to see a research text that effectively addresses the rapidly advancing diversity of society in educating this current generation of upcoming counselors."

Tamara F. N. Ferebee, *MEd, LPC, ACS, co-founder, National Association of Black Counselors, Inc.*

"This book is one of a kind! Finally, a research textbook that centers social justice, is user-friendly, and ensures that *every* chapter is relevant to master's-level practicing counselors. The experiential nature of the book brings the material to life. I recommend it most highly!"

Dr. Emmanuel Ahia, *director, MA in clinical mental health counseling, Rider University*



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Reimagining Research

Reimagining Research centers antiracist research practices and showcases real-world research in counseling practice. The book focuses on the research competencies that matter most to counselors, with each chapter co-authored by practicing counselors and counselor educators. Each chapter reflects diversity in authorship and opens with a “potential for practice” case study that illustrates a research-related challenge in the practice of counseling. Online resources—including a focus group interview, sample transcripts of qualitative interviews, video demonstrations of statistical techniques, and other documents used in research processes—present these “potentials for practice” in experiential ways. Chapters close with attention to resources that are readily available for counselors who want to implement these practices, such as evidence-based practice guidelines, open-access journals, and open-access statistical tools.

Trevor J. Buser is an associate dean at Naropa University and licensed professional counselor. He is past president of the International Association of Addictions and Offender Counselors and the former editor of the *Journal of Addictions and Offender Counseling*.

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Reimagining Research

*Engaging Data, Research,
and Program Evaluation in Social
Justice Counseling*

Edited by
Trevor J. Buser
Sandy Gibson

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Foreword

As I was preparing to write this foreword, I explored the chapters purposed for this book, as it was my intent to make sure that I not only understood the material but that I could literally embrace the content herein and the potential impact it would have on our clients, their varying intersectionalities, and the counseling communities in which we serve. I was struck by one of the statements made in a chapter that seemed to speak straight into the issue at hand; it was a challenge of sorts when it comes to research and the influences on individuals who are often left voiceless and marginalized in our society. The passage clearly spoke to the fact that most lines of inquiry “lacked an emphasis on the importance of considering diversity and inclusion in the research process.” This line struck me not because I knew this sentiment to be true, but because it spoke to a larger problem that exists when the dominant culture either ignores or blatantly leaves blank the life experiences of the marginalized when it comes to utilizing data to spin a narrative. There is a danger when the spun story is not inclusive. Perhaps there is an intentionality hidden in there somewhere, somewhere behind this pointed non-inclusive research, conceivably there is a need to further divide us and leave the gaping holes, wounds, unattended. Sadly, all of this points to the fact that there is much work left to be done. In this work, we must be intentionally and unapologetically antiracist and earnestly dismantle hierarchical systems of power that deny us all our humanity and the inherent right to be a part of the equation.

Reimagining Research: Engaging Data, Research, and Program Evaluation in Social Justice Counseling opens the door to evidenced-based facts and a reality rarely seen in textbooks. In a day and age when books are being shamelessly and publicly removed off shelves and taken out of the hands of willing learners who seek knowledge and embrace the honesty that is written on the pages that follow, we see editors Dr. Trevor Buser and Dr. Sandy Gibson and a collection of unapologetic authors who are serving truth to power. While focusing on research, program evaluation, and intentionally providing relevant resources, the jewel of this book lies within its earnest commitment to advocating for the integration of social justice and antiracist research into all realms of our counseling practices, something the reader will recognize immediately throughout each and every chapter.

The collaborative nature of the textbook espouses practicing counselors and counselor educators into a writing partnership that brings their

expertise together and operationalizes the material from a whole picture perspective. The book highlights how the teaching of research has often missed the mark, unfortunately, and provides ways that will ensure that readers honor all voices and that they are included in the equation, unbiasedly, and that the findings in return help to heal and make a difference in our world. The 13 chapters bring to light pertinent information designed to enhance classroom instruction and learning with the sole intent of helping students and practitioners see and understand the value of actively exploring the significant impact that research, data, and program evaluation has on the clients and communities that we serve.

Another exciting supplement to this book is the integration of experiential components into the educational environment. Providing the opportunity for students to actually participate in hands-on experiences with tangible materials is a huge advantage to learning; especially for students who learn differently and are often left out when it comes to meeting their needs academically. The experiential aspect makes the material accessible to all and makes the learning more palatable.

I believe the intent behind *Reimagining Research: Engaging Data, Research, and Program Evaluation in Social Justice Counseling* is pure. Those reading what authors have shared here will be able to apply the materials in ways that will not only enhance their investigative capabilities, but will also provide tools, resources, and other impactful avenues of exploration that will impact how we conduct inclusive research practices moving forward and improve the lives of our clients and the communities in which they live. #ShakeItUp #TapSomeoneIn These are hashtags I used throughout my year as president of ACA and will continue to utilize in the future. As an antiracist, it is my belief that we must dismantle systems that oppress, and we do this by being intentional, shaking things up, and disrupting the status quo, and by tapping individuals into leadership, research, and their destiny. This book is a roadmap for researchers and practitioners seeking to make a difference, it provides evidenced-based concepts that will significantly change how we ethically and morally utilize research that embraces the change we desperately need to see in the world.

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Throughout this book project, we were sustained by several wells of motivation. The first was intangible, in the form of an idea: we both felt the responsibility and the importance of developing a book that was much needed in our field—a research textbook that centered multicultural and social justice counseling competencies. The other wells took the form of people. We are full of gratitude to the co-author teams who generated the chapters, a mix of counselors, scholars, and counselor educators. What a blend of talent, passion, knowledge, counseling expertise, and commitment to antiracism and anti-oppression! We are genuinely inspired by these individuals and the writing they have completed in this book.

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Trevor Buser and Sandy Gibson



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Introduction to Research

Chenelle A. Jones, Sandy Gibson, and Trevor Buser

Introduction

Welcome, welcome to the world of research! Those questions often asked by new counselors, such as *How will I know what to do?*, *What is best practice in this situation?*, and *How will I know if I am helping?*, are addressed in THIS CLASS! We won't actually provide you with the answers for every possible clinical scenario, but after completing this book, you will be empowered with skills needed to locate guidance on each of these questions.

This is a practical text, specifically developed for counselors who plan to use research to guide their clinical work. It is NOT a text for doctoral students who plan to do extensive and rigorous research studies. The aim of this book is to provide a comprehensive introduction to research for any student in a master's degree in counseling program, including school counseling, clinical mental health counseling, rehabilitation counseling, marriage, couple, and family counseling, career counseling, college counseling, and student affairs counseling.

There are some unique aspects to this book on research. As the primary accents are on pragmatism and relevance to the work of counselors, each chapter is co-authored by a practicing counselor and a counselor educator who identifies as a researcher. These practicing counselors give us a "gut-check" on the content. They hold us accountable for ensuring that what is written here makes a real impact on the lives of clients. This collaborative authorship also animates the research process with counseling-related values. Counselors DO use research in their practice, and you will see many real-life examples of this work in each chapter. In this collaboration, practitioners maintain an equal voice in chapter content, including decisions about its readability, relevance, and applicability to the field, effectively building the bridge between researchers and counselors. For example, each chapter opens with a "potential for practice" section authored by a practicing counselor who illustrates the practical use of that

specific method of research in their work, often describing a clinical difficulty in detail and the process of resolution. These case examples will show you that research skills are highly relevant to the delivery of counseling. Throughout the text, you will also learn about open-source/low-cost materials, so that you can fill your toolkit with resources that won't be going away at graduation. Yes, you will really use your research skills in clinical practice!

For example, below is a vignette from Kate Coppola, MA, Director of Career Advising and Exploration Center for Career Development at Princeton University. Take a look at how she describes the use of research for program evaluation:

Our university career counseling team noticed that most students didn't attend our 90-minute career exploration workshops offered to all undergraduates. We discussed potential reasons for this—perhaps it seemed daunting to start exploring career possibilities or students didn't think they had time to pause and reflect. To learn more, we collected feedback from about 80 students who attended a workshop and also measured changes in their self-knowledge and confidence before and after the session. Additionally, we conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews with 12 students to learn more about their experiences in both the workshop and a follow-up career counseling appointment. Combining this quantitative and qualitative data resulted in three key findings: First, although some of our small group workshop exercises promoted active learning, others were less clear and actionable. Second, students who made the most progress attended both the workshop and the follow-up career counseling appointment within two weeks, rather than waiting longer to reflect. Last, most students preferred to reflect with a small group of peers they knew well or individually with a career counselor, rather than with students who happened to be sitting at their table during the session. We applied our learning by modifying workshop activities based on student feedback, reserving follow-up career exploration appointments for workshop attendees to maximize continuity, and developing two new events: a full-day exploration event for sophomores during winter break and a short-term reflection group for first-generation college students. Our team continues using research methods to refine our program offerings and best meet the needs of our students.

In this text, we strive to strike a tone that is clear, informal, and user friendly, rather than dense, formal, and complex. You are not expected to be expert researchers. This text is solely intended for students who plan to be practitioners. In the counseling field, you will frequently hear the phrase *evidence-based practice* (EBP) and the importance of using EBP to guide clinical work. This is why we are here: to be practicing counselors! Let's focus on that first word for a minute: *evidence*. We want to have confidence that a specific technique, theory, or model is likely to help our client. This text is intended to introduce you to the world of evidence review and critique, as well as the very basics of building your own evidence.

Having spent over two decades teaching research methods to counselors in training, we've learned that often students do not perceive this to be a clinical course, but it is! Everything you learn in all of your other classes connects with research. That is how evidence is established to verify and put forward what you learn throughout your time in the counselor education program. We want you to be able to conduct research when needed to help your clients, understand and critique the research of others, assess the needs of those you serve, and evaluate your own practice or the needs of your community. Ultimately, we all want to know if we are effectively helping our clients.

Here is an example of a marriage and family counselor, Katie Onitiri, MA, LCADC, LMFT, employing research skillfully to understand the needs of her clients:

In my private practice, I work with families, couples, and individuals. While working with my clients I noticed an increase in relapse after years of sobriety; parents reporting increased anxiety and children who presented depressed or anxious since the COVID-19 pandemic. I wanted to properly capture my populations' challenges so I could address their needs and develop a program for families in the community. I decided to collect data by completing a chart audit and creating a list that indicated the presenting problem for clients since July 2020. The most frequent presenting issues included substance use, depression, and anxiety. The complaints were noted from parents, couples, schools, children, and individuals, with clear indications that COVID-19 was affecting the health and functioning of the family. This prompted me to read new research on COVID-19's impact on mental health, which led me to implement new mindfulness interventions in treatment plans. I also created a virtual parenting support group for a low socioeconomic housing community, with a goal of learning healthy coping skills for parenting during the pandemic. This new program was implemented as a prevention group.

Let's reimagine "research and statistics" and reframe them as "actions and effectiveness." As counselors, we take actions with our clients to help improve their wellness (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014, Section C.7.a.), and it is important to them and to us that our work is helpful—that we collectively make a difference (effectiveness). If I ask if you want to know if you were helpful, I hope you will say yes! Making assumptions about—rather than rigorously studying—the needs of our clients and their associated systems (families, schools, communities), or about the effectiveness of our interventions, is inconsistent with our code of ethics (ACA, 2014, Section C.2.d.) and opens the door for our own biases to play a role in decision making.

Whether new or seasoned in the profession, counselors often ask, *What should I do with this client—or this group of clients?* Let's look at an example from Leisy Valentina Ezra, MA, LAC, NCC, who was asking a similar question. Leisy Valentina is a practicing school counselor at Christina Siex Academy, serving children and families from Trenton, New Jersey. Listen to the way that research guides Leisy Valentina's practice:

As a helping professional, I constantly try to keep up with best practices and incorporate research-based interventions relevant to the rapidly changing world we live in. Sometimes I feel like I am constantly searching for something that I know should exist, but I am somehow unable to find it. One challenge that I face in my field is aligning parent expectations between households of "primary parent," parent who has full custody, and "secondary parent," parent who only has visitation rights. In my efforts to support the specific population I serve, children from single-parent households, I am often reviewing research findings on the best strategies to engage both parents and address any barriers or limitations that are getting in the way of establishing consistency between both households in support of the goals established in counseling. I am grateful for knowing the value of reliable and valid research approaches to incorporate best practices that have assisted me while I support the community I serve.

Although the development of skills required to address this question, *"What should I do?,"* will occur synergistically throughout your graduate program education, the roots of that answer are established here. Research is empowering, it offers us direction, validates (or not) our interventions, and reveals outcomes that we can use to guide and further develop our practice. Research informs our work with larger systems such as families, schools, agencies, and even entire communities. Let's take a moment and reflect on how many individuals can be affected by system-level research.

Take a look at how Corrine Rutt, MA, a school counselor, made use of research methods as she began this new role:

I began my career as the sole school counselor in an elementary school located in a town that was almost completely foreign to me. Questions swam through my head: What are the unique needs of this school and this population of students? How can I support our teachers? What do they expect my role to be? How does that compare with my principal's expectations and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) model? What should my priorities be this year and for the next five years? Where do I even begin? By administering a needs assessment survey to the school staff, I quickly gathered information from a variety of sources and obtained answers to these questions; and questions I had not even imagined to ask. Themes emerged from the qualitative data: (a) The school lacked common language about student behavior expectations, (b) teachers needed support to address disruptive student behavior, and (c) they wanted me to lead monthly classroom lessons. Overwhelmingly, teachers reported that students needed support in persevering through challenges. I also learned that because I was the fifth school counselor to serve in the school in recent history, I would need to make establishing trust among students and staff a priority and that I would need to create a comprehensive school counseling program almost from scratch. With this information in hand, I created a plan that included monthly classroom lessons—one of which was about perseverance—and began building trust through open communication and targeted response to the needs identified through the survey.

The outcomes of this very important research created system-level change that directly affected students and teachers and provided Corrine with information—real evidence—to guide her work. You will learn more about conducting needs assessment studies in this book.

Kaplan and Gladding (2011) suggested in their *Vision for the future of counseling* that expansion of research in counseling is necessary to improve the public perception of counselors, a position clearly supported by CACREP's mandate (CACREP, 2016) and state licensure laws requiring that counseling students be prepared with research knowledge and skills. It is through the evaluation and publication of new models and techniques that we build evidence for practice. But if we counselors do not produce our own research, we become reliant on other professions and their values to guide our work. It is our hope that through your work in this course and with this text, you will grow confidence in your own ability to conduct

research and build our counseling professional identity. You will offer new evidence that comes from within our discipline.

Another imperative and unusual aspect of this book on research is the intention to center social justice and multicultural counseling. Too often, in the United States and globally, participant enrollment in research has not reflected the demographic composition of the general population, those affected by the health conditions being studied, or those for whom the investigational outcomes are intended. Racial and ethnic minorities and the young and elderly, among others, are consistently underrepresented. This text is dedicated to helping you to read research with awareness of this history, allowing you to review and determine if research is led by best practices of social justice. If the design of a study is not inclusive by nature and we fail to acknowledge and confront this, even putting it forward as best practice (Lipscomb, 2021), we perpetuate the problem. Although we do have a chapter specifically dedicated to diversity and inclusion in research, every chapter in this text integrates antiracist and anti-oppressive accountability for practices in research and addresses systemic inequalities that may be operating. Throughout the book, our contributing authors put forward a commitment to the inclusion of understudied and underserved groups. In [Chapter 12](#) of this text, you will learn precisely how to apply this critical awareness in evaluating the research of others.

Let's hear now from Dixita Malatesta, MA, learning specialist, who works in the field of rehabilitation counseling. She talks about her utilization of research to advocate for the needs of students with disabilities:

As the learning specialist for the Accessibility Resource Center at The College of New Jersey, I work with students who want to have an extra layer of support as they embark on their college experience. In this role, I work with students who want to hone the necessary skills, such as executive functioning, to be successful in college. Much of this work relates to the domain of rehabilitation counseling, although my role is not only specific to this domain. One challenging situation that arose recently was how to support students in the program when there was a complete shift from learning in the classroom to learning in a virtual classroom, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation was addressed by collecting data and doing a needs assessment of the students. Through the survey I developed, I learned that students were challenged by asynchronous learning. After evaluating the data related to the students' concerns, I concluded that students needed more opportunities for engagement in the learning process. I also turned to literature regarding universal design for learning and

support for executive functioning in an online environment. I reviewed the appropriate professional literature and placed these findings in conversation with the results of my needs assessment. On the basis of these steps, I established opportunities for students to interact with their peers in an online common space. In this space, students are now able to pose questions and receive feedback about course content, learning strategies, and course processes, so every student can benefit and model executive functioning strategies for others.

What a remarkable account of blending research activities to empower students and open new structures and opportunities for resourcing students! It is a reminder that we must use our positional power for empowering others. Let's face it, historically, there are substantial violations of human rights in our social research practices in the US, and it is important for you to be aware of these injustices and the distrust that may arise, as a result of the harms caused. You will learn more about this history in [Chapter 3](#), but the entire book integrates counseling professional codes of ethics, the multicultural and social justice competencies (Ratts et al., 2016), an awareness of the history of racist research practices, and the promotion of best practices in engaging in antiracist research to guide your work.

This will help you to answer questions such as: *“Do my clinical approaches and practices make worse historical vulnerabilities of marginalized and oppressed people or create new ones?”* and *“How can I intentionally disrupt, dismantle, and offset the vulnerabilities that have been and continue to be present in the clinical practice work that I do?”* Counselors as researchers are persons of privilege who, through their research and interpretation, have a degree of power over the story of the other. Counselors have the power to select what gets perpetuated and told. This is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly and should be deeply filtered through our core values as counselors. This is also where we must engage by directly identifying racist and discriminatory practices, policies, and behaviors (overt and covert), in order to dismantle them and ensure that discrimination, marginalization, and exploitation within service delivery are not options. This includes reviewing the research of others through this same lens.

In this next section, Chenelle A. Jones, PhD, provides an in-depth reflection on the intersection of research with themes of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Inclusion Matters in Research

Contemporary issues in our society have left many people feeling exhausted. Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic paired with natural