

Understanding the Call of Social Justice Advocacy: A Phenomenological Study of High School Counselors

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Abstract

Due to a growing diversified society, and the specific needs of students who are considered marginalized, school counselors are identified as crucial personnel to serve as social justice advocates to promote educational equity for all students. Despite this calling, there is limited research on school counselors' understanding of social justice advocacy and their expected role. Thus, this article highlights research that provided practicing high school counselors the opportunity to share their views on this phenomenon.

Keywords: advocacy, school counselors, knowledge, perceptions, competency

Over the past 30 years, the demographic characteristics of public schools in the United States have shifted. The latest statistics from the U.S. Department of Education reveal that between 2000 and 2017, the percentage of U.S. school-age children who were White decreased from 62 to 51 percent, and the rate who were Black also reduced from 15 to 14 percent

(de Brey et al., 2019). In contrast, the percentages of school-age children from other racial/ethnic groups increased: Hispanic children, from 16 to 25 percent; Asian children, from 3 to 5 percent; and children of two or more races, from 2 to 4 percent (de Brey et al., 2019). However, amid this increasingly diverse population within American public schools, there continue to be disparities regarding socioeconomic status, academic achievement, and student behaviors. In 2016, the percentage of children under the age of 18 in families living in poverty was higher for Black children than Hispanic children, and the rates for both of these groups were higher than for White and Asian children (de Brey et al., 2019). Interestingly "the academic achievement of students from diverse backgrounds also reflects "an education system that remains unequal" (Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015, p.167). Asian and White students continue to represent a higher percentage of individuals earning credits in calculus and Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate (AP/IB) courses. In contrast,

Black and Hispanic students' rate remains the lowest (de Brey et al., 2019). Likewise, student behavior is another area that still reflects some disparity. Although the percentage of students retained in a grade decreased from 3.1 to 1.9 percent between 2000 and 2016, in 2013–14, a higher rate of Black students than of students from any other racial/ethnic group received an out-of-school suspension (de Brey et al., 2019). Thus, as our schools continue to be "challenged by changing demographics and characterized by blatant inequality and failure" (Walker, 2006), it is evident that social justice advocacy must exist to create a fair and equitable environment for all students.

Social Justice Advocacy and School Counselors

Social justice, as defined by Bell (2007), "is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (p.1). The term includes "all people regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, class, disability, age, language, religion, and region" (Jun 2010, p.324). This notion of social justice advocacy encompasses counselors going beyond the traditional method of providing only direct services to clients to offering auxiliary functions, which include involving outside organizations that influence their individual lives (Kiselica and Robinson, 2001). Thus, Field and Baker (2004) deemed that school counselors must go beyond the four walls of their office and obtain resources and interventions which will allow them to advocate for not only individual students but also student groups and student issues. For over a decade, the authors researching this topic have provided claims regarding the importance of school counselors serving as social justice advocates.

According to Paisley and Hayes (2003), school counselors are the ideal persons to serve as social justice advocates and eliminate barriers to academic success because of their school-wide perspective. Walker (2006) indicated that school counselors should be considered a necessary asset to the new inclusive team of closing the achievement gap because of their influence on all members of the school community. Ratts, DeKruyf, and Chen-Hayes (2007) postulated that "social justice advocacy is a key task of the 21st-century professional school counselor" (p.90). Correspondingly, Bemak and Chung (2008) indicated that the transformation of a school counselor's role to advocacy is a crucial element in reducing the achievement gap. Bemak and Chung (2008) believe that school counselors "are well-positioned to address this complex problem given their unique position in the schools and the professional training they receive in becoming multicultural/social justice advocates and organizational change agents" (p. 10).

Furthermore, organizations such as the Education Trust's National Center for Transforming School Counseling (NCTSC), the Council for Accreditation of Counseling Related Educational Programs (CACREP), and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) all worked extensively on social justice mandates and initiatives. These mandates and initiatives connected school counseling programs to the education reform of addressing equities and closing achievement gaps (Paisley & Hayes, 2003; Wilkerson & Eschbach, 2009). For example, in 1996, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest, along with the Education Trust, implemented an initiative, the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI). The TSCI was designed

to encourage counselor educators to change their training and create programs to prepare counselors-in-training to serve as advocates and academic advisors. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP, 2009] also revised its standards for the education of all counselors but placed particular emphasis on the school counseling area. The revisions highlighted necessary skills for school counselors such as program development, implementation and evaluation, counseling and guidance, and consultation. The language of these amended standards coincided with the qualifications specified in the TSCI (Paisley & Hayes, 2003). Likewise, ASCA designed school counselor competencies to aid school counseling programs in developing curricula that focused on the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes for creating a comprehensive school counseling program for meeting the needs of all students (Wilkerson & Eschbach, 2009).

Consequently, the topics of social justice advocacy and school counseling have yielded a plethora of research. Parikh, Post, and Flowers (2011) explored the relationship between school counselors' political and religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, and race of school counselors and their attitudes about social justice advocacy. The above-listed variables were determined to either encourage or impede school counselors' social justice advocacy practice. Hartline and Cobia (2012) took a look at closing the achievement gap summary results' reports of school counselors who received training on the ASCA National Model. The results indicated that school counselors were able to identify gaps and created interventions but required more training in the areas of evaluation and reporting.

Feldwisch and Whiston (2015) investigated school counselors' commitment to social justice advocacy. These authors conducted a quantitative study with a focus on school counselors who self-reported as being social justice advocates. The results revealed that school counselors' validation of their social justice efforts correlated with their scores on the Advocacy Competencies Self-Assessment. The results also indicated that school counselors working in identified comprehensive school counseling programs scored higher than those school counselors who did not. Cook, Brodsky, Gracia, and Morizio (2019) concentrated on the training outcomes of school counselors-in-training self-development as well as the relationship between the school counselors-in-training and the students they worked with during their practicum experience. The findings exposed beneficial results for both the school counselor trainees and their students. The students reported an increase in academic self-efficacy. At the same time, the school counselor-in-training conveyed a better understanding of their own biases and privileges, and an increased comfort level in working with diverse students. Lastly, Boyland et al. (2019), surveyed the current practices of preparation programs of school counselors and principals to allow for a better understanding of each role and to foster collaboration between school counselors and administrators. Although these various authors stressed the need for school counselors to serve as social justice advocates, adhering to this call can be a difficult task. The challenge often is a result of school-based and district leaders' lack of awareness regarding school counselors' ability to assist in schools' effort to improve academic achievement and promote opportunity and equity.

Purpose

There are a number of authors expressing the importance of school counselors serving as social justice advocates to address diversity and societal inequities in schools (Martin, 2002; Paisley & Hayes, 2003; Parikh et al., 2011; Ratts et al., 2007; Trusty & Brown, 2005). Research indicates that because school counselors have a school-wide perspective, they are the ideal school personnel to determine barriers that interfere with academic success for all students. However, despite the emphasis placed on school counselors in this area, challenges also exist. Wilkerson and Eschbach (2009) pointed out that school counselors are deficient in several skills needed to close the achievement gap, such as using data to create programs, effectively monitoring student progress, and promoting school-wide change. While Evans, Zambrano, Cook, Moyer, and Duffey (2011) cited entry-level competencies, the school counselor's role, school climate, and community support and resources as barriers preventing school counselors from adhering to the call of social justice advocacy. Limited research has taken place on obtaining practicing school counselors' understanding of social justice advocacy and their beliefs regarding their skills in carrying out this role. Thus, this qualitative study used a phenomenological methodology to examine the knowledge and opinions of high school counselors. The questions guiding this research were: 1) What are high school counselors' understanding of their role in social justice advocacy? and, 2) Do high school counselors believe they have the necessary skills to serve as social justice advocates? School counselors' discussions about their interpretation of this role and perceptions of their abilities concerning social justice

advocacy will allow their input into this phenomenon. Additionally, this study will provide information on how to equip school counselors-in-training as well as practicing school counselors with the tools they need to create and implement programs to address the needs of all students and to become critical players in closing the achievement gap.

Method

Participants

The participants were practicing high school counselors in a tri-county area of a southeastern state. As the researcher chose to obtain the voices of high school counselors who may have experience with social justice issues, these participants were theoretically (purposefully) selected based on the potential contribution to the development of this research (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). The criteria for the study's population consisted of high school counselors currently employed in a diverse school setting: a) representing all educational levels (i.e., special education and general education), b) comprising of at least three different ethnicities, and c) having at least one-fourth of their students on free and reduced lunch. This criterion of diversity was used based on the stance of the National Education Association (NEA), implying that "full acceptance of diversity is a major principle of social justice" (NEA n.d., para. 1).

Before gaining access to the participants, the researcher obtained university IRB approval and made research requests to school district offices within the tri-county area of interest. The selection process of the participants began immediately after receiving authorization by contacting the district offices' counseling coordinators and obtaining the email addresses for all

high school counselors. The total number of high school counselors was 138. These school counselors received email invitations providing an attached consent letter and requesting a reply of interest to participate if they met the criteria. Out of 138 high school counselors who received the email, eight (representing the three districts in the tri-county area) responded regarding their interest. Of these eight participants, all were female, three were African American, one was African American/Asian (Korean), and four were Caucasian. One of the participants had 12 years of experience, six had between one and ten years, and one had less than one year of experience (see Table 1). Each participant received a Visa gift card for \$25.00. The demographic characteristics of the participants' schools are included (see Table 2). Participants' school enrollment ranged from 657 to 2239 students. Seven participants worked in suburban schools, and one worked in an urban school. Descriptive statistics on student ethnicity and socio-economic status are reported in Table 2

Measures

The data collection protocol included a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) and semi-structured interviews utilizing an interview guide with open-ended questions (see Appendix B). The demographic questionnaire items were determined based on the demographic descriptions used in the literature that was reviewed for this study and was adapted from Parikh et al. (2011) and Ford and Nelson (2007). The interview questions came from Singh, Urbano, Haston, and McMahon (2010). Their study concentrated on school counselors who already believed they engage in social justice advocacy; however, the researchers concluded that their interview protocol was

relevant and appropriate in answering the questions for this study.

The questions focused on school counselors' current programs, roles, and responsibilities, and their perceptions of social justice advocacy. The researcher's objective was to determine school counselors' understanding of social justice advocacy and therefore asked questions designed to allow for deep probing from the interviewer as well as to provide an appropriate level of freedom, which permitted a conversational style of interviewing. Written participants' consent was received to record the interviews. The sessions were face-to-face and lasted from 45 minutes to an hour. Five of the eight meetings were held in the participants' offices, while the three other participants chose to come to the researcher's office. Some of the interviews took place during the day while others were after work hours.

Data Analysis

The research followed Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) to obtain in-depth construction of knowledge. The researcher recruited two coders, a counselor educator, and a Ph.D. candidate and former school counselor to create the research coding team. Copies of the transcribed interviews were reviewed by the participants for accuracy and then given to both coders to begin Moustakas' (1994) analytical process.

The research team worked independently and held ongoing discussions via phone contact and face-to-face meetings to reach unanimity. Employing additional coders to analyze and interpret the data increased the credibility of the analyses. The coding team first identified all non-repetitive,

non-overlapping statements regarding the phenomenon under examination and kept a coding log of terms and clusters resulted from the data interpretation. After each coder completed their analysis, the team compared and clustered the data into themes to develop textual descriptions- focusing on what the participants experienced. Lastly, multiple meanings of the textual descriptions created structural stories (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). After examining and revisiting the transcripts' keywords and phrases, the coding alliance gave rise to seven themes, which were substantial to determining high school counselors' understanding of social justice advocacy and identifying necessary factors in adhering to the social justice advocacy calls.

To further establish trustworthiness, the researcher provided detailed descriptions of the entire data collection process, information regarding the participants' demographic background, as well as each of their school's demographic characteristics (Table 2). The researcher also increased the dependability of the study's results by utilizing member checks, which allowed the participants to view transcripts and to provide feedback to ensure their ideas and experiences were displayed accurately. All eight participants felt the transcriptions were precise and did not see a need for any changes. Additionally, the researcher conducted reflective journaling to allow her to ponder thoughts, record initial impressions of the data collected, and to consider possible developmental interpretations (Shenton, 2004).

Results

The findings of this study resulted in seven themes (see Figure 1). These

were personal experiences, competence, exposure, diverse populations, programs, collaboration in the schools, and community collaboration/resources.

Personal Experiences

Regardless of what individuals encounter or undergo, experiences, whether past or current, often manifest their beliefs and actions. Therefore, the participants' own experiences seem to be an appropriate theme in attempting to understand social justice advocacy. Counselor 5 shared, "I haven't been a part of any form of social justice advocacy. I don't know if I have lived a sheltered life, but it's just not something that I truly think about outside of my own life. Since it doesn't affect me like it would other people, maybe I ignore it, I am not sure." Counselor 7 stated, "In my personal life, I have worked in non-profit organizations advocating for social justice for women who have been victims of domestic violence, but as far as the school is concerned, it has been very minimal." Counselor 3 stated, "A lot my awareness honestly comes from social media." In reflecting on the notion of personal experiences, the participants' responses varied; however, each indicated that their skills in social justice was limited and felt that their own experiences were a contributing factor to their current stance on social justice.

Competence

As the participants expounded on their experiences in and understanding of social justice advocacy, the concepts of ability in fulfilling this role emerged. Participants' comments mostly indicated a lack of competency. When asked the question, how prepared do you feel to serve as a social justice advocate in your school, Counselor 2 responded, "Not prepared

at all.” Similarly, Counselor 6 stated, “Completely unprepared to help the kids in the way that they need it because I feel like there are such hot button issues like transgender, and the race is still an issue and socioeconomic status.” All participants agreed that some form of preparation is needed to assist high school counselors in becoming better social justice advocates for all students. Thus, their comments revealed a common theme of exposure at the preservice and practicing levels.

Exposure

Exposure is a theme because of the numerous responses received from the participants concerning its importance. In this context, the term means “the fact of experiencing something or being affected by it because of being in a particular situation or place” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Its linkage between the research questions is like competency in that the level of exposure in which school counselors have may affect their ability to perform the task of social justice advocacy effectively. The participants’ responses related to the need for school counselors to be more exposed. For example, Counselor 6 stated, “I think that the more exposure you have, the more you are prepared for anything.” Likewise, Counselor 7 shared, “I think exposure is the number one thing.”

Additionally, the participants responded to questions regarding their views of what exposure would entail. For the inquiry, what helps or would help you be a successful social justice advocate in your school, Counselor 4 stated, “We need training on data.” While Counselor 5 shared, “I think reading up more on the ACA advocacy competencies and getting more experience on being an advocate is very much needed.” In pondering the

question, what recommendations would you suggest for training programs to adequately prepare school counselors-in-training to serve as social justice advocates in their prospective schools? Counselor 5 stated, “I think we need more classes on social justice, and how to be an advocate because it is not a big focus in graduate school programs.” Counselor 1 also explained the need for preservice programs to provide courses designed specifically for understanding data as it relates to school counseling. She expounded, “We get data all the time and are expected to know it, but we need to know what does data look like, and how can you show that what you are doing is making a change?”

Moreover, for the question, what suggestions do you have for professional development for practicing school counselors, Counselor 1 commented, “School counselors simply need more training or workshops on cultural diversity.” Counselor 2 stated, “Definitely some kind of professional development that it’s not just one day. It should be ongoing training each year.” Likewise, counselor 8 indicated that more training on understanding and how to work with various populations such as EL (English Learner), special education, and LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex) is much needed. Overall, the majority of the responses related to the need for school counselors to be more exposed to the matters they believe affect their role in social justice advocacy.

Diverse Populations

As the comments regarding various groups of students surfaced in several of the participants’ responses, the identification of marginalized students generated the fourth theme of diverse populations. The idea of

different groups of students is prevalent because, as previously indicated, “full acceptance of diversity is a major principle of social justice” (NEA, n.d., para.1). Thus, an understanding of each participants’ work setting and their thoughts regarding diversity aided in guiding this research. The participants made repeated comments regarding students with varied social, racial, language, and economic identities. Counselor 4 discussed the students she is most concerned about, “Our Hispanic population, our African American population, especially boys... our transgender population, our at-risk students who may have few credits going into their third year of high school, and our homeless population.” However, most of the other comments also focused on the participants’ uncertainty of how to reach these students. Overall, the data revealed various levels of diversity in each school environment, despite the disparity of enrollment numbers within the schools.

Programs

Responses from such questions as what types of social justice-related issues do you see in your school and what are you doing to help your marginalized students proved that the need for specialized programming was evident. Participants again identified various marginalized populations and were able to highlight programs in their schools designed to reach those populations. Still, few were able to discuss plans in which they, as school counselors, implemented and coordinated. Counselor 8 shared, “I haven’t implemented, but have seen different programs be put into place to try to get African American students to a higher level whether it is afterschool programs, mentors, extra tutoring...” Collaboration within the Schools
Most participants discussed programs

that were school/district-led; however, they also disclosed their lack of partnership and involvement in creating “closing the achievement gap” programs. As a result, the sixth theme of collaboration within the schools emerged. Counselor 3 stressed, “I think a lot of times as educators, we, there is a disconnect because everyone thinks, well this is that person’s job and not understanding that this is everyone’s job, and this should be a collaborative effort...” While Counselor 4 explained, “We do have a forum to enact with our teachers and administrators, but the problem is everyone is just so busy and in their worlds.” If you attempt to mention a program with teachers, they talk about the 100 other school initiatives that are coming down from the district or state.” Despite weakness in this area, to truly serve as a social justice advocate for all students, participants stressed a need for this component.

Community Collaboration/Resources

Lastly, just as it is vital to be in collaboration with significant players involved in students’ lives within the school setting, the participants also talked about the need for community connections. However, they mainly focused on resources and referrals. Counselor 1 shared, “I feel like the only community collaboration we have are with mental health counselors and maybe like a financial need for families as well as placement for them.” Counselor 2 commented, “We reach out to support groups all the time; for example, we have a church group that we work closely with for our homeless students and families in transition.” Counselor 6 stated, “I feel that we probably could collaborate a little more with the community, but other than knowing of community resources and making referrals, there is not much more

we do.” The next theme identified was community collaboration and resources because of the importance of school counselors being aware of their community resources to make necessary referrals as well as to utilize community members to serve as participants in their programming for marginalized students. For example, creating a mentoring program involving local Greek fraternities for at-risk African American males or reaching out to college admissions representatives to co-facilitating “going to college” group sessions for first-generation college-going students. Unfortunately, none of the participants made the connection between social justice advocacy and the various initiatives they as school counselors could implement as they discussed collaboration.

Discussion

This author of this study sought to examine the understanding of social justice advocacy among high school counselors and their beliefs regarding their ability to carry out this responsibility. Overall, the research revealed that although the participants had an awareness of social justice issues in their school settings and the need for advocacy programs, there were inconsistencies between the social justice advocacy expectation of school counselors and their actual job duties and skills.

Moreover, the themes which emerged provided validation of other previous findings concerning social justice advocacy. For example, comments participants made regarding their personal experience, exposure, and competency seem to coincide with the discoveries from Parikh and colleagues (2011) exploration of the relationship between school counselors’ beliefs and their attitudes about social

justice advocacy. The authors determined that variables such as political and religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, and race of school counselors all affect school counselors’ social justice advocacy practice. Likewise, with this current research, based on some participants’ experiences and their lack of exposure to social justice issues, there is resistance and apathy to create change despite the diversity and equities they see in their schools.

All participants discussed feeling somewhat incompetent in carrying out a social justice agenda and stressed the need for additional preservice and professional development training. Hartline and Cobia’s (2012) found that school counselors who received adequate training on the ASCA National Model obtained the skills needed to identify achievement gaps and create intervention programs. The participants in this study, however, pointed out that although they felt more competent with the training, they too believed that additional training was needed to create and evaluate data-driven programs to ensure a fair and equitable education for all students to promote systemic change (ASCA, 2019).

Feldwisch and Whiston (2015) also touched on the theme of competency. Although the focus of their study was on self-reported social justice advocates, they rationalized that school counselors who worked in school counseling comprehensive program setting scored higher on an Advocacy Competencies Self-Assessment than those who did not. The results of the authors’ research seem to imply that individuals working in complete counseling program settings received some level of training to help them create the program and to become more confident in their role of

social justice advocates.

Quite a few of the participants touched on the need to have more specific and beneficial social justice learning opportunities while in preservice programs. The desire for more training is consistent with several other studies. For example, Cook et al. (2019) introduced the concept of developing multicultural and social justice counseling competencies (MSJCCs) through fieldwork. Their findings proved beneficial for school counselors-in-training as well as for the students with whom they worked. Moreover, in another recent study conducted by Boyland et al. (2019), preservice training was again the topic at hand. However, the authors considered the preservice preparation of not only school counselors, but principals as well. The research resonated with competency and collaboration in that their results yielded a standards-aligned curriculum to assist principals and school counselors in the understanding of each role and adopting the much the collaborative relationship school counselors need to adhere to the call of social justice advocate effectively.

In conclusion, this study explored school counselors’ understanding of social justice advocacy and their beliefs in their ability to perform this role effectively. The findings revealed an alignment with other research conclusions affirming that social justice advocacy is a significant function for school counselors. Several themes emerged indicating an acknowledgment of social justice advocacy and the need for collaboration and special programming, however other items stated a lack of personal experiences, exposure, and competency as barriers. Additionally, the participants’ comments were consistent with previous research’ results regarding

the need for more training to effectively address the social justice issues within the school system and assist in ensuring equitable academic outcomes for all students.

Implications

Despite the vast attempts made to include school counselors in the movement of ensuring equity and a high standard of education for all students, school counselors continue to face challenges that prevent efficiency in this role of advocacy. Likewise, there appears to be little or no discussion as to which areas of school counseling (e.g., training, school leadership, self-efficacy) pose the most significant obstacles. The findings of this study are essential because they present first-hand information concerning school counselors’ insights about social justice advocacy. Moreover, they provide suggestions for all stakeholders, including counselor educators, school counselors, and school and district leaders, to play a part in helping social justice advocacy to become commonplace for all school counselors.

Counselor Educators

When asked about their graduate school training, most participants indicated an emphasis on social justice advocacy was limited. Thus, the understandings gained from this study is vital in helping counselor educators either develop a new course that focuses solely on social justice advocacy or infuse aspects of this concept in identified classes within their curriculum. The use of the themes in social justice advocacy teaching could look like the following. First, creating multicultural immersion activities to allow students to gain exposure to and obtain their own experiences in being around people of other cultures.

Second, providing full instruction of the ASCA National Model with a strong emphasis on leadership, collaboration, data collection/analysis to highlight the necessary methods and skills to create programs designed to bring about systemic change. Third, offering extensive training on the ACA advocacy competencies to demonstrate what advocacy looks like not only at the individual student level, but also involving school/systems advocacy and social/political advocacy (Ratts et al., 2007). Fourth, exposing students to real-life school/community issues via guest speakers and experiential learning activities. Finally, counselor educators should consider purposeful cross-cultural practicum and internship placements requiring students to research the unfamiliar school settings for their arrangements. This different setting would allow school counselors-in-training an opportunity for a more in-depth understanding of environments that are outside of their reality.

School Counselors

Dixon, Tucker, and Clark (2010) postulate, “school counselors are qualified to move from the traditional one-student-at-a-time reactive model of school counseling to the all-students-all-the time model of preventive and culturally responsive school counseling” (p.108). Therefore, practicing school counselors should consider the findings of the research as a realization of the importance of ongoing professional development to reach more students indirectly vs. directly. The participants appeared to be aware of their role in assisting with the social/emotional, academic, and career development of all students, but did not tie it to social justice advocacy, nor understood how to employ the application of that expectation. School

counselors can use the seven themes to advocate for professional development as relates to their needs. There are action steps that may include but are not limited to identifying barriers of vulnerable students and student groups and to developing an action plan for confronting those barriers. Another is providing and interpreting data to show the urgency for change. An additional action step is preparing written and multi-media materials that provide clear explanations of the roles of specific environmental factors in human development. Finally, school counselors can advocate by seeking out and joining with potential allies (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporeck, 2018). Once school counselors increase their self-efficacy and competencies in these areas, they will likely feel more comfortable in communicating the importance of their advocacy role and their needs with their school and district leaders.

School Leaders/Districts

School and district leaders are responsible for determining the most appropriate and effective utilization of its school faculty (Lieberman, 2004). Therefore, it is essential for those individuals “to be cognizant of the roles and functions of the school counselors to make appropriate and informed decisions” (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012, p.90). Consequently, the information stemming from this study can be used by school and district leaders to gain an awareness of school counselors’ roles. This understanding could assist these individuals in identifying applicable tasks that would “move school counselors from an ancillary service-oriented profession to one that becomes a critical player in accomplishing the mission of schools, academic success and high achievement for all students” (Martin, 2002, p. 152).

School leaders and administrators could also draw on the seven emergent themes to establish appropriate professional development for school counselors. Ideally, the workshops/training should be consistent (i.e., revised each year), to allow for ongoing learning.

Furthermore, to ensure the implementation of the implications, all school districts should employ a school counseling coordinator. Such an individual is necessary for the execution of comprehensive school counseling programs and the development of social justice advocacy for all students. Subsequently, school counseling district coordinators should connect with counselor educators and the school counseling representative at the state level to assist in the development of a comprehensive counseling program model that aligns with the current ASCA program model. A state-level steering committee would allow school counseling leaders from various districts, counselor educators, and school counseling state representatives to meet regularly, conduct research, and participate in ongoing professional development as it relates to the role of school counselors. Lastly, more opportunities are needed to form collaborative multidisciplinary relationships and to create opportunities for both future and present school counselors and school administrators to engage in cross-discipline professional development.

Future Research

Based on the discussion of the results of this study, the researcher was able to identify other possible research suggestions. First, it would be beneficial to conduct a qualitative survey of counselor educators to obtain additional information regarding their opinions in social justice

advocacy’s incorporation in preservice training. Second, the literature (Evans et al., 2011; Wilkerson & Eschbach, 2009), as well as participants, indicated that lack of knowledge and skills, non-counselor related tasks, lack of support, and more, all impeded school counselors from becoming effective social justice advocates. Therefore, a qualitative study of school and district leaders could also provide additional information and prove to be valuable in understanding social justice advocacy. Third, this study surveyed only high school counselors; however, as the role of the school counselor may vary within different educational settings. Additional research could be considered for elementary and middle school counselors as well. Fourth, a grounded theory approach could also be advantageous to determine how school counselors execute their programs and to see how other stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, and parents, perceive school counselors’ roles.

Limitations

This study had several limitations, including the generalizability of the results and subjectivity. The bias of information was one limitation that may have caused difficulty in ensuring reliability and validity. However, to contain this subjectivity and safeguard security, the researcher engaged in reflective journaling (Hepper & Hepper, 2004). The findings cannot be generalized to all school counselors for several reasons. First, participants of this research were from the southeast quadrant of an unknown state; therefore, their views may have been based on their region’s culture. Second, although the sample size was sufficient for phenomenological research, having only the opinions of eight individuals is limiting. Lastly, since all participants were females, the study does not contain

the perspectives of any other gender. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality may have been an additional limitation; however, randomly assigned for each participant were attached immediately after the interviews. Also, no identifiable information was disclosed in the research. Both of these strategies assisted in reducing this matter of concern. Finally, there was some apprehension of the researcher's presence during data gathering affecting the subjects' responses. Thus, this researcher made an effort to ease participants' minds involving the purpose of the research and to establish a positive rapport before launching into the interview questions (Creswell, 2013).

Conclusion

This study extended the discussion on social justice advocacy and how it relates to school counselors. It provided an opportunity for eight high school counselors to lend their voices to this phenomenon. The findings indicate that although the participants are aware of the social justice issues in their prospective schools and view advocacy as a significant role in their profession, vital elements in fulfilling this task are missing. However, as the nation continues to promote access and equity for all students, all educational stakeholders must assist in the necessary and appropriate teaching of school counselors to prepare them to serve as integral partners in this educational mission of equity and social justice.

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Table 1
Participant Demographic Information

| Category | Participants |
|------------------------|--------------|
| Race | |
| African American | 3 |
| African | 1 |
| African American/Asian | 4 |
| Caucasian | |
| Gender | 8 |
| Female | 0 |
| Male | 0 |
| Other | |
| Level of Education | 4 |
| Masters | 1 |
| Masters +30 | 2 |
| Education Specialists | 1 |
| Doctorate | |
| Years of Experience | 1 |
| 0-50 | 6 |
| 1-10 | 1 |
| 12+ | |

Table 2
Participants' School Demographic Data

| Characteristics | C.1 | C.2 | C.3 | C.4 | C.5 | C.6 | C.7 | C.8 |
|------------------------------------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|
| School Enrollment | 2239 | 1673 | 657 | 1053 | 2169 | 2239 | 2169 | 1652 |
| Ethnicity (%) | | | | | | | | |
| Caucasian | 67 | 58 | 3 | 61 | 41 | 67 | 41 | 60 |
| African American | 26 | 26 | 93 | 24 | 46 | 26 | 46 | 25 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 3 | 2 | 0.2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 10 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 3 | 8 | 4 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 8 | 5 |
| Native American | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 2 | 0.4 | 0 |
| Other | 2 | 7 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Socioeconomic Status | | | | | | | | |
| Free/Reduced Lunch (%) | 30 | 48 | 64 | 40 | 39 | 30 | 39 | 87 |
| Geographic Setting | | | | | | | | |
| Rural (R), Suburban (S), Urban (U) | S | S | U | S | S | S | S | S |

Note: C.1-C.8 are Counselors 1-8.

Figure 1



Appendix A Demographic Questions

1. Please indicate your gender: _____
2. Which of the following best identifies your race?
 - a) Caucasian
 - b) African American
 - c) Asian/Pacific Islander
 - d) Hispanic/Latin
 - d) Native American
 - e) Other
3. What is your level of education?
 - a) Master
 - b) Education Specialist
 - c) Doctorate
4. How many years have you been a school counselor?
5. What is the total number of students in your school?
6. What is the ethnic make-up of your school?
 - a) Caucasian _____
 - b) African American _____
 - c) Asian/Pacific Islander _____
 - d) Hispanic/Latino _____
 - d) Native American _____
 - e) Other _____
7. What is the socioeconomic make-up of your school?
 - a) Free/Reduced Lunch _____
 - b) Full pay _____
8. What type of school setting do you work in?
 - a) Rural
 - b) Suburban
 - c) Urban

Appendix B Interview Questions

1. Describe your current school counseling program.
2. What is your role and responsibility in this program?
3. What is social justice to you?
4. What is advocacy to you?
5. Where do your definitions of social justice and advocacy stem from?
6. What types of social justice-related issues do you see in your school?
7. What types of students do you identify as marginalized in your school?
8. What are you doing to help your marginalized students?
9. How do you explain your current stance as a social justice advocate?
10. How prepared do you feel to serve as a social justice advocate in your school?
11. What helps or would help you to be a successful social justice advocate in your school?
12. What recommendations would you suggest helping training programs adequately prepare school counselors-in-training to serve as social justice advocates in their prospective schools? What suggestions do you have for professional development for practicing school counselors?
13. Please take a moment to discuss any other information that you would like to add related to your experiences with social justice advocacy as a school counselor.

Self-Efficacy as it Relates to Attributions and Attitudes Towards Poverty Among School Counselors-in-Training

Counselors-in-Training

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Abstract

This study was conducted in order to examine the self-efficacy of school counselors-in-training and their attributions and attitudes towards poverty. The population for this study consisted of master's level school counseling students from two southeastern schools. All data were obtained via self-report measures and were collected using an internet survey and paper surveys. The study utilized a multiple regression analysis in an attempt to explore the relationships between attitudes and self-efficacy and attributions and self-efficacy. Although no significant relationship was found between self-efficacy and attitudes or attributions, the results of the study showed that school counselors-in-training held similar attitudes and attributions as the general American population which are primarily negative. Implications for training are discussed.

Keywords: poverty, attitudes, attributions, self-efficacy, school counselors-in-training

Counselors-in-Training

A child is born into poverty every 41 seconds in the United States of America

(Ratcliffe, 2015). Currently, 21 percent of all children, one in five, live below the federal poverty threshold (Koball & Jiang, 2018). According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), about 15 million children in the United States live in poverty (Koball & Jiang, 2018). Of the total population of children living in poverty, 24 million live in urban areas, while 5.7 million children live in rural areas (Addy & Wright, 2012). Caucasian children make up the largest number of children living in poverty; while African American, American Indian, and Hispanic children have a higher proportion of poor children among their entire population (Addy, Engelhardt, & Skinner, 2013).

The poverty threshold, based on a calculation updated by the Census Bureau each year, defines the minimum annual income needed to meet basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing expenses (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2019). The 2019 guidelines for the thresholds of annual income ranged from \$12,490 for a family of one to just over \$43,430 for a family of eight (HHS, 2019). In school systems, the number of students