4-17-2025

Lived Experiences of School Counselors Regarding Applications of Multicultural and Social Justice Advocacy

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

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by

Michele Lynn

MA.Ed., Northern Arizona University, 2010

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

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May 2025

Abstract

School counseling literature claimed that school counselors were trained in multicultural and social justice advocacy and were uniquely positioned within the school system as change agents. School counseling research had not explored school counselors' experiences when applying their ethical responsibilities of multicultural and social justice advocacy. This hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of school counselors working in the education system regarding ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy. The research question was: How do school counselors experience their social justice and multicultural advocacy roles within the education system? Three theories composed this study's foundation: hermeneutic phenomenology, ecological systems theory, and social dominance theory. Nine participants were interviewed, and the hermeneutic circle process was used to analyze the data. Eleven themes were found that related to social justice in context, potential challenges or barriers for school counselor ethical practices, issues of marginalization and harm, systemic implications, the influence of systems hierarchy and religious and political movements, and positive influences and partnerships related to multicultural and social justice advocacy. Findings may be used to better prepare and support school counselors for the systemic implications, which may create stronger advocacy for all students.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all who are marginalized and harmed by systemic oppression, discrimination, biases, and stereotypes and do not receive the support and human rights that all people should be afforded. I also dedicate this work to Amari Moore and many of my former students, who taught me to recognize systemic oppression and harm and gave me the courage to stand up when standing up meant standing alone. Finally, I dedicate this work to my children, Hailey and Brendan Lopez, and my chosen family, Jennifer Lundy Bentley, Electra De Lucia, and Shannon Honore, and to the memory of Stacy Earls and Christine Haskins. The strength that all have provided me during very challenging and painful periods of my life kept me going and fighting when I was not sure I had much left in me. Each and every one was significant to my drive and my success in this journey.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank a variety of people whose support truly helped make this journey happen and who supported me in ways they can never be thanked enough. To my daughter, Hailey, you have been my rock through my entire journey. You have provided support in all ways: been my champion, been an ear, and supported my tears and my fears. I could not be more appreciative and proud of the daughter you are and the beautiful social justice fighter you have become. To my lifelong friend, Jennifer Lundy Bentley, you have known me inside and out and been a support and champion through all things thick and thin. You are the true definition of a loyal friend. Thank you, Electra De Lucia. You are the sweetest, kindest, and most genuine spirit I have ever met. I am so happy our life paths crossed. You were a great support and friend through many ups and downs, and I will always value your friendship. Thank you, Shannon Honore, for many years of soccer mom times and for being a fun and supportive friend through so many frustrations and valleys in my journey. We have a great history together and great memories with our kids that will always be cherished.

To my therapist, Nancy Williams. You truly walked side by side with me through the very hard challenges that brought me to the decision to return to school and pursue my Ph.D. Until working with you, I had believed that dream was of the past. It is truly your support and help in healing my own trauma and understanding the impact of systemic oppression and trauma that set my path in this direction. Your ongoing professionalism and dedication to supporting my healing and journey pursuing this work have been invaluable.

Finally, to my dissertation team, Dr. Kat Peoples and Dr. Ariel Harrison, thank you for your support and guidance throughout this journey. I learned a lot from you on this journey that I will carry with me into the future and in my professional pursuits. I would not have made it through the process without your support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

According to Kendi (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022),

> school counselors must radically shift their attention from the failure of the students to the negligence of our education system to support students who are the most marginalized. School counselors can and must intervene. If they are not increasing the opportunities for all students, then we are doing a disservice. School counselors—as people who engage with multiple stakeholders, including parents, students, teachers, administrators—must take advantage of their unique positionality to support the humanity of all students and fight for equal access. (pp. xv–xvi)

School counseling has endured many evolutions and changes over the past century. During this time, school counseling has been molded by entities outside of the profession. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) was established in 1952 as a division of the American Counselor Association (ACA). In 2018, ASCA became a completely independent organization, separate from ACA, though a collaborative relationship is maintained.

The ASCA (2022a) described school counselors as follows:

> School counselors have unique qualifications and skills to implement a comprehensive school counseling program that addresses pre-K–12 students' academic, career and social/ emotional development needs. School counselors are leaders, advocates, collaborators and consultants who create systemic change to ensure equitable educational outcomes through the school counseling program.

> School counselors demonstrate the belief that all students have the ability to learn by advocating for and contributing to an education system that provides optimal learning environments for all students. (Preamble, para. 2)

School counselors' roles and activities change depending on what level of K–12 education they work. The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019b) was developed to define the role of school counselors and support the development of a comprehensive school counseling program to improve student success. In addition to the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019b), school counselors must adhere to the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2022a) and various professional Position Statements (ASCA, 2023b).

As a part of the School Counselor Ethical Standards (ASCA, 2022a), numerous standards define school counselor roles related to multicultural competence and social justice advocacy. In addition, numerous Position Statements (ASCA, 2023b) focus on multicultural and social justice advocacy and define the position of ASCA, the rationale, and the activities and duties of school counselors. Examples include *The School Counselor and Transgender/Gender-nonconforming Youth*, *The School Counselor and Gender Equity*, and *The School Counselor and Working with Students Experiencing Issues Surrounding Undocumented Status.*

Savitz-Romer and Nicola (2021) pointed to the lack of research that explored the situatedness of school counselors within the system of education, especially when considering how school counselors' work within a system impacts the ethical practices of school counselors. Also, research has not focused on the experiences of school counselors

working in the education system as they apply ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy. School counselors compose a small section (1.8%) of the education system (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019), a system of educators who typically do not share the same mental health training or ethical standards and practices. Given these considerations, a study that explored the embeddedness of school counselors within an education system, especially concerning experiences related to ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy, might provide information that would better support diversity and equity within the education setting. Additionally, the information gathered may point to adjustments needed in counselor education and preparation and provide an understanding of how to better support the counselor's role and identity within the education system as an advocate for equity and an ally for the student population.

This chapter provides background on the identity and role of school counseling and insightd into the perceptions of school staff about the school counseling role and identity. The problem and purpose of the study are explained, and the theoretical foundation and lenses through which the findings were interpreted are described. In addition, key concepts such as the nature of the study, essential definitions, assumptions, limitations, and the significance of the study are explained in detail.

Background

Research consistently endorsed the unique positioning that school counselors have to promote educational equity and advocate against the marginalization of students. However, research had not focused on the situatedness of school counselors within the

"nested systems in which counselors work--systems which … place constraints on school counseling equity" (Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021, p. 207). Decades of research have asserted that the unique positioning of school counselors stems from the specific training that school counselors receive, the skills they have that are different from the skills of the educational staff, and their power and ability to be a bridge between academic staff, families, and the community (Beck et al., 2018; Bryant & Milsom, 2005; Edwards & Foster, 1995; Field & Baker, 2004; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2021; Lambie et al., 2019; Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020; Mayes et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2014; Minton 2016; Moe et al., 2022; Moss & Singh, 2015; Porter et al., 2000; Shell, 2021; Walley et al., 2009; Zyromski et al., 2021).

Most school counseling research placed responsibility on school counselors to advocate and educate about the roles and responsibilities of the school counselor. However, not much change has come in the decades since these studies have been done. There have also been implications that school counselors hold power, often alluded to as parallel to administration (Field & Baker, 2004). Recent research and statistics showed a potential disconnect between assertions of school counselors' unique training, skills, and power positions regarding multicultural and social justice advocacy, and the reality of continuing inequities among marginalized students (ASCA, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2023a; de Brey et al., 2019; Dameron et al., 2020; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Irwin et al., 2023; Kendi, 2019; Merlin-Knowblich & Chen, 2018; Moss & Singh, 2015; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022; Shi & Carey, 2021; Taie & Lewis, 2022a, 2023b; The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016).

The most recent research questioned whether school counselors are meeting or able to meet the unique needs of a diverse student population (Dameron et al., 2020; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Kendi, 2019; Merlin-Knowblich & Chen, 2018; Moss & Singh, 2015; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022). For over a century, the roles and identities of school counselors have been obscure, inconsistent, and at the mercy of the educational system. The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019b) was developed starting in the late 1990s to make the school counseling role more solidified and necessary within the education system. The ASCA National Model has supported the academic focus in the last two decades. However, the mental health and counseling portion has fallen into the background (Lambie et al., 2019; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021). The impact of school counseling on social justice advocacy and the holistic support of students has made little progress (Lambie et al., 2019; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021) despite extensive definitions and ethical expectations in The ASCA Ethics and Standards (ASCA, 2022a),the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019b), and numerous Position Statements (ASCA, 2023b).

Considering literature from within the education system provides a broader picture of the systemic environment in which school counselors are embedded. The education system literature considered in the current study relates to the perceptions of educational administration and staff regarding the roles and responsibilities of school counseling and topics related to multiculturalism and social justice (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Barakat et al., 2019; Beesley, 2004; Blake, 2020; Brooks & Watson, 2019; Chata & Loesch, 2007; Cholewa et al., 2016; Cruz et al.,2022; Davis et al., 2022; Diamond &

Lewis, 2019; Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020; Diem et al., 2016; Grace & Nelson; 2019; Hanes, 2017; Huchting & Bickett, 2021; Kiang et al., 2021; Lane et al., 2020; Leath et al.,2019; Mansfield, 2015; Owens & McClanahan, 2020; Porter, 2020; Reiner et al., 2009; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Steketee et al., 2021; Stone-Johnson et al., 2021; Sugrue & Hanna Daftary, 2021; Villares et al., 2021; Weiner et al., 2021).

Research focused on the perceptions of school counseling roles and identities by administrators in the school setting demonstrated that although school counseling was changing and encouraging school counselors to advocate and educate about their roles, perceptions about school counseling roles and identities by administrators did not match or progress in terms of how professional school counseling defined identities and roles (Amatea & Clark, 2005; ASCA, 2023a; Blake, 2020; Chata & Loesch, 2007; Lane et al., 2020). Similar misalignments were demonstrated in the literature regarding teacher perceptions of the roles and identities of school counselors (Beesley, 2004; Clark & Amatea, 2004; Reiner et al., 2009; Villares et al., 2021). Systemic and social dominance considerations were also explored within educational literature.

The literature evaluated for the current study demonstrated ongoing issues in the educational environment related to multiculturally responsible education, persistent inequities, ill-prepared administration/staff, and systemic and social dominance influences (Barakat et al., 2019; Brooks & Watson, 2019; Cruz et al.,2022; Davis et al., 2022; Diamond & Lewis, 2019; Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020; Diem et al., 2016; Grace & Nelson; 2019; Hanes, 2017; Huchting & Bickett, 2021; Kiang et al., 2021; Leath et al.,2019; Mansfield, 2015; Owens & McClanahan, 2020; Porter, 2020; Riddle &

Sinclair, 2019; Steketee et al., 2021; Stone-Johnson et al., 2021; Sugrue & Hanna Daftary, 2021; Weiner et al., 2021). The current study explored the experiences of school counselors applying ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy within the education system. Research related to applications of school counselors' multicultural competence and social justice advocacy within the education system was minimal and lacked information about potential support, challenges, or barriers within the education environment.

Problem Statement

Professional literature and research asserted that school counselors are trained to be multiculturally competent and uniquely positioned in schools to make significant changes in their multicultural and social justice advocate role (Beck et al., 2018; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2021; Lambie et al., 2019; Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020; Mayes et al., 2021; Minton 2016; Moe et al., 2022; Moss & Singh, 2015; Shell, 2021; Zyromski et al., 2021). School counseling ethics require that school counselors work to uncover, promote awareness, remove, and speak against marginalization, oppression, and systemic barriers that impede student success (ASCA, 2022a). School counselors are master's-level educated professionals who receive training specific to multicultural awareness and understanding, with a purported achieved competence and understanding of social justice advocacy expectations per counselor ethical standards (ASCA 2022a; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016).

When school counselors enter the education environment, research has shown challenges and barriers related to counselor-assigned roles or duties, counselors lacking

in multicultural competence, or the lack of understanding that administrators and school staff have regarding the profession of school counseling (Brasfield et al., 2021; Cole & Grothaus, 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2018; Lane et al., 2020; Merlin-Knoblich et al., 2019; Payne & Smith, 2018; Peterson, 2019). Although school counselors receive training in multicultural and social justice advocacy (CACREP, 2015), research has neglected to explore the experiences of school counselors when implementing these skills in the school environment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of school counselors working in the education system regarding ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy. Research had asserted that school counselors are uniquely positioned in the school setting with specialized training to create change and provide equity for all students (Beck et al., 2018; Bryant & Milsom, 2005; Edwards & Foster, 1995; Field & Baker, 2004; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2021; Lambie et al., 2019; Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020; Mayes et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2014; Minton 2016; Moe et al., 2022; Moss & Singh, 2015; Porter et al., 2000; Shell, 2021; Walley et al., 2009; Zyromski et al., 2021). Understanding the experiences of school counselors regarding the application of multicultural and social justice advocacy could inform the profession of school counseling about potential challenges and barriers, needs in training and role advocacy, and ways to align counselor training to school counselor-embedded experiences.

Research Question

How do school counselors experience their roles in terms of social justice and multicultural advocacy?

Methodological and Theoretical Framework for the Study

Three theories composed this study's foundation: hermeneutic phenomenology, ecological systems, and social dominance. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a theory and a method of research (van Manen, 2014). Recent literature suggested that school counseling needs to be understood from a systems perspective, and some literature pointed to the importance of understanding social dominance that resides throughout the systemic interconnections of the education system (Lantz et al., 2020; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021; Wilcox et al., 2020). Ecological systems theory and social dominance theory (SDT) were used as lenses within hermeneutic phenomenology to provide a broad, interconnected understanding and bring meaning to the research.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a theory and a research methodology (van Manen, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology was expanded from prior phenomenological theory by Heidegger (1962, 2010). Heidegger (1962, 2010) argued that a person could not separate themselves from the world they are *within.* Heidegger (1962, 2010) used the term *Dasein* to represent the notion of being in the world. This philosophy of a person within the world asserts that individuals are interpretive beings in a constantly interpreted world (Vagle, 2014).

For Heidegger (1962; 2010). human beings bring to understanding *fore-sight or fore-conception.* This understanding includes biases, judgments, and preconceived understanding. Heidegger purported that meaning is gained through a circular movement back and forth between parts and the whole (Peoples, 2020; Peoples, 2024; Vagle, 2014; Wrathall, 2006). This process is called the *Hermeneutic circle*. Through this process, people's fore-sight can be recognized and compared to the meaning they are making.

Phenomenology is a research method that seeks to understand lived experiences. Through phenomenology, I sought to understand the experiences of school counselors in the education setting environment and how they experience their ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy. The application of hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me, as the researcher, to recognize and consider my biases, judgments, and fore-conceptions as a former school counselor.

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) conceptualizes human development through the influence and impact of nested systems encompassing an individual. Five systems are interactional and interconnected: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystem influences an individual's development, including people and institutions that can influence actions and beliefs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The mesosystem involves consideration of the interactions and connections of two or more settings involved in the microsystem in which the developing person is an active participant (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The exosystem does

not have a direct impact on an individual but accounts for various links between social structures within an individual's broader ecosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The macrosystem considers the broader society and culture surrounding an individual, including ethnicity, geographic location, socioeconomic status, and dominant cultural ideologies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Finally, the chronosystem comprises lifetime changes in a person's environment that can influence their development and lifestyle, such as historical events, broad societal beliefs, and significant life transitions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Ecological systems theory has been applied in various realms, including education. However, it had not been applied to school counseling research. Recent literature emphasized the importance of considering school counseling through an ecological systems lens (Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021).

SDT

SDT is "an attempt to connect the worlds of individual personality and attitudes with the domains of institutional behavior and social structure" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, Location No. 683). Theorists of SDT focus on group-based social hierarchies within human societies, formulated and maintained by numerous forms of group-based oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, nationalism, and ethnocentrism; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The social hierarchies consist of one or a small number of powerful and dominant groups at the top of the social structure and one or a few subordinate groups at

the bottom (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The dominant groups hold a considerable portion of positive social value, which includes wealth, high social status, political authority and power, and access to the best health care, housing, and food (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The subordinate groups endure a substantially disparate share of negative social value: low social power and status, high-risk and low-status employment, and considerably less opportunity and access to suitable food, housing, or health care (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Theorists of SDT also concentrate on how institutional and individual behaviors and social discourse (e.g., ideology, attitudes, and stereotypes) are impacted and fueled by group-based social hierarchies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Critical concepts of SDT applicable to the current study include behavioral asymmetry, ideological asymmetry, legitimizing myths, and social dominance orientation (see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Behavioral asymmetry is a mechanism that produces and maintains group-based social hierarchies. Behavioral asymmetry is impacted by stereotypes, legitimizing ideologies, biases, socialization patterns, and the operation of systematic terror (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Ideological asymmetry presumes that social ideologies organize the actions of individuals and institutions; the sharing of knowledge and beliefs supports discrimination (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Additionally, legitimizing ideologies (classism, sexism, racism) are driven by the aspiration and agreement of group-based hierarchy (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Legitimizing myths (LMs) include values, ideologies, attitudes, stereotypes, and beliefs providing intellectual and moral justification for how social value is distributed within the

social system (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Two types of LMs exist: hierarchy enhancing (justify and sustain group-based inequality) and hierarchy attenuating (supports and justifies greater group-based social equality; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Nature of the Study

In addressing the research question in this qualitative study, I used a phenomenological hermeneutic design. This qualitative analysis addressed school counselors' lived experiences of working in the K–12 education system in the United States concerning ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy. In addition to hermeneutic phenomenology, ecological systems theory and SDT were used to provide a broad and more profound understanding of the experiences of school counselors.

This research considered the embeddedness of school counselors in the education system. Therefore, I chose hermeneutic phenomenology due to Heidegger's principle of Dasein. School counselors practice within the system of education. They exist as a part of this environment, not as separate entities. Additionally, my experiences as a former school counselor were considered a part of the research process. The hermeneutic circle process and journaling allowed me to reflect on my experiences, biases, and judgments throughout the research process. I conducted semistructured interviews with current or former school counselors. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and evaluated through the hermeneutic circle process. As the sole researcher, I analyzed the data.

Definitions

Competence: The quality of being competent; adequacy; possession of required skill, knowledge, qualification or capacity (ASCA, 2022a).

Dasein: "Being there." Heidegger argued that humans are Dasein because of the way they exist in the world (Wrathall, 2006).

Hermeneutic circle: The notion that all understanding moves in a circle. Understanding of the whole is established by reference to the individual parts and a person's understanding of each part by reference to the whole (Wrathall, 2006).

Multicultural humility: An orientation toward caring for a person's patients that is based on self-reflexivity and assessment, appreciation of patients' expertise on the social and cultural context of their lives, openness to establishing power-balanced relationships with patients, and a lifelong dedication to learning (Lekas et al., 2020).

School counselor: A person with unique qualifications and skills to implement a comprehensive school counseling program that addresses pre-K–12 students' academic, career, and social/emotional development needs. School counselors are leaders, advocates, collaborators, and consultants who create systemic change to ensure equitable educational outcomes through the school counseling program. School counselors demonstrate the belief that all students have the ability to learn by advocating for and contributing to an education system that provides optimal learning environments for all students (ASCA, 2022a).

Social justice advocacy: The social justice counseling paradigm uses social advocacy and activism as a means to address inequitable social, political, and economic

conditions that impede the academic, career, and personal/social development of individuals, families, and communities (Ratts, 2009).

Assumptions

An assumption made in this research was that participants would be truthful in their responses. This assumption was essential to the research because the data were based on reported experiences of school counselors. Another assumption was that participants could resist some of the research process. The political and environmental aspects of the education system have created more sensitivity to how staff in the education system can be perceived. There are fears of legal or career retaliation in some areas, especially surrounding multicultural and social justice advocacy. Finally, as a former school counselor, I assumed misalignment between purported multicultural and social justice advocacy of school counselors and their actual understanding and actions. My experiences showed that many school counselors are not multiculturally humble, and many are not exhibiting ethical practices of social justice advocacy. If there is understanding, many school counselors shy away from social justice advocacy due to fears of retaliation or discipline from stakeholders in power. As a school counselor conducting this study, I addressed the separation of roles in the informed consent process. I followed all ASCA ethical guidelines, IRB protocols, and methodology for hermeneutic phenomenological analysis to address these potential challenges.

Scope and Delimitations

In this research, the focus was experiences related to the application of multicultural and social justice advocacy. This focus was chosen because the political and

cultural environment in the United States is charged with multicultural aspects, and social justice advocacy is imperative to create positive change. School counselors are charged with being multiculturally competent and acting as social change agents, but prior research had not explored this in depth.

This study included former or current licensed or certified school counselors. This research did not include other mental health professionals in the school setting, such as social workers or psychologists. Additionally, a theory that relates to this topic but was not employed is critical race theory (CRT). This theory was not applied because the focus was broader multicultural aspects beyond race.

Transferability refers to how research can be generalized to the wider population. However, qualitative research is bound contextually (Ravitch & Carl, 2016. Qualitative researchers aim to conduct the research in a way that can apply to other contexts while "still maintaining their context-specific richness" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 189). In seeking transferability of findings to other school counseling populations and contexts, I used thick description, member checking, and the hermeneutic circle process, which included reflexive journal writing to support transferability. Although transferability was sought, the findings may not transfer to the experiences of all school counselors due to differences in states, geographic regions, and school districts.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was that the purposeful and small sample size could have resulted in the unintended omission of potential participants and the rich experiences of this population. Additionally, participants may not have been completely

honest in their interviews due to fears of judgment or confidentiality-related worries. Participants may have generalized their experiences instead of providing detailed descriptions, or might have provided answers they thought I was seeking. These limitations may impact transferability.

Significance

Literature showed that inequities exist for marginalized students in the U.S. education system (Farley & Leonardi, 2021; Farley et al., 2021; Kummings & Tienken, 2021; McQuillan, 2021; NCES, 2018; Simmons et al., 2018; Timberlake, 2020). School counselors have been tasked with being social change agents and advocates within the education environment (ASCA, 2019a, 2022a, 2023b). However, there is a disconnect between the asserted specialized training and ethical expectations of the roles and identities of school counselors as social justice and multicultural advocates and reality, as demonstrated in numerous reports and research (ASCA, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2023a; de Brey et al., 2019; Dameron et al., 2020; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Irwin et al., 2023; Kendi, 2019; Merlin-Knowblich & Chen, 2018; Moss & Singh, 2015; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022; Shi & Carey, 2021; Taie & Lewis, 2022a, 2023b; The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016). Limited research has shown some understanding of the multicultural competence of school counselors (Dameron et al., 2020; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Merlin-Knowblich & Chen, 2018; Moss & Singh, 2015).

Several studies have shown barriers to ethical standards and practices related to the overall roles and identities of school counselors (Brasfield et al., 2021; Cole & Grothaus, 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2020; Merlin-Knoblich et al., 2019; Payne

& Smith, 2018; Peterson, 2019). Some school counseling research has focused on whether school counselors are multiculturally competent, demonstrate social justice advocacy, or meet the needs of diverse students (Dameron et al., 2020; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Kendi, 2019; Merlin-Knowblich & Chen, 2018; Moss & Singh, 2015; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022). Decades of research have implied that school counselors hold power and influence in the school setting similar to administration, have the unique ability and skills to evoke change, educate staff and the community, and hold similar professional respect as clinicians (Beck et al., 2018; Bryant & Milsom, 2005; Edwards & Foster, 1995; Field & Baker, 2004; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2021; Lambie et al., 2019; Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020; Mayes et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2014; Minton 2016; Moe et al., 2022; Moss & Singh, 2015; Porter et al., 2000; Shell, 2021; Walley et al., 2009; Zyromski et al., 2021). What was unknown was school counselors' experiences applying ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy within the broad education system and the potential supports, challenges, or barriers that may be encountered. That is what the current study addressed.

The findings from this study may support school counselors and school counselor educators by highlighting the experiences of school counselors as they implement ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy within the education system. This research may inform the school counseling profession about the educational environment and the potential impact of systemic hierarchical structures on school counselors' ethical practices and may explain how the education system supports or presents barriers or challenges to school counseling ethical practices concerning multicultural and social

justice advocacy. Additionally, findings may provide insight into how multicultural and social justice training for school counselors needs to be revised or aligned differently to fit the realities of school counselors working in the education system. Broadening understanding may help advance social justice advocacy actions and clarify what and why inequities continue to exist for marginalized students despite clear and defined school counselor professional ethics and roles.

Summary

The embeddedness of school counselors within the education system and the potential impact on counselor roles, duties, and ethical practices had not been explored in previous research, especially concerning multicultural and social justice advocacy. Decades of research have made many assertions about the unique positioning and power that school counselors have to evoke change and create equitable education environments and experiences for all students. For decades, the implication has been that school counselors are trained in specialized ways to play an influential role in the school setting. Data have shown that there has not been much change in experiences for many marginalized groups. In current social dynamics, the situation has gotten worse in some ways for many groups. Therefore, taking school counselor research in a different direction was essential. There was a need to explore systemic and group-based implications that had not been focused on in prior research.

In Chapter 2, I review the history of school counseling and the obligations, standards, and ethical practices expected of school counselors. Additionally, I discuss multicultural competence and social justice advocacy and their importance in school

counseling. Prior research related to the roles of school counselors and topics of multicultural and social justice advocacy, from school counseling/counseling literature and realms within education research, is also reviewed. Finally, I discuss the implications of the prior research and the reasoning behind my interest in this research focus.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

School counseling research and professional literature asserted that school counselors are competent and well trained in social justice and multicultural advocacy. Additionally, there is an ethical expectation that this training is used to advocate for marginalized students. However, research had not explored whether school counselors meet the asserted level of training and ethical practices. Furthermore, the potential impact of working in the education environment on school counselors' implementation of multicultural and social justice advocacy had not been considered.

The purpose of this hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school counselors regarding ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy within the education system. Another assertion of literature was that school counselors are uniquely positioned and have specialized training in the education environment to create equitable change for all students (Beck et al., 2018; Lambie et al., 2019; Pincus et al., 2021; Shell, 2021; Walley et al., 2009; Zyromski et al., 2021). Exploring the experiences of school counselors within the education setting as they apply multicultural and social justice advocacy could advise the profession about possible challenges and barriers, potential needs in training and role advocacy, and advanced alignment of counselor training to school counselor-embedded experiences.

This chapter provides information about hermeneutic phenomenology, the theory that was used to explore school counselors' experiences. In addition, ecological systems theory and SDT were used as lenses within the hermeneutic phenomenological process. The first literature review section provides background and historical information to

explain what a school counselor does; the shifts in expectations, roles, and identity over decades; the evolution of the ASCA; and the impact the ASCA has made on school counseling. Finally, research assertions regarding school counselors' unique position are highlighted. This foundational information reveals struggles in professional school counseling, specifically with roles and identities, and also provides a look into how systems in the United States have impacted school counseling.

The next section reviews school counselors' obligations to multicultural and social justice advocacy. Background is provided regarding the evolution of the necessity of multicultural and social justice advocacy in school counseling. Subsections of this section review research related to multicultural and social justice advocacy in school counseling. The research provided show that most research focused on the multicultural and social justice advocacy of school counselors has been self-report measures, and the application of this advocacy by school counselors has not been explored or observed in research. The remainder of this section describes research related to marginalized groups and the connection to school counseling. The review demonstrates that there appears to be a disconnect between what has been explored in school counseling research and the assertions regarding school counselors as multicultural and social justice change agents.

Because the literature was sparse regarding the embeddedness of school counseling in the education system and the potential impact of working in this system on ethical practices, systemic considerations are explored in the final two sections. The first section reviews the minimal literature on the perceptions of school administration and teachers regarding the roles and identity of school counselors. This consideration is vital

because school administrators are the higher-ups and decision makers in a school setting, and school counselors are among the few noneducation staff on a campus. The last section reviews literature from outside-of-school counseling research that provides insight into the potential environment of the education system specific to multicultural and social justice issues and the broader systemic issues currently impacting the education environment.

Literature Search Strategy

Databases searched included ERIC, PsycINFO, PscyARTICLES, Educational Research Complete, Google Scholar, Thoreau, American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and American Counselor Association (ACA) databases, Dissertation and Theses, and Walden University Library. Keywords searched included *social dominance theory*, *systems theory*, *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems theory*, *race*, *whiteness*, *students of color*, *disability/ability*, *special education*, *poverty*, *gifted education*, *trans(gender)*, *LGBTQ*, *educational inequities*, *privilege*, *intersectionality*, *school counsel(or, ing)*, *guidance counselor*, *ethical practices*, *(multi)cultural competence*, *multicultural training*, *social justice advocacy*, *mental health-youth*, *students*, *school system*, *educational leadership*, *educational policy*, *counselor education* and *supervision*, *principal preparation/training*, *teacher preparation/training*, *teacher beliefs*, *systemic oppression*, *school counselor roles*, *bias*, *discourse in education*, *leadership* and *systems-level change*, *Christian privilege*, *religious discrimination*, *religion* and *education*, *superintendents*, *school boards*, *discipline policies*, *discipline practices*, and *microaggression*.

Theoretical Foundation

Prior school counseling research related to roles, duties, or multicultural competence and social justice advocacy was narrow in focus. Therefore, the theoretical foundation of this study was essential to create a broader and more detailed understanding of the phenomenon being explored.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Husserl (1859–1938) is regarded as the father of phenomenology. At a rudimentary level, phenomenology studies phenomena (Vagle, 2014; Wrathall, 2006). Within hermeneutic phenomenology, phenomena are not created or defined separately from the world within a person's mind. Also, phenomena are not mysterious happenings generated by outside forces. Vagle (2014) described phenomena as "the ways in which we find ourselves being in relation to the world through our day-to-day living" (p. 20). More recently, phenomenology has been used as a philosophy and a research methodology (van Manen, 2014).

Heidegger (1889–1976) was a student under Hersserl who branched off and created the philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology. Husserl asserted that the researcher's position is from the perspective of "being a stranger in a strange land" (Peoples, 2020, p. 34). Husserl also argued that all phenomena could be reduced to their most simplistic essence and is done through a bracketing process. Heidegger described various ways of being and was different from Husserl, arguing that experiences can not be bracketed because it is impossible to separate oneself from being within the world and avoiding bringing theoretical assumptions into qualitative study (Peoples, 2020; Vagle,

2014; Wrathall, 2006). One of Heidegger's most significant insights was that "human existence is grounded in our always already finding ourselves in a world (Wrathall, 2006, p. 10)." Dasein is a concept created by Heidegger (1962, 2010) that represents the notion of being in the world: the actual existence of each person. Wrathall (2006) explained this notion:

> Our way of being is found not in our thinking nature…the kind of being we have, the way we carry ourselves and live our lives, is intimately and inextricably bound up with the state of the world we find ourselves in. (p. 15)

This existence or lived experience is what Heidegger focused on, and Heidegger emphasized that research should concentrate on phenomena through Dasein (Heidegger, 1962; 2010; Peoples, 2020; Vagle, 2014; Wrathall, 2006).

According to Heidegger (1962; 2010), phenomenology compels individuals to view things they experience in a way that recognizes that they must understand that things appear as they are. This concept is "that which becomes manifest for us." Through intentional relations, manifestations come into being and are constantly being interpreted. Therefore, intentional relations are in a perpetual state of interpretation (Vagle, 2014). Heidegger focused on how people make sense of the world but acknowledged that people have preconceived notions about phenomena, which Heidegger called foresight or fore-conception (Peoples, 2020; Vagle, 2014; Wrathall, 2006).

Hermeneutic Circle

For Heidegger (1962, 2010) a person's personal experience is a part of the construction of their understanding of the experience. Heideggerian phenomenology

asserts that “humans live in the world as interpretive beings in a continuously interpreted world” (Vagle, 2014, p. 74). Heidegger taught about understanding as moving in a circular pattern (many use the spiral as a better description). Wrathall (2006) described this pattern as follows: “As we move back and forth between the description and the thing described, our understanding of both is enriched” (p. 8). This revision process is called the hermeneutic circle (spiral). Interpreted meaning is always in motion; through the hermeneutic circle process of understanding, a person makes sense of the world (Peoples, 2020; Peoples, 2024; Vagle, 2014)

When individuals use the process of the hermeneutic circle, foresights, preconceived understanding, or biases are considered. It is within the process that a person’s understanding or judgments are revised. The flow back and forth from the parts to the whole and back again provides new understanding and continues to evolve as more information is presented (Peoples, 2020; Vagle, 2014; Wrathall, 2006). Applying the hermeneutic circle process within my research, I considered my biases, preconceptions, and judgments and compared them to the participants’ lived experiences, narrowing them down until meaning was found.

Ecological Systems Theory

For this research, I used Savitz-Romer and Nicola (2021) as a foundation tying ecological systems to the work of school counselors. The overarching purpose of Savitz-Romer and Nicola’s essay was the following:

> We outline school counselors’ unique roles in supporting minoritized youth and draw on Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological systems theory to consider nested systems

> in which counselors work—systems which, we argue, place constraints on school counseling equity. This system-level framing moves away from casting the limitations of our current student support model as an individual-level, personnel issue and instead conceptualizes it as an organizational one that must be remedied to ensure all students have equal access to critical counseling support. (p. 207)

Additionally, Savitz-Romer and Nicola noted that to ensure that counselors receive the utmost support, are well trained, and are held accountable for providing equitable counseling practices, school counseling reform and considerations must extend to school and district leaders, counselor educators, and district policies.

Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner,1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) conceives human development within an understanding of the systems in which it is nested. Bronfenbrenner postulated that individuals are nested within five interrelated systems. The focus is on interconnectivity and interactional causality (McMahon et al., 2013). Change in one system will create a ripple effect throughout the ecosystem.

The five systems are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystem affects individuals' development; this includes the people and institutions the individual is most surrounded by such as parents, peer groups, schools, and neighborhood communities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Bidirectional relationships exist within a microsystem, meaning that other people can shape a child within their environment, and other people's beliefs and behaviors can also be impacted (Guy-Evans, 2023). The mesosystem considers the interconnections among those involved in the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;

Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). An example of the interconnections is communication between teachers and parents, which can influence child development. The exosystem accounts for various links between social structures such as home life and workplace environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The exosystem does not directly influence child development but impacts parts of the microsystem (Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021; Guy-Evans, 2023). The macrosystem involves the greater society and culture surrounding an individual, potentially influencing beliefs and perceptions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The macrosystem encompasses ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ideologies of the surrounding culture, and geographic location. Finally, the chronosystem comprises lifetime environmental changes that influence the development and overall lifestyle (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). These influences include historical events, significant life transitions, and broader societal beliefs.

Savitz-Romer and Nicola (2021) applied ecological systems theory to school counseling by explaining how school counseling environmental factors fit into the concepts of ecological systems theory. In school counseling, the microsystem contains components that impact the work of school counselors: administration, school district, school boards, the school community, and families. The mesosystem involves the relationships between the different microsystem components (e.g., the relationship between the school district and school boards). The exosystem influences school counselors without a direct relationship. Examples of these elements include state education agencies, professional associations, and counselor preparation programs. The

macrosystem involves ideologies, values, and beliefs of the education system stakeholders and the encompassing society of the United States, which impact school counseling ethical practices. Examples include ideology related to mental health-seeking actions, educational funding, and the greater societal perceptions of the school counselors' roles. Savitz-Romer and Nicola described the chronosystem as encompassing

> environmental factors affecting school counselors that change over time…includes, for example, how the presence of college access organizations and other role partners such as social workers has affected the counseling profession, as well as the increasing national attention to students' mental health needs. (p. 11)

Additionally, the chronosystem represents ongoing environmental changes in sociohistorical contexts of the education system that influence the school counseling profession.

SDT

SDT was developed by Sidanius Pratto (1999) who described their theory as "an attempt to connect the worlds of individual personality and attitudes with the domains of institutional behavior and social structure" (Location No. 683). The theory begins with the perception that all human societies are systems organized into "group-based social hierarchies (Sidanius & Prato, 1999, Location No. 692)." Theorists of SDT ask why human societies tend to cultivate group-based hierarchies. The theory considers various forms of group-based oppression familiar to the world (e.g., sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, classism, and nationalism) as the universal tendency to formulate and

maintain a group-based hierarchy. Unlike other theories, SDT focuses on the skillful and universal forms of oppression and discrimination that significant numbers of people experience every day of their lives and is "devoted to trying to deepen our understanding of the recurrent realities of actual human existence, including the universal realities of patriarchy, ethnocentrism, and dominance/submission" (Sidanius et al., 2004, p. 847).

At the most basic level, these hierarchies comprise one or a small number of dominant and powerful groups at the top and one or a few subordinate groups at the bottom (Sidanius & Prato, 1999). Within these social hierarchies exists large disproportionality. The dominant groups possess a significant share of positive social values, including political power and authority, wealth, access to the best food, health care, housing, and high social status (Sidanius & Prato, 1999). On the other end, subordinate groups experience a substantially disproportionate share of negative social value. Negative social value includes low social status and power, low-status and high-risk occupations, and less access and opportunity to obtain good health care, food, or comfortable housing. Additionally, those groups that experience negative social values often incur harsh penalties and punishments.

Social dominance theory recognizes that systematic individual and institutional discrimination fuels persistent group-based oppression. Sidanius et al. (2004) explain:

> Many social institutions (e.g., schools, organized religions, marriage practices, financial houses) and many powerful individuals disproportionately allocate desired goods—such as prestige, wealth, power, food, and health care—to members of dominant and privileged groups while directing undesirable things—

> such as dangerous work, disdain, imprisonment, and premature death—toward members of less powerful groups. (p. 847)

Theorists of SDT concentrate on how the nature and gravity of group-based social hierarchies contribute to and impact social discourse (e.g., attitudes, stereotypes, and ideology) and institutional and individual behavior.

Theorists of SDT consider institutional discrimination a significant power that creates, maintains, and recreates systems of group-based hierarchy (Sidanius & Prato, 1999). Social institutions create group-based hierarchies within their policies, procedures, and actions. These institutions can be public or private but create discrimination at all levels: sometimes overt, conscious, and deliberate; other times, covert, unconscious, or unintended.

Key concepts within SDT are behavioral asymmetry, ideological asymmetry, legitimizing myths, and social dominance orientation. The first concept, behavioral asymmetry, is a mechanism that maintains and produces group-based social hierarchy. There will be differences in the behavioral ranges of individuals who belong to the various groups at different levels of the continuum of social power. More significant is how the behavioral differences contribute to and are reinforced by "the group-based hierarchical relationships within the social system (Sidanius & Prato, 1999, Location No. 911)." Behavioral asymmetry will also be impacted by psychological biases, stereotypes, socialization patterns, legitimizing ideologies, and the operation of systematic terror. Finally, generally, people tend to be ethnocentric and favor their ingroups more than

outgroups. However, dominant groups tend to exhibit higher levels of ingroup bias or favoritism than subordinate groups.

Ideological asymmetry within social dominance theory assumes that social ideologies "help to coordinate the actions of institutions and individuals…people share knowledge and beliefs that legitimize discrimination, and most often behave as if they endorse these ideologies (Sidanius et al., 2004, p. 847)." Additionally, theorists of SDT assume that legitimizing ideologies (sexism, racism, classism) are propelled by one's aspiration for an agreement with a group-based social hierarchy.

Legitimizing myths (LM) also affect group-based social hierarchy. Sidanius Prato (1999) describes LM as consisting of "attitudes, values, beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies that provide moral and intellectual justification for the social practices that distribute social value within the social system (Sidanius & Prato, 1999, Location No. 961)." Within the ideology of legitimizing myths are hierarchy-enhancing (HE) LMs and hierarchy-attenuating (HA) LMs. Hierarchy-enhancing myths are LMs that justify and support group-based social inequality, and HAs are LMs that support and justify greater group-based social equality. Examples of LE-LMs in modern-day US and Western culture are the ideologies focused on the notion of individual responsibility, implications that the hardships that poor people experience are results of internal attributes, the Protestant work ethic, and assumptions and beliefs that are referred to as "political conservatism." Within each of these ideologies is the belief that where an individual resides in the social status range is what has been earned and, therefore, what the person deserves.

Social dominance theory has not been utilized in school counseling literature; however, it has been used to explore multicultural competence in counselor trainees and practicing counselors. School counselors, for the most part, receive nearly identical training as clinicians (CACREP, 2016). Lantz et al. (2020) and Wilcox et al. (2020) applied SDT to explore aspects of multicultural competence related to counselors/therapists and counselors/therapists in training. Essential to this application was the understanding, according to Wilson et al. (2020), that:

> SDT may help explain why therapists are not inherently multiculturally competent; namely, as products of a dominant society that espouses the merits and necessity of a hierarchical (i.e., racist, classist, sexist) social order, beginning therapists, even with the best of intentions enter their training with ingrained prejudices. (p. 471)

Many groups in the field of school counseling and education are dominant in the United States (ASCA, 2020a; de Brey et al., 2019; Irwin et al., 2023; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2022; Taie & Lewis, 2022a; Taie & Lewis, 2022b; The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016). Despite good intentions, a large majority of counselors in training (and professionals in the education system) may "be blind to the barriers that individuals from oppressed groups face due to systemic oppression" (Lantz et al., 2020, p. 144). Therefore, applying SDT to this research will help illuminate potential group-based dominance or inequities that fuel potential barriers to multicultural and social justice advocacy.

Combining these theories will provide a much broader and more detailed understanding of the experiences of school counselors. Hermeneutic phenomenology will seek to understand the positioning of school counselors. Then, the combination of knowledge that school counselors work within an extensive system potentially dominated by numerous groups will allow deeper meaning to be explored in ways school counseling research has not attempted in the past.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

History of the School Counselor Roles and Identity

The roles and identities of school counselors have been vague for over a century (Gysbers, 2010). Throughout these years, roles have dramatically changed and shifted numerous times, "often in response to broader educational, societal, political, and economic issues…requiring counselors to be flexible and adaptable" (Lauterbach et al., 2018, p.1). During the Progressive Era in education (beginning in the 1890s), mental health services in schools evolved. Harvard University started training counselors with an emphasis on vocational guidance in 1911 (Blake, 2020). The vocational guidance movement focused on ensuring that graduates could acquire valuable work and positively impact society (Blake, 2020; Gysbers, 2010; Lauterbach et al., 2018; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021; Walley et al., 2009). The early portion of the twentieth century saw the evolution of many school specialists who supported student mental health needs. During the 1920s and 1930s, there was a movement to expand counselors' roles to provide strategies for emotional problems, partially as an answer to issues caused by World War 1 (Blake, 2020).

However, the profession swayed again in the late 1950s. In 2023, the school counseling profession we know evolved from this era and focused on identifying academically gifted students to prepare them for STEM careers (Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021). In 1952, ASCA was established as a division under the ACA. Until this period, school counseling work was considered a "position-service orientation…and considered ancillary to the schools' educational mission" (Lauterbach et al., 2018, p. 1). To develop a new approach to school counseling that would be framed as intentional, preventative, and programmatic, The Comprehensive Developmental Guidance Movement (CDGP) arose in the 1970s; this movement started to shift school counseling from the position-service orientation to a program orientation (Lauterbach et al., 2018). School counselors began to develop programs that served all students (Gysbers, 2010). Unfortunately, this period created much strife for the profession. During the 1970s and 1980s, administrators cut positions to save money. Declining enrollment numbers were vital, and school counselors were usually among the first to be eliminated; the school counseling profession was at risk (Beesley, 2004).

There was some optimism for mental health support in schools in the 1990s. A movement for school-based comprehensive health services was in place, and mental health was the fastest-growing section of this movement (Walley et al., 2009). The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health stated, "Children receive more services through schools than any other public system, federal, state, and local agencies and schools should fully recognize and address the mental health needs of youth in the education system" (cited by Walley et al., 2009). However, school counselors continued

to face resistance. According to the National Assembly on School-Based Health Care (2009):

> While they have become a de facto mental health system for children, schools are not universally eager to embrace a mental health agenda as part of their academic mission…schools are skittish or outright resistant about embracing mental health as a part of their mission (as cited in Walley et al., 2009, p. 5).

Another movement also emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This movement focused on standards-based education reform and accountability. Despite the CDGP movement to reframe the school counselor's role, they were predominantly overlooked in educational reform agendas (Lauterbach et al., 2018). In response to the educational reform movement, professional school counseling organizations developed policies foundational to the ASCA National Model (Gysbers, 2010).

In 1997 the Educational Trust introduced the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI). This initiative encouraged school counselors to move beyond focusing on supporting students' social-emotional development to emphasizing high academic achievement. As social change agents, the focus was for school counselors to use data in student advocacy efforts and to adopt systemic perspectives established in access and equity principles to address barriers to academic success and to close the achievement gap (Lauterbach et al., 2018)

Also, in 1997, ASCA developed The National Standards for School Counseling Programs (NSSCP). These standards listed specific competencies that emphasize what students' knowledge and abilities should be due to a standards-based comprehensive

school counseling program. The NSSCP included standards in the three focus areas: academic, personal-social, and career development. Additionally, school counselors as leaders in the reform movement were encouraged, and appropriate school counselor activities were listed (Lauterbach et al., 2018).

Various research articles and commentary continued over the next few years regarding school counselors' struggling identity and roles. To help solidify and define the identity and roles, the ASCA Governing Board decided in March 2001 that a national school counseling program model was necessary. Over the next couple of years, many in the field met to discuss and decide on the Model development, which built off the CDGP movement, TSCI, and NSSCP. In 2003, ASCA published "The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs." The ASCA National Model had its first significant revision in 2013 (3rd edition) (currently in its 4th edition- released in 2019), which streamlined and clarified language to reflect the current state of education.

Mental health professionals in the education system have continuously found a conflict between what the profession defines as the roles and expectations of counselors and what the government, society, and education system believe those to be. In 1963, the journal article by Blocher et al., "The Dilemma of Counselor Identity," highlighted what appears to be a near-identical struggle for school counselors today:

> One of the crucial problems for any emerging profession lies in its efforts to communicate itself to other related groups, and so establish some degree of professional identity. At the present time, more disagreement than agreement seems to exist among school counselors themselves regarding the professional

> self-image they hold and which they presumably wish to communicate to others…Much of the current controversy seems to center on the issue of whether the school counselor is to be some sort of general guidance worker or whether he should be a therapeutically oriented specialist. (p. 344)

Blocher et al. (1963) further described the environment and struggle school counselors were experiencing. When guidance workers entered the education system, they were often the only professionals with the training and experience related to growing knowledge of individual differences. Teachers and administrators did not understand how to apply this new knowledge in the classroom. Guidance professionals with a deeper understanding, training, and a desire to justify their presence in the schools and convert and please educational staff resulted in counselors assuming a wide range of duties that, unfortunately, detracted from the counseling function. Since the beginning, school counselors have given more energy to responsibilities outside the specialized training and services they committed.

Blocher et al. (1963) cite observations from an early leader in guidance, Anna Reed, in 1944:

> A comparison list of the functions allotted to guidance during the early period with those found in present-day lists indicates that the initial functions centered around a much more definitely defined field than do functions included today…Immediately after transfer to education a sort of hit or miss method of adding to or discarding from functions previously performed by philanthropy

> began…Guidance was an unwelcome child at birth and is still the orphan of education. (p.345)

Notably, Blocher et al. (1963) stated that "the counselor must ask to have these activities delegated to others if he is to retain his primary identity as a helper of youth" (p.346). The article explained a feeling similar to that of many school counselors today. Due to many long years of battling the conflicting expectations of the school counselors' role, many felt unprepared for the actual primary role of the counselor of youth. Instead, they had felt unappreciated and unnecessary, relegated to "a benevolent do-gooder who really has little to offer youngsters in his own right" (Blocher et al., 1963, p. 346). Sadly, as will be demonstrated in current school counselor research, these descriptions, almost 80 years ago, could practically describe the struggles of school counselors today.

School Counselors' Shift From Mental Health Support to Academic Focus

Lambie et al. (2019) highlighted the severe shift in the profession and described key pieces that impacted the roles of school counselors. In many ways, these pieces affected student support more negatively than positively. Lambie et al. (2019) discussed the growing mental health concerns among school-aged youth, a drastic escalation in school shootings, and increasing rates of students' consideration of suicide. They pointed out how the role of school counselors, per The ASCA National Model, was "insufficient to meet students' growing mental health concerns" (p. 51).

Lambie et al. (2019) emphasized the school environment as one of the most significant settings that impacted students' mental health and social and emotional growth (and was previously mentioned as common knowledge in the 1990s during the

movement for school-based comprehensive health services). Still, the evolution of the ASCA National Model created a more considerable barrier to school counselors meeting students' mental health needs. The goal of the ASCA National Model (2019b) had been to utilize data-driven practices to reduce barriers to learning and support students in their academic, career, and social and emotional growth. Unfortunately, a different shift had taken place; the primary focus was on academic success at the expense of students' mental health growth. The profession benefited from the ASCA model, especially concerning the school counselors' educator role (Zyromski et al., 2021). However, the result created tension with counselors' therapeutic skill set and unique ability to address the mental health needs of students; much of the school counselors' identity was informed by the school environment. The school counselors' data-driven practices could inadvertently be used to fulfill the administration's expectations or alignment with current political movements and miss many variables that contribute to the life success of students (Zyromski et al., 2021). The ASCA National Model (2019b) provided lists noting appropriate and inappropriate school counseling tasks. Within these tasks, ASCA identified that providing long-term counseling for students with higher needs or needing support for psychological disorders was inappropriate for school counselors (Lambie et al., 2019).

A considerable percentage of students in the US experience mental health struggles daily. Many mental health disorders develop in childhood. Recently, this has grown tremendously through the Covid pandemic, changes in brain development, the impact of social media and technology, ongoing strife within the education system and

the political environment in the US, a plethora of "isms" and oppression throughout the US, the impact of poverty, and accessibility barriers to mental health care (Barnes, 2021; Beachum & Gullo, 2020; Carrero Pinedo et al., 2022; Dupper et al., 2015; Ghandour et al., 2019; Gorski, 2019; Grace & Nelson, 2019; Guz et al., 2021; Heberle et al., 2021; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2021, Kiang et al., 2021; Maté, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2020; Pincus et al., 2021; Peterson et al., 2021; Savitz-Romer, 2021; Smith-Millman et al., 2019; Van der Kolk, 2015; Walley et al., 2009). Seventy to eighty percent of youth in need of mental health care are not receiving services, and needs are more pronounced across many marginalized populations: racially or culturally different, those living in poverty, LGBTQ+, and those with disabilities (Lambie et al., 2019).

Lambie et al. (2019) called for a re-examining of the school counselor role and a focus on a professional identity that embraced both an educational and mental health focus. As stated by Blocher et al. (1963) and again 56 years later by Lambie et al. (2019), school counselors tended to be the only educational staff with mental health training in the school setting. Additionally, school counselors are ethically called to "help decrease the disparities of unmet mental health needs of diverse student populations through increasing access and decreasing barriers" (Lambie et al., 2019, p. 53; ASCA, 2022a).

Roles and Identity: ASCA Ethical Standards, National Model and Position Statements

As noted, the identity and roles of the school counselor have been ambiguous and in constant tension for many decades. To some extent, it is to be expected that school counselors should be open to evolving roles and identities through expanding knowledge, scientific growth, and societal shifts. In response to the decades of unclear roles and

identities, ASCA developed the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2022a), The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019b), and various Position Statements (2023b) in recent years. The ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2022a) have evolved through many revisions since their adoption in 1984. Currently, the Preamble includes this description of school counselors:

> School counselors have unique qualifications and skills to implement a comprehensive school counseling program that addresses pre-K–12 students' academic, career, and social/emotional development needs. School counselors are leaders, advocates, collaborators, and consultants who create systemic change to ensure equitable educational outcomes through the school counseling program. School counselors demonstrate the belief that all students have the ability to learn by advocating for and contributing to an education system that provides optimal learning environments for all students. (p.1)

Throughout the ASCA Ethical Standards (2022a), the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (2019a), and the numerous ASCA Position Statements (2023b), the roles and responsibilities of school counselors are laid out in extensive detail. Currently (2022), ASCA has 49 Position Statements. Position Statements include *The School Counselor and Equity for All Students*, *The School Counselor and LGBTQ Youth*, *The School Counselor and Anti-Racist Practices*, and *The School Counselor and Mental Health.* Each of the Position Statements has a section called *The School Counselor's Role*, which clearly lists and explicitly defines the school counselor's role related to the Position Statement. Even though there are extensive

descriptions and expectations of the role of school counselor (which have been in place for more than two decades), and despite ongoing research, the role/identity confusion and blurriness within the profession and the education system seemingly has had little positive movement.

Decades of research had running themes regarding the role/identity confusion experienced in the school counseling environment. Extensive research findings have noted that school counselors are often overwhelmed by the counselor-to-student ratios, duties they are expected to perform that are not related to the professional school counselor training and roles defined by the profession, and school counselors are often not regarded by education staff as a professional that has extensive training and expertise outside of educational perspectives; frequently the expected roles and identity of school counselors place them in conflict between ethical expectations and the expectations of the education system (Beck et al., 2018; Blake, 2020; Brasfield et al., 2021; Fan et al., 2019; Fye et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2020; Mau et al., 2016; Pincus et al., 2021; Peterson, 2019; Walley et al., 2009; White, 2021)

Much research on school counselors' roles and identity has indirectly implicated a tremendous barrier: the education system. Unfortunately, research has not shifted to focus on potential obstacles the education system creates to the school counseling roles and identity, nor has school counseling research explored education system research to evaluate the school counselor's environment. Additionally, there is a lack of research comparing the environmental experience of counselors in clinical or private practice with the experiences of school counselors within the education system.

Often, the resolutions or recommendations that result from research regarding school counselor identity and roles have continuously focused on the responsibility of school counselors to advocate and educate about their school counselor roles and identity. Most research recommendations imply that school counselors' roles/identity struggles are due to a lack of school counselors advocating for and educating administration and staff about their roles (Ametea & Clark, 2005; Astramovich et al., 2013; Blake, 2020; Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Holman et al., 2019; Mau et al., 2016; Moyer, 2011; Pincus et al., 2021; Reiner et al., 2009). In the following commentary by Levy and Lemberber-Truelove (2021), the illusion of power and leadership is emphasized by the belief that school counselors have to advocate for their roles and, in doing so, create an identity that then allows for school counselors to lead and create systemic change:

> As leaders and advocates for systemic change, the school counselor's situatedness within education requires that we advocate for needed changes in the educational mission of the school system that produce inequities…school counselors must be able to articulate and advocate for their own professional identity…The establishment of a strong educator-counselor identity allows school counselors to adequately engage in ASCA's (2019) activities and responsibilities and equitably support student's holistic development. (p. 6)

These implications suggested that school counselors held the power to advocate for and insist on meeting their roles and identities per the profession (Field & Baker, 2004).

Recent ASCA research demonstrated troublesome issues in school counseling, especially considering what research has shown for decades and the extensive ethical and

role definitions available. In 2020, ASCA conducted a State-of-the-Profession Survey (ASCA, 2020b). Eighty-seven percent of the respondents were school counselors, 3% of respondents were building-level directors/coordinators/building supervisors, and the remaining 10 percent of the respondents held other positions and were not included in the results. A couple of aspects believed to be *Extremely Challenging/Challenging* to day-to-day school counseling, reported by over 50% of respondents, were *Managing high caseloads* (53%) and *Closing achievement gaps* (51%). This survey was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, many aspects were focused on the virtual educational environment into which the education system had been thrown. However, it is essential to note that issues reported by respondents included increased duties that were not counseling-related. *Having access to students in a virtual environment* (68%) and *Providing counseling and lessons to students in a virtual environment* (62%) were the highest reported for *Extremely Challenging/Challenging.* All respondents reported that 11.5 % of their time was spent on *Non-school-counseling tasks*. When asked about their *Perception of the school counselor role,* respondents said that the role of school counselor was understood *To a Great Extent* with the following percentages: 27% Administrators, 19% Teachers/school staff, 12% District staff, 5% School Board members, and 2% Policy and decision-makers. The results of this report suggest many potential challenges to school counseling within the education environment.

The following year, 2021, ASCA polled district directors (ASCA, 2021a). Participants were asked what they found to be *Extremely Challenging/Challenging* to school counseling within the education system. The following responses were reported by

over 50% of respondents: *Ensuring administrators understand the school counselor role* was the highest reported at 72.7%, followed by *Closing opportunity and achievement gaps* (67.4%), *Managing high caseload/number of students* (67.0%), *Being assigned inappropriate duties* (63.9%), *Addressing racism and bias through practices/pedagogy/curriculum in the school counseling program* (57.3%), *Creating systemic change in their buildings* (54.8%), and *Accessing adequate school community mental health resources for referrals to students and parents* (50%). Some answers were not included in the prior year's survey. However, we can look at some professional development interests reported in the 2020 State-of-the-Profession Report. The following data was reported for *Extremely Interested/Interested* types of professional development: 84% Mental Health, 83% Social/Emotional development, 81% Crisis/trauma/violence, 75% Diversity/equity and inclusion, 72% anti-racism practices, 72% self-injury and suicide, 65% LGBTQ issues, and 62% Advocacy. Again, another professional ASCA report conveys many challenges and barriers to ethical practices, especially in connections to multicultural and social justice focuses within the education environment.

While ongoing professional development is essential, the high response rate regarding many aspects related to mental health and ethical expectations to be a voice for students and positive social change advocates leaves some questions as to why these numbers are so high. Especially when considering the implied extensive training and education in these areas (CACREP, 2016), the clear ethical guidelines and standards for school counseling (ASCA, 2022a), not to mention the repeated implication of school counselors being "uniquely positioned." It is within these recent reports from ASCA and

commentary that more consideration of the reality of school counseling is necessary. Additionally, within these reports, what appears to be a disconnect emerges between what has been continually asserted and what reality may be.

School Counselors' "Unique" Position

Extensive school counseling research and literature have repeatedly noted that school counselors are "uniquely positioned," are in a "unique position," or are "uniquely situated" within the school system. This proposition is emphasized so often that when doing an EBSCOhost search using Walden University library, 120 articles showed in results when searching the combination of "school counseling or school counselor or professional school counselor or guidance counselor" (Subject Terms) AND "Unique Position" (All Text). Forty-five articles appeared when combining "Uniquely Positioned" (All Text). Often, there is no specific definition or explanation of what this involves or means. These phrases within research frequently imply that "unique" equates to "power or influence" that school counselors hold.

Through a deeper examination of the various articles utilizing these phrases, more understanding evolved and expanded awareness of the perceived expectations or roles of school counselors and their placement in the school system over many decades. The earliest article found with this implication was by Smaby et al. (1990), titled "School Based Community Intervention: The School Counselor as Lead Consultant for Suicide Prevention and Intervention Programs." In this earlier school counseling literature, Smaby et al. (1990) state, "School counselors are in a unique position to play a key role in initiating the creation of school-based community intervention teams because of their

daily contact with students and knowledge of the counseling and therapy principles used by other community resources (p.376)."

Then, in 1995, literature by Edwards and Foster, titled "Uniting the Family and School Systems: A Process of Empowering the School Counselor," opened their article with, "School counselors are looked to frequently by parents, by teachers, and by school administrators for help in dealing with difficulties at home and school. Such demands can be daunting, particularly when the expectations are high, or when the different systems (parents, teachers, and administrators) are in disagreement (p. 227)." From these early publications, the "unique positioning" of school counselors appeared to be a bridge between different "systems" in conjunction with their specialized training in counseling and therapy, which is not foundational to the education-system.

The early 2000s continued with the understanding that school counselors were a bridge between the numerous systems and stakeholders in students' lives. In addition, the research added more to the explanation of what "unique positioning" entailed. Porter et al. (2000) noted that school-based mental health professionals tended to be recognized as a part of the administrative hierarchy of the school. Then, Field and Baker (2004) went even further and asserted that "school counselors are in the unique and powerful position to be a student's voice when planning, consulting or negotiating with teachers, administrators, and other support staff who seek to provide a school climate in which students may be successful" (p.57). Field and Baker (2004) were cited in numerous future research. When considering the perception that school counselors were often viewed as members of the administrative hierarchy, the implication that "unique" may equate to

"power or influence" may have stemmed from this specific research or this research era. However, later research often did not explicitly emphasize the power of a school counselor as this research did, but school counselors holding power was implied going forward.

The research progressed with a growing emphasis on school counselors' training and expertise, primarily focusing on how their training allowed more opportunities to support students in more specific ways than school personnel focused solely on academics. Lambie et al. (2019) asserted that school counselors are trained in both educational systems and mental health, and this supported school counselors being "uniquely situated" (p.51), especially in meeting the growing mental health concerns of school-aged youth. Bryant and Milsom (2005) noted that school counselors' "unique" (p. 63 & 64) training provided more identification of child abuse and enabled them to work with administration and educators to improve their understanding of signs of potential abuse. Additionally, school counselors could encourage training for school staff regarding a susceptible subject.

Other research focused on specialized school counselor training aspects that placed school counselors in a "unique position." Many research articles discussed training that supported identifying mental health symptoms and understanding potential factors that impacted mental health (Beck et al., 2018; Lambie et al., 2019; Pincus et al., 2021; Shell, 2021; Walley et al., 2009; Zyromski et al., 2021). This research also pointed out that school counselors had daily access to young people and had a much higher probability of encountering youth with mental health indicators than in any other setting

(Walley et al.,2009). School counselors' training and expertise often provided an extensive understanding of resources and supports outside of the school system, essentially beyond resources solely focused on academics (Beck et al., 2018; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2021; Lambie et al., 2019; Shell, 2021; Zyromski et al., 2021).

More recent research added to the "unique positioning" in connecting the ethical expectations of advocacy in school counseling. McMahon et al. (2014) highlighted school counselors' training in leadership advocacy, collaboration skills, and the ability to think and work systemically. Social justice-focused advocacy had become necessary, and numerous school counseling literature highlighted various areas in which school counselors fit the "unique positioning." Social justice advocacy that school counselors' training supported and was expected in ethical practices included but was not limited to often being the first point of contact and support for marginalized students, being a voice and advocate for all students, especially in recognizing inequities and oppressive practices in the school system (Beck et al., 2018; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2021; Lambie et al., 2019; Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020; Mayes et al., 2021; Minton 2016; Moe et al., 2022; Moss & Singh, 2015; Shell, 2021; Zyromski et al., 2021).

Most recent research has taken another direction. While school counselors' education system and mental health training and skills contributed to the "unique positioning," there had been a growing focus on areas of school counseling that had not progressed. Questions had arisen regarding whether school counselors were meeting or able to meet the unique needs of diverse students. Emphasis focused on the historical fluctuation in the concentration and scope that had led to ongoing counselor

inconsistency and role ambiguity (Lambie et al., 2019). Emphasis was laid on modifying current practices and systems to identify and engage youth needing adequate care. Lambie et al. (2019) illustrated the increasing interest and emphasis on the necessity of understanding growing youth mental health needs. They also stressed the importance that school counselors today highlight their abilities and unique training that addresses students' mental health and educational needs.

School Counselor Obligations: Multicultural and Social Justice Advocacy

A Brief History of Multicultural Competence and Social Justice Advocacy

While many in the profession may not realize, the road to multicultural and social justice competency has been almost as long as we have seen with the struggle of school counselor identities and roles. Some early scholars from many different disciplines began illuminating outright biases and a lack of cultural responsiveness in the fields of counseling and psychology as early as the 1940s (Singh et al., 2019). The civil rights movement spurned the development of many ethically focused counseling and psychology organizations, such as the Association for Non-White Concerns (now the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development -AMCD) and the Association of Black Psychologists. These groups helped to bring attention to and advocate for cultural issues.

In 1982, a group of scholars published an article calling for systemic change in counseling, from which ten competency statements were laid out. Over the next decade, more attention was given, and a task force was created. The result was the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC)(1992), followed by articles that emphasized the

operationalization of the MCC into practice. Many criticisms and substantial resistance from colleagues mounted, including countless articles in professional journals from 1996-2004 (Singh et al., 2019). Many "asserted that counseling was culture-free and that good counseling was just good counseling" (Singh et al., 2019, citing personal correspondence with D.W. Sue). However, the MCC transformed the counseling profession through extensive scholarship and research. Despite the pushback, the MCC movement influenced the 1995 ACA Code of Ethics revision and continued to influence future revisions (Singh et al., 2019). It was not until 2003 that the American Counseling Association (not just individual divisions) endorsed the MCC (also important to note that school counseling was still a branch under ACA, and ASCA had not branched off as a separate entity).

In the following years, revisions to standards, competencies, and CACREP counselor preparation programs moved forward slowly. In the late 1990s, another task force was formed to develop counselor advocacy competencies (often called the "Social Justice Advocacy Competencies"). The competencies summoned counselors "to reduce systemic injustices that affect client well-being through individual, group and systemwide interventions" (Singh et al., 2019, p.242).). Six advocacy domains were developed, which integrated multicultural competence and organized advocacy.

In 2009, a special publication series in the *Journal of Counseling & Development* provided extensive details and elaborations regarding the ACA Advocacy Competencies. Then, in 2018, they were revised, providing more historical context and elaborating on competencies and strategies (Singh et al., 2019).

In 2015, the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) (Ratts et al., 2016) were released. These competencies create a "map" integrating multiculturalism and social justice to help counselors address injustice. Many areas could be improved and strengthened within the model. Still, Singh et al. (2019) asserted that "it is in the implementation that counselors can begin to see the power and potential they have to guide immediate and necessary social change (p. 243)."

Multicultural Competence vs. Multicultural Humility. Until recently, expectations of multicultural competence were intended to require counseling professionals to understand that ethical practices necessitated gaining knowledge about different cultural perspectives, experiences, and inequities to ensure person-centered care that reduced disparities (Lekas et al., 2020). There has been a recent movement toward *cultural humility* instead because of what *multicultural competence* implies. However, these terms will be used interchangeably in this study.

Debates have occurred that *multicultural competence* can suggest or imply a sense of mastery (Lekas et al., 2020). Additionally, the traditional implications of the concept of *multicultural competence* can also contribute to an imbalance of power, fuel stereotypes and biases, and leave the illusion that core beliefs and values are unchanged and shared by all group members. *Multicultural humility* cultivates person-centered caring and allows clients, students, or individuals to be experts in their own lives and experiences. Multicultural humility also encourages power-balanced relationships and emphasizes that learning about other cultures and experiences should be a lifelong journey, not something with an ultimate achievement goal.

School Counseling Multicultural Competence and Social Justice Advocacy.

As a group under the umbrella of the ACA, school counselors had been expected to follow the growing focus on multicultural competence and social justice advocacy. Following the first significant revision of The ASCA National Model (2013) and the movement in the Education Trust (2009) to call on school counselors to incorporate advocacy into their counseling programs, the research sought to explore where school counselors' perceptions and understanding of multicultural competence and social justice advocacy stood. Multicultural competence and social justice advocacy go hand in hand. Without a deep understanding of cultural complexities, systemic oppression and barriers, and the historical impact on marginalized groups, social justice advocacy cannot reach the depths of necessity it entails.

Social Change Advocates: Necessity of Multicultural Competence and Social Justice

Throughout the ASCA Ethical Standards (2022), school counselors have many specific requirements for their advocacy roles and responsibilities to create systemic changes. The following are examples of ethical requirements specific to school counselors' roles and responsibilities to students that involve social justice advocacy and multicultural competence:

A.1.c. Support all students and their development by actively working to eliminate systemic barriers or bias impeding student development.

A.1. d. Provide culturally responsive instruction and appraisal, and advisement to students.

A.1. e. Provide culturally responsive counseling to students in a brief context and support students and families/guardians in obtaining outside services if students need long-term clinical/ mental health counseling.

A.1.h. Respect students' and families' values, beliefs and cultural background, as well as students' sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, and exercise great care to avoid imposing personal biases, beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture or ethnicity.

A.1.j. Advocate for equitable, anti-oppressive and anti-bias policies and procedures, systems and practices, and provide effective, evidence-based and culturally sustaining interventions to address student needs.

A.1. k. Involve diverse networks of support, including but not limited to educational teams, community and tribal agencies and partners, wraparound services and vocational rehabilitation services as needed to best serve students.

A.3. a. Provide students with a culturally responsive school counseling program that promotes academic, career and social/emotional development and equitable opportunity and achievement outcomes for all students.

A.4. f. Address any inequitable systemic policies and practices related to students' postsecondary choices.

A.6. e. Refrain from referring students based solely on the school counselor's personal beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture, ethnicity, or personal worldview. School counselors maintain the highest respect for

student cultural identities and worldviews. School counselors pursue additional training and supervision when their values are discriminatory in nature (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, reproductive rights, race, religion, ability status). School counselors do not impose their values on students and/or families when making referrals to outside resources for student and/or family support.

A.10. Marginalized Populations- this section of the ASCA Ethical Standards explicitly lays out social justice advocacy and the roles of the counselor specific to various marginalized populations.

In addition to laying out ethical responsibilities to students, the next section in the ASCA Ethical Standards (2022a) lays out responsibilities to parents/guardians, the school, and the self. The following are examples of these responsibilities relating to multicultural competency and social justice advocacy.

B.1.c. Promote equity and inclusion through culturally affirming and sustaining practices honoring the diversity of families. Recognize that all parents/guardians, custodial and noncustodial, are vested with certain rights and responsibilities for their children's welfare by virtue of their role and according to law.

B.2. d. Exercise leadership to create systemic change to create a safe and supportive environment and equitable outcomes for all students.

B.2.l. Provide culturally responsive information to families to increase understanding, improve communication, promote engagement, and improve student outcomes.

B.3.f. Explore and examine implicit biases and the impact on practice and interaction with students; apply learning to program practice and development.

B.3.g. Develop knowledge and understanding of historic and systemic oppression, social justice and cultural models (e.g., multicultural counseling, anti-racism, culturally sustaining practices) to further develop skills for systemic change and equitable outcomes for all students.

B.3.k. Honor the diversity and identities of students and seek training/supervision when prejudice or biases interfere with providing comprehensive school counseling services to all pre-K–12 students. School counselors will not refuse services to students based solely on personally held beliefs/values rooted in one's religion, culture, or ethnicity. School counselors work toward a school climate that embraces diverse identities and promotes equitable outcomes in academic, career, and social/ emotional development for all students.

These examples demonstrate the necessity of understanding a wide range of cultural differences and historical understanding of inequities marginalized populations have and continue to endure.

In her 2022 2nd edition book, "School Counseling to Close Opportunity Gaps: A Social Justice and Antiracist Framework for Success," Holcomb-McCoy writes in the preface, "Why haven't school counselors disrupted their students' uneven access to opportunities? Why do we continue to need a book like this to spell out to school

counselors what they might already know? The answer is simple—disrupting racist and oppressive policies and practices embedded in our schools is not easy (p.xviii)." Holcomb-McCoy's first edition was published in 2007. In her second edition, she again emphasized the continued struggles within school counseling to make strides toward equity for all students, especially regarding dismantling the foundations of racist policies and practices within our education system.

Ibrim X. Kendi, activist and author of "How to be an Anti-Racist" (2019), notes in the Foreward to Holcomb-McCoy's book:

> School counselors must radically shift their attention from the failure of the students to the negligence of our education system to support students who are the most marginalized. School counselors can and must intervene. If they are not increasing the opportunities for all students, then we are doing a disservice. School counselors—as people who engage with multiple stakeholders, including parents, students, teachers, administrators—must take advantage of their unique positionality to support the humanity of all students and fight for equal access. (pp. xv-xvi)

Though social justice advocacy has been a concept of helping professions for decades, solidifying school counseling ethical expectations and standards is in its infancy. As defined by Ratts and Hutchins (2009) in Crook and Stenger (2015), social justice advocacy is "an approach that focuses on addressing the causes and effects of systemic oppression on the lives of students" (p. 67). Crook and Stenger (2015) futher described that another definition of social justice advocacy recognized the "persistent disparities in

academic achievement among subgroups of students…as an approach for improving overall educational outcomes for all students (p. 67).” To implement social justice advocacy, school counselors must work to resolve injustices, expand accessibility to resources and opportunities, and safeguard the non-discriminatory treatment of all students. School counselors must also understand their personal social justice advocacy beliefs and attitudes. To understand the progression of social justice advocacy in school counseling since the first edition of Holcomb-McCoy’s book, we must look at research over the past decade, especially since the adoption of the MSJCC (2015).

Bigger Picture: Truth of Multicultural Competence and Social Justice Advocacy

The U.S. educational system is one of the most oppressive and unequal in the world (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Kendi, 2019). Students in the U.S. consistently receive considerably different learning opportunities based on numerous oppressive dynamics foundational to our education system (de Brey et al., 2019; Irwin et al., 2023; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2022; Taie & Lewis, 2022a; Taie & Lewis, 2022b; The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016). Students are regularly identified in ways that create experiences of privilege or normalization, while other identities are oppressed or marginalized. Oppression includes classism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, sexism, and other “isms.” Oppression explicitly “ occurs in situations in which people are exploited, marginalized, or rendered powerless (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022, p. 31).”

Unfortunately, no matter how extensive ethical practices, position statements, and standards were defined and laid out for school counseling, research continually demonstrated that counselors struggled to create equitable school counseling programs

(Moss & Singh, 2015). Often, school counselors continue to apply "culturally inappropriate strategies and interventions that perpetuate injustice or stereotypical perspectives about students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022, p. 46)." However, suggestions were made for counselors by Brown and Perry (2011), as cited in Moss and Singh (2015):

> For counselors to address issues of race, class, gender, patriarchy, homophobia, and white privilege, it is important that they (a) work toward raising their own awareness around these issues; (b) accept responsibility for their part in the status quo conservation; (c) set an example of challenging systems of oppression; and (d) seek social justice. (p. 7).

Moss and Singh (2015) highlighted ways that counselors could become allies. They described Broido, 2000, that allies could be defined as "members of the dominant social groups (e.g., men, Whites, heterosexuals) who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based upon their social group membership (p. 9)."

The summary provided in Moss and Singh's (2015) "Future Research" section is essential to this research study. They stressed that research consistently underscored the necessity for school counselors to address inequities in the school system. However, they note that scholarship to that point did little to "address how school counselors can bring attention to inequities and emerge from traditional methods of school counseling as social justice allies (p.29)."

While the research discussed earlier focused explicitly on school counselors' multicultural competence and social justice advocacy, extensive research on

marginalization and oppression experienced by numerous groups within the education system and how it relates to school counseling paints an even bigger picture. The following studies suggest a concerning disconnect when considering ethical expectations, position statements, the ongoing implications of "unique positioning, " and implied counselor power and expertise in being a voice and an advocate for marginalized groups.

Multicultural Competence of School Counselors

Until the research of Merlin-Knowblich and Chen (2018), multicultural competence research related to school counselors had not focused on actual multicultural behaviors that would demonstrate a foundation in multicultural competence. The study primarily focused on self-reported concepts of multicultural competence. Therefore, Merlin-Knoblich and Chen (2018) examined the frequency of school counselors' perceived multicultural education behaviors. Because there had been some discrepancies in research between school counselors' actual behaviors and their perceptions of multicultural competence, this research also sought to explore potential obstacles impeding their multicultural education behaviors.

From Merlin-Knoblich and Chen's (2018) research, "five interpretable factors emerged defining school counselor multicultural education behaviors: *Classroom Guidance with Multicultural Education Emphases, Professional Development with Multicultural Education Emphases, Knowledge Construction, Human Relations,* and *Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different* (p.13)." Their results found consistencies and differences between the theory of multicultural education and the actual actions and behaviors of school counselors in their sample. Some multicultural education

behaviors were enacted occasionally, but others were rarely. *Classroom Guidance with Multicultural Education Emphases* was *occasionally* implemented. *Professional Development with Multicultural Education Emphases* was performed *rarely*. *Knowledge Construction* was *rarely* utilized; this was unforeseen and surprising as the results appeared the least aligned with the "prescribed role of school counselors" (p.16). *Human Relations* behaviors were performed *occasionally*. Finally, *Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different* was implemented *rarely*. This result also noted that while *Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different* is a construct and part of school counselor ethical practices, the approaches tended to follow assimilationist foundations and continued to ignore systemic oppression.

When participants indicated behaviors enacted as *never or rarely*, they were asked to note obstacles. The most stated obstacle across all items was *not enough time.* This response was consistent with prior research investigating school counselors' struggles to complete desired tasks. The second most remarked obstacle was *not needed.* Considering that the research focused on multicultural education behaviors, a *response that was not needed* was problematic. The implication was that multicultural education was not always required in schools. It emphasized privilege and monolithic ideology. It could be presumed that school counselor participants did not fully understand that multicultural education interventions promote more equitable opportunities for marginalized students and foster multicultural awareness for students with privilege.

Merlin-Knoblich and Chen's (2018) research was expanded by Merlin-Knoblich et al. (2020). This study sought to fill the gap by exploring how school counselors

enacted multicultural education behaviors and the potential challenges that might prevent them from acting. The results of Merlin-Knoblich et al. (2020) indicated four domains that reflected informal processes participants utilized when determining how they would implement multicultural education behaviors. The four domains were *labeled Acknowledgment of Context, Influential Intrapersonal Factors, Awareness of Others,* and *Intervention Approaches*.

For the domain of *Acknowledgement of Context*, participants noted that the context of their work environments influenced how they engaged in multicultural education behaviors. A primary focus was on school culture. If the school culture was promotive and open to multicultural education behaviors, they enacted behaviors more often. However, if the school culture was prohibitive (ex. "Unsupportive or resistant administrators, teachers or parents, and prioritizing other ideas due to limited time and resources" p. 5), the ability or willingness of school counselors to enact multicultural education behaviors was impeded.

The following two domains, *Influential Intrapersonal Factors* and *Awareness of Others* included various factors related to "internal aspects of themselves that informed whether and how they enacted multicultural education behaviors (p.5)", and consideration of students and colleagues. The results indicated that many school counselors were attuned to the multicultural needs of the students, colleagues, and themselves and the necessity of interventions. However, they often "were stifled by their own fears and/or views of their capacity (p.7)" to intervene. The final domain, *Intervention Approaches*, described the actual interventions school counselors enacted

that demonstrated multicultural education behaviors. Often, the interventions related to discrimination within their schools, and few were proactive and preventative.

Crucial implications from Merlin-Knoblich et al. (2020) not only explored how school counselors enacted multicultural education behaviors, but a more specific focus evolved, pointing to potential systemic implications regarding the embeddedness of the work of school counselors within the education system. This research also showed various aspects not considered in prior school counseling research, such as potential barriers to enacting multicultural ethical practices. Their conclusions pointed not only to the possibility that ethical expectations of multicultural competence may not exist at previously assumed levels but also that the educational environment may impede or disregard ethical counseling practices.

As described in earlier research focused on the roles and responsibilities of school counselors, ongoing implications were that ethical practices required multicultural competence, but this was an assumption that school counselors were multiculturally competent. Research had not demonstrated that school counselors were multiculturally competent leaving preparation programs. As some research explored the actual multicultural competence behaviors and actions vs. self-reported competence, another consideration surfaced: a reflection of how school counselors were educated and prepared for multicultural competence within the profession.

Dameron et al. (2020) explored this consideration in their research. They examined whether there were “significant differences among self-perceived multicultural competence of school counselors who received a single multicultural counseling course,

an infused curriculum, both a multicultural course and an infused curriculum, or no multicultural competence coursework (p. 179).” This research was essential because most counseling preparation programs before the adoption of the MCC (2003) by the ACA, the revision of the ASCA Model (2013), and the movement of the Education Trust (2009) were not training counselors with multicultural aspects and considerations. Even after the adoption, as shared previously, there were many years of push-back and debates within the profession. The CACREP Standards (2016) called for the inclusion of the MCC in counseling curricula, but individual counseling programs had the authority to interpret that as each program was individually decided. Often, the result was providing only one multicultural counseling course or, at a minimum, including MCC in standards or ethics-focused courses.

Dameron et al. (2020) found that school counselors who had received a multicultural counseling curriculum through an infusion within the entire counseling program vs. receiving a single multicultural counseling course had higher perceived skills, awareness, and knowledge. Another key result from this study showed that while there were differences based on the type of counseling preparation, school counselor participants in each multicultural competence area still demonstrated a need for further development and growth.

Another recent research study by Shi and Carey (2021) points toward the potential barriers and implications of school counseling within the education system. While their research does not focus on systemic issues, the results added to systemic considerations that are not focused on in-school counseling research. Shi and Carey (2021) explored

school counselors' multicultural competence as assessed by state licensure exams for school counselors. No prior research had explored how state licensure exams addressed school counselor MCC. This research showed that some essential aspects of MCC are assessed within State school counseling licensure exams. Some common attributes covered in state licensure exams were social advocacy, multicultural assessment and counseling, understanding racial or ethnic identity development, and understanding racism and student resistance. However, there was considerable variability across state tests, and results suggested that "despite the guidelines and positions published by ASCA (2020) and AMCD (2015), the state examinations are not based on a commonly accepted professional framework for multicultural counseling competencies (p. 86)."

Unlike clinical counseling, which requires licensure tests, not all states require school counselors to pass licensure tests for certification or licensure. While implied in this research but not explicitly noted, school counselors were usually not licensed or certified through state behavioral health boards. Predominantly, school counselors receive certification or licensure through their state education department (ASCA, 2023). Currently, 30 states and the District of Columbia require a content examination for school counselors (ASCA, 2023; Carey et al., 2019). However, based on research by Carey et al. (2019), "passing state licensure examination could not serve as evidence for school counselors' competence in either research or program evaluation (p.80)." Additionally, this demonstrated that forty percent of states do not require any content examination for school counseling licensure or certification.

Carey et al. (2021) discuss several necessary implications; however, one conclusion pointed to problematic contradictions professionally and ethically. They point out that there was "not yet a complete consensus among school counselors, school counselor educators, and state policymakers on what competencies school counselors should have to work effectively with diverse student populations (p 86)." This conclusion contradicted ethical expectations, standards, and position statements laid out and defined within numerous aspects of the school counseling profession. Furthermore, it pointed to systemic entwinement and potential barriers to ethical practices in school counseling that research had not considered. Other aspects missing from school counseling research were the differences in expectations or practices depending on the counseling setting, regardless of the training, ethical expectations, and professional guidelines.

Multicultural Competence in Counselor Education

To further examine the extent of multicultural competence training within counselor education, it is crucial to look at literature related to experiences within counselor education. Research shows marginalized counselor educators and counselors in training often have negative experiences related to biases, stereotypes, and numerous "isms" reflected in microaggressions, tokenism, and discrimination (Baggerly et al., 2017; Chan et al., 2018; Lester et al., 2021; Marasco & Astramovich, 2022; Paone et al., 2021; Seaward, 2018).

Baggerly et al., 2017, investigated the diversity change of faculty members in APA- and CACREP-accredited counseling programs. Diversity had increasingly grown in value and focus over the last 50 years in psychology/counseling and counselor

education. Counselor educators had been encouraged to be social change agents in changing the dynamics in higher education, which could be “unwelcoming to faculty members who are racially and ethnically diverse (p. 294)”.

The rationale for the study was to explore whether the focus and value of diversity were reflected in counseling/psychology and counselor education faculty members. Findings showed that there had been a drastic increase in racially/culturally diverse faculty members, but it was not without noted issues. There were differences between APA and CACREP programs. APA programs had fewer Black faculty and more Asian faculty members than CACREP programs. Additionally, APA programs had a 1:1 ratio of female-to-male faculty, unlike CACREP programs with more female faculty. It is also important to note that while this study was conducted in the last decade, the only diversity components explored were binary gender and racial/cultural diversity.

Even within the increasing diversity of counseling education faculty, some research showed diverse faculty experiences that demonstrated a lack of multicultural competence of some counseling education faculty. In 2021, Lester et al. (2021) investigated the experiences of nine Black female faculty within counselor education. They discussed prior research regarding the encounters of faculty of Color in higher education. Black female faculty were often relegated to marginalized positions, encountered racial and gender discrimination, and experienced biases and stereotyping, which frequently impacted retention and promotion. The findings highlighted the participants’ insistence that the counselor education field needed more conversations focused on race and gender politics. The participants described the hostility they

encountered and the lack of mentoring that often led to Black female faculty having to maneuver the politics of academia on their own. Also reported were that institutional policies and structures were exclusionary because they were often not in alignment with the experiences of Black female faculty. Finally, understanding the intersectionality of race and gender was also necessary because examining these identities alone could create challenges.

As shown in the previous research, considering LGBTQ+ diversity issues has also been minimal within counselor education and school counselor research. While coming out can lead to positive outcomes such as reduced self-stigma, a higher ability to cope with the prejudices they encounter, and job satisfaction, especially in inclusive work environments, there can be numerous unique challenges within the workplace and interpersonally (Marasco & Astramovich, 2022). Often, "out" faculty face anti-gay discrimination and are marginalized or tokenized by the administration or colleagues.

Therefore, Marasco and Astramovich (2022) wanted to explore the experiences of gay male-identified counselor educators who came out in counselor education settings. They maintained that the education system had traditionally been oppressive to marginalized groups. Often, legislation helped to ban LGBTQ+ people from working in education settings. While higher education may have had more flexibility, instructors, and educators have had to monitor aspects of sexuality and gender that were viewed as inappropriate. Marasco and Astramovich (2022) illustrated:

> Coming out and the construction of "the closet" perpetuate heteronormativity, as one must actively state their otherness. Additionally, coming out and "the closet

> are representative of White European male experiences, and therefore can only be narrowly applied. Although institutions of higher education advertise for, celebrate, and promote diversity, gay-identified instructors often face discrimination and homophobia. (p. 31)

Their research findings showed positive and supportive components, such as receiving professional backing, acceptance of gay identities, and having other faculty members who identified as LGBTQ+. There were "unique dynamics" that existed "between the roles of power and the responsibility of diversity" (p. 41). Participants acknowledged "the continual nature of coming out, which affect negotiations of authenticity (p. 41)." Many participants desired to train and supervise ethical and affirming counselors-in-training. Participants also noted the negative impacts of coming out in counselor education as a battle between living authentically and awareness of the potential costs personally and professionally. Overall, the participants had integrated their gay identities into their instructional practices and used their coming out to enrich their work; they felt that their living authentically counteracted any responses or experiences from others that could be potentially negative.

Multicultural competence is required for all counselors; however, research has also been sparse in considering how multicultural training might impact counseling students of Color. Seward (2018) investigated critical incidents in multicultural education that potentially generated cultural learning resistance from students of Color. One of the key findings of this research demonstrated that resistance related to safety within the training environment. When interacting with culturally ignorant or insulting peers and

faculty, students described feelings of alienation and isolation. Findings also indicated that the cultural climate or curriculum tremendously affected students of color resistance. Seward (2018) asserted that the curriculum could be marginalizing if the content and approaches to learning are oriented more toward teaching students from culturally dominant groups.

Another study that focused on the experiences of counseling students of Color was conducted by Paone et al. (2021). Prior research highlighted that students of Color might have distinct curricular needs from White students, suggested that they knew more coming into the multicultural education setting than their White counterparts, and indicated biased classroom cultures and interactions. They wanted to understand the experiences of students of Color more deeply. Findings showed that many students faced a self-imposed responsibility to educate White peers about racism and their racial traits. Additionally, many students also reported not speaking up as often, especially if encountering the biases of peers. Positive and negative feelings were described in the decisions to inform White students. The negative emotions stemmed from the student being the only person of color in that learning environment. Participants expressed a constant wavering between remaining silent or confronting the naïve or racist viewpoints of White peers. Being one of the only students of Color often forced students to correct faculty beliefs and White peers' demonstrations of racism. These situations tended to cause anger and frustration regularly for students of Color.

Social Justice Advocacy in School Counseling

The research focused on social justice advocacy in school counseling is minute. Only a few research articles in school counseling focus on social justice advocacy. More commentary is being provided, focusing on the need for social justice advocacy in school counseling and seeking further considerations (systemic implications and impact of group dominance ideologies) that may impact the pursuit of social justice advocacy (ASCA, 2021c; ASCA, 2022b; ASCA, 2022c; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2022; Roche et al., 2020).

In 2015, Crook et al. focused on social justice advocacy competence perceptions among school counselors. In 2018, Feldwisch and Whiston examined school counselors' commitments to social justice advocacy. In both research articles, school counselors were gauged by self-report measures. Findings for both research showed that, generally, school counselors perceived themselves as competent concerning social justice advocacy.

Feldwisch and Whiston (2018) extended the prior research to "ascertain whether school counselors' overall self-report of social justice work matches or contradicts scores on measures of social justice advocacy (p.168)." This research showed that school counselors who supported more significant levels of social justice advocacy in their work reported higher scores on their social justice advocacy measures. Overall, the findings in these studies were positive, but caution is warranted as both relied on self-report measures. In considering the research that has focused on multicultural competence most of the time, it was found that there has been a difference in demonstrated actions of competency vs. self-report measures.

In 2019, Cook et al. explored a professional development school's (PDS) model approach to practicum work that immersed school counselors in training in diverse fieldwork to gauge the impact on the personal growth and awareness of the counselors regarding multicultural and social justice advocacy issues. The PDS model trains the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) and provides close supervisory interaction that helps counselors in training explore privilege, diversity, and social justice. This approach also helps trainees "avoid imposing personal biases while developing a culturally informed perspective" (Cook et al. 2019). Findings showed that counselors in training described awareness of privileges and biases, their increased comfort with working with diverse students, and their advocacy for students.

From 2020-2022, more commentary implies the need to focus on systemic aspects of education and the impact on school counseling. Some also note that knowledge and understanding of group dominance or power dynamics in the system are crucial to social justice advocacy in school counseling.

In 2020, Roche et al. provided educational background and wrote about advocating for students through the *student-within-environment (ASE)* model. The ASE approach is a humanistic/ social justice theory born from Martin Heidegger's understanding of historicity. Historicity is the concept that recognizes that people are born into worlds that are projected on them with already existing cultures and environments that ultimately impact one's morals, decision-making abilities, and perceptions of the world.

In the historical background of this commentary, Roche et al. (2020) explained the historical foundation for education and academics in the United States. The American school system originated with Puritans in the 1600s. The Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647 established the pioneering concept of public schools. This act ensured that all citizens and their children could read the Bible. The Puritans wanted to ensure that their religious norms and practices were sustained through education. Unfortunately, as the history of public education evolved, many diverse, non-White, non-Puritan, non-Christian peoples were harmed, forced into boarding schools, their cultures torn from them, and many lost their lives. The purpose was to push for the norms and beliefs of affluent White Christian families. Roche et al. (2020) assert that considering historicity is necessary, as thousands of marginalized students are educated today in a system that existed before them and was built based on specific ideologies and beliefs, those of White Affluent Christian people. This commentary provides systemic considerations and a foundational understanding of the education system and the group dominance that White, prominent Christians have held since its inception.

In 2021 and 2022, three additional commentary articles emphasize the need to understand the systemic environment school counselors work within and highlight (through different theories) the existing power or dominance structures. Savitz-Romer and Nicola (2021) extensively lay out the implications of ecological systems theory on the profession of school counseling. In 2021 and 2022, Oehrtman and Dollarhide discuss the need for school counselors to learn about and understand micropolitical theory and micropolitics to be social justice advocates for students successfully.

Since social justice advocacy of school counseling research is minimal and recent articles emphasize the necessity of understanding systemic implications and group-dominance impact on social justice advocacy, more understanding of the reality of school counselors' social justice advocacy work is needed. This study hopes to open more understanding and conversation regarding this reality.

School Counseling Research: Multicultural and Social Justice Focuses

The following sections highlight the research on school counseling and its connection to various multicultural and social justice topics/issues. Considering what this study seeks, most of the following research demonstrates a disconnect between the assertions that school counselors are multiculturally competent and "uniquely positioned" to create social justice change for marginalized groups and reality. Additionally, some of the following research hints at social dominance considerations.

School Counseling Research and Race Dynamics

Understanding racial oppression and racism is necessary to advocate for and support marginalized groups within the education system. Over the decades, there has been significant research regarding racism and systemic oppression in the education system. Unfortunately, research related to school counseling is minimal. For this study, I will share some research related to school counseling since the evolution of the MSJCC. Still, the lack of school counseling research regarding different diverse groups is imperative to note.

White school counselors have dominated the profession since its inception and today continue to represent the majority of school counselors (ASCA, 2020a). In 2015,

Moss and Singh's article titled "White School Counselors Becoming Racial Justice Allies to Students of Color: A Call to the Field of School Counseling" pointed out how Whiteness and White identity development, White privilege, and lack of awareness of the impact of Eurocentric counseling theories may influence counselors' interactions with students of Color. The article also indicated that self-awareness regarding White privilege and racism was critical to creating an "empathic therapeutic alliance with racially and ethnically diverse clients" (p. 4). Additionally, White individuals often maintain the status quo through silence, "which maintains White privilege in societies that deliberately minimize discussion around racism and privilege in the school setting." (p.4). Therefore, the following research is provided to gain insight into the experiences of racially diverse students related to school counseling.

In 2016, Toomey and Storlie investigated potential associations between school counselors' multicultural self-efficacy, multicultural counseling competence, and perceptions of school environment experiences of Latino students and school counselors' interventions in bias-related incidents among Latino students. Toomey and Storlie (2016) sought to research beyond self-reports of multicultural competence. They wanted to know if multicultural competence was associated with perceptions of marginalization of student populations and intervention approaches in bias-related situations at school. The sample was racially/ethically diverse, but almost 2/3 of the sample were White respondents. Their research showed that most school counselors reported that their schools were moderately safe for Latino students. This conclusion showed a potential disconnect between school counselors' and students' perceptions, as research on the experiences of

Latino students has repeatedly shown racial discrimination and bias-related incidents. Additionally, these school counselor participants reported high multicultural competence and self-efficacy levels. The research also demonstrated that school counselors who conveyed a deeper understanding of multicultural knowledge and perceived that the school climate was more damaging for Latino students were more likely to intervene in harassment, bias-based bullying, or discrimination directed at Latino students.

Other research by Storlie and Toomey (2016) explored school counselors' perceptions of systemic barriers that affected Latino students. Storlie and Toomey (2016) discussed a variety of barriers that impact Latino students, such as language barriers and low acculturation of parents, which can contribute to negative beliefs or misunderstandings about academics in Latino lives. They also depicted various oppressive or discriminatory issues that Latinos experienced that could prevent academic success. The sample was diverse racially/culturally but also had a majority of White participants at 59.2%. Their findings demonstrated that most counselors were well aware of the multiple systemic barriers Latino students encountered in the education system. However, it was also acknowledged that this research was conducted in the U.S., with the highest Latino populations. Participants also stated that their prior schooling was critical in fostering the skills needed to work with this population, which could have been impacted by the region where school counselors were trained.

Of concern was that two of the participants did not recognize inequities or systemic barriers that Latino students experience. A few comments made by these participants were problematic. The first stated, "I understand different cultures have

different beliefs and different customs; however, all students are given the same opportunities to be successful and to have fulfilling lives and careers (Storlie & Toomey, 2016, p. 129).” The other made a statement responding to a citizenship question, “I believe it is demeaning and disrespectful to call our students by labels. If you want a label, try ‘American’ (Storlie & Toomey, 2016, p. 129).” These comments were problematic because they demonstrated that despite all the ethical requirements, position statements, and expectations of school counselors to advocate for equity in education, not all school counselors appear to have the level of training or multicultural competence necessary in the profession.

Since there is minimal research in school counseling regarding racial issues related to student experiences, the following is research connected to barriers and challenges for Asian American communities that have implications for school counseling. Shen (2016) noted that there was “a serious gap in empirical research into Asian American students’ counseling concerns in PK-12 settings (p. 4).” At the time of Shen’s (2016) research, only one publication, Yeh, 2001, a 15-year-old, local New York inquiry, had explored school counselors’ perceptions and experiences with Asian American students. Therefore, to build on Yeh’s (2001) research, Shen (2016) focused mainly on externally demonstrated concerns of Asian American students and the challenges they presented to school counselors. In this research, “concerns” were those expressed by Asian students to counselors and counseling concerns about students. Two groups were formed, with Group 1 having little counseling experience with Asian

Americans, and Group 2 was comprised of counselors who worked in schools with a high percentage of Asian American students.

Shen's (2016) "results reveal Asian American students' counseling concerns and challenges for school counselors. Four issues were found as counseling concerns: (1) *expectations and pressures*, (2) *language and cultural barriers*, (3) *counseling barriers*, and (4) *logistical needs*, ranked from most to least frequently encountered (p.12)." All of these issues *somewhat* challenged both groups. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, this research implied that most counselors perceived themselves as *somewhat* competent in counseling Asian Americans, even if they had little contact with Asian American students. *Overcoming counseling barriers* was reported by both groups of counselors. The main findings of Shen (2016) demonstrated positive associations for Group 1 between "challenge level and counselors' (a) workshop training or (b) Asian American practical experience….Group 2 showed a negative association (the expected result) between challenge level and counselors' field-experience training. Challenge level was also associated with their ethnicity and school location; school location was further related to the frequency of students' logistical needs (p.12)."

Critical to this research study, *expectations and pressures* continually surpassed all of the other challenges for both groups of counselors in Shen's (2016) research. While the literature often discusses the expectations and pressures Asian American students experience from their families and self-aspirations, this research also considers social concerns and pressures. In America, the social circumstances and stresses can be linked to the model minority myth, racism, and anti-Asian discrimination. Forty to forty-one

percent of the counselors surveyed in both groups felt greatly challenged by this issue. This result implied the possibility that school counselors are not as multiculturally competent as they believe themselves to be or that training and approaches are still lacking in helping to reach Asian American students in the school counseling realms.

In another study conducted in response to numerous research that reported that Asian Americans (AA) tend to under-utilize counseling services, Kim et al. (2021) explored the factors that may influence Asian Americans seeking assistance from school counselors. Kim et al. (2021) explained one potential factor important to this study:

> Among AA students, underutilization of counseling services may stem from the model minority stereotype, that is, a belief that all Asian Americans excel in academic, social, and career areas relative to other minority ethnic groups. Moreover, this stereotype is a tool that helps maintain White supremacy, blaming AA students' failures on themselves or their family; in doing so, there is a failure to place accountability for structural racism on factors in education settings that contribute to children's academic failure. It is not surprising then that AA students who internalize the model minority stereotype may feel a sense of shame or embarrassment, which prevent them from seeking counselors for help. (p. 18-19)

Kim et al.'s (2021) research aimed to draw attention to the combination of social-demographic characteristics and the level of risk that AA students encounter, which could influence their seeking contact with the school counselor. This study's social-demographic characteristics were associated with immigration, English proficiency, ethnicity, first-generation status, and family income. Level of risk was described as the

"possibility for or likelihood of academic failure and dropping out of school due to the presence of systemic factors that affect their academic achievement" (Kim et al., 2021, p. 20).

The study described various factors in which AAs were more likely to meet with school counselors, such as recent immigration (which Kim et al., 2021 found thought-provoking), first-generation status, and economically disadvantaged AAs. Kim et al. (2021) found that "the level of risk faced by students was the most salient factor affecting students' help-seeking behaviors in schools (p. 31)." They also found that AA students who are academically struggling might wait until the last minute to seek help. They concluded that this behavior might result from the model minority stereotype, which, if internalized, can create more shame for students experiencing academic challenges.

In the implications of this study, Kim et al.(2021) stated that "the findings highlight the need for school counselors to develop culturally responsive strategies to serve as empowering institutional agents of change for AA students who are academically struggling, those who might be "invisible" or "forgotten" (p. 33-34)." They also mentioned that school counselors must explore nontraditional outreach, culturally responsive services, and their perceptions, biases, and values concerning AA students and their families.

While also minimal, more research focuses on school counseling and the experiences of African American/Black students. Shure et al. (2019) sought to add understanding to the "persistent underachievement and disproportionality in special education among low-income, African American students" (p.454). Prior investigations

demonstrated that teacher bias contributed to the unequal proportions of African-American students in special education. Additionally, previous studies inferred that some biases might relate to misinterpretations of student behaviors by not considering culturally appropriate behaviors.

Extensive research has focused on the Eurocentric and individualistic foundation of the U.S. education system (Shure et al., 2019). This comprehensive research suggested that "educators may misinterpret African-centered behaviors and communication styles because they fall outside of the Eurocentric norms" (p. 456). Shure et al. (2019) also pointed to studies that explicitly demonstrated that White teachers often reported African American students as having more externalizing behaviors and as less scholastically capable than White students.

Shure et al. (2019) understood the school counselors' responsibility to advocate for educational equity. Still, they were aware of research that pointed to the possibility that "school counselors may lack sufficient multicultural counseling competence" (p. 454). Therefore, Shure et al. (2019) examined the probability of school counselors recommending students for remedial or advanced education options based on cultural behavior styles. Their findings showed that school counselors "may also hold biases regarding culturally influenced behaviors that influence their recommendations of African American students for remedial special education placement (p.460)." However, an unexpected finding (opposite teacher research findings) was that school counselors were likelier to recommend students for behavior remediation who demonstrated individualistic behaviors than students who displayed collective behaviors. In response to

their research findings, Shure et al. (2019) suggested that school counselors in training needed more extensive training regarding Multicultural Counseling Competence.

The following two research studies focused on gaining perspectives on Black students' experiences with school counselors. Harris et al. (2021) explored the interactions between school counselors and Black male student-athletes. Mayes et al.(2021) focused on how Black female students' experiences regarding school counselors were described.

Harris et al. (2021) interviewed nine Black male participants who were current or former student-athletes. Three themes emerged in examining what components shaped the interactions of Black male student-athletes with their school counselors. The three themes were 1) *perception of the school counselor's role,* 2) *village of support,* and 3) *prior encounters with school counselors.* All participants shared a narrow view of school counselors. Many feared judgment or stigmas associated with meeting with a school counselor. One participant mentioned that there was a taboo that school counselors were only there for students who had emotional or behavioral issues. Another participant conveyed that the race of the school counselor was important and impacted perceived power dynamics. If there were Black staff members in the school that the Black students considered as trusting and part of "their village," they often would seek out these people instead of the school counselor (when the school counselor was White). Prior encounters with school counselors also tended to impact students' perceptions of school counselors. Often, the Black student-athletes did not feel their counselor knew how to support and guide them. Overall, the implications of this research demonstrated that school

counselors needed more intensive training to advocate for their role and better serve Black male student-athletes' unique needs.

Mayes et al. (2021) interviewed 10 Black women in the first semester of their first year of college. The study sought to gain insight into Black girls' perceptions of their interactions with their high school counselors and explore what participants felt Black girls needed from school counselors to support their success. The findings in this research implicate that school counselors are unwilling or unable to support Black girls holistically. Participants felt that outside of failing grades, school counselors typically did not initiate contact with them. Those who had positive relationships with their school counselor noted that it was due to their desire and initiative to "get their needs met" (p.141). Overall, most participants described limited experiences with school counselors and reported school counselors' approaches as disjointed, reactive, and primarily focused on scheduling or preventing academic failure. Four participants specifically relayed negative interactions, including the sense that once students were not at risk of failure, they fell off the school counselor's radar or counselors lacked academic monitoring. Many participants were discouraged by their experiences related to educational planning, and some felt "that if students weren't failing, school counselors essentially 'didn't even care.' (p. 144)." All participants reported no interactions with school counselors regarding their social/emotional development, including mental health considerations. One conclusion Mayes et al. (2021) drew was:

> Participants' interactions with school counselors seem to suggest that school counselors viewed failure as almost imminent and something to plan for and

> address rather than supporting each participant in achieving their potential and being better prepared for life after high school. (p. 143)

Overall, the participants perceived that school counselors did not view their emotional experiences or humanity as necessary to their schooling. Additionally, they did not feel that the school counselors established emotional connections with them nor created a safe space that allowed them to be fully present.

School Counseling Research and LGBTQ+

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature and research on LGBTQIA+ and school counseling. ASCA has put out numerous position statements regarding this student population, describing the expectations of school counselor roles and advocacy required (ASCA, 2023b). Additionally, commentary articles such as Simons et al. (2018) noted the growing need for more research on LGBTQIA+ students and school counseling. They recognized challenges across different states and school districts and wrote recommendations for school counselors as a resource in validating and advocating for transgender, intersex, and genderqueer (TIG) students.

School counselors are often the first line of potential support for these students. The public education system is "one of the few institutions that almost all students identifying as LGBT must attend" (Shi & Doud, 2017, p. 5). School counselors are trained and expected to advocate for safe and equitable learning environments. Research often highlights that LGBTQ populations face different struggles than other minority groups (Shi & Doud, 2017). Sexual and gender minority youth are frequently the only groups "where the general population may use religious beliefs to substantiate prejudice,

discrimination, and intolerance" (Shi & Doud, 2017, p. 2). Additionally, unlike racial and ethnic minority groups, where the family can be a positive and influential resource, sexual and gender minority students often do not have the same level of family support (Shi & Doud, 2017). The following research touches on various essential considerations, from the competency and attitudes of counselors to advocacy regarding working with these populations.

In 2017, Shi and Doud examined school counselors' competency in working with LGBT students. The research questions focused on the perceived competency level school counselors self-reported and whether certain demographic variables significantly correlated to the perceived competency level. Not surprisingly but concerning, results showed that school counselors' self-perceived competency level was low in working with LGBT youth. In addition, deeply disturbing were the descriptive items that examined the school counselors' essential beliefs about LGBT populations. Shi & Doud (2017) firmly remarked:

> It is difficult to imagine the school counselors who believed "the lifestyle of an LGBT student is immoral" or "homosexuality is a mental disorder or a sin and can be treated through counseling or spiritual help" could be effective in helping this student population who are struggling to come to terms with their sexual orientation and sexual identity. (p. 10)

Results also showed that school counselors' sexual orientation, post-master training experiences, and the location they resided in significantly related to self-perceived competency level working with LGBT student populations. Implications pointed to a lack

of multicultural competence regarding LGBT student populations, a potential deficiency in seeking post-master professional development, and an absence of ongoing personal examination of biases and beliefs that impact their work as school counselors.

Kanamori and Cornelius-White (2017) also explored a similar direction by focusing on counselor and counseling students' attitudes toward transgender people. Additionally, they investigated factors related to the attitudes of transgender people. Their results showed that counselors and counselors-in-training reported having highly positive attitudes toward transgender people. Other key findings demonstrated that being female, having more personal familiarity, and having multicultural competence were associated with more positive attitudes. Diversity training was not significantly correlated with positive attitudes and more negative attitudes related to professional experiences. Kanamori and Cornelius-White's (2017) discussion stated that their research findings regarding diversity training corroborated previous findings of Willoughby et al.(2010), which concluded that "coursework on multicultural counseling does not have an impact on counselors' attitudes toward persons who are transgender (p. 47)."

Also, in 2017, Simons et al.'s research explored school counselor advocacy for LBG students. This research utilized the lens of The Theory of Planned Behavior (TBP), which "posits that one's beliefs, self-efficacy, thoughts about others, and intention to enact behavior relate to actual outcome behavior (p.30)." TBP was applied by examining 1) attitudes toward LGB persons, 2) advocacy self-efficacy, 3) motivation to comply, and 4) LGB advocacy intention. They also gauged whether these variables would be predictors of LGB advocacy and whether there was a relationship between these variables

and the level of implementation of the ASCA National Model. Findings demonstrated that most TBP variables influenced the school advocacy activity levels of school counselors for LGB students. Implications of this research highlighted that training school counselors for general advocacy and LGBT-specific advocacy helped counselors to "challenge the status quo and that which keeps inequitable power in place to the deficit of sexual minorities (p. 34)." Additionally, school counselors with more favorable views toward LGB people may be more likely to be knowledgeable of or perform more direct LGB advocacy activities.

In 2019, another exploration into the competency of school mental health professionals working with LGBTQ youth was conducted by Smith-Millman et al. (2019). This study included school psychologists, counselors, and social workers. Significant to this study, they also examined "potential biases and barriers that may limit their ability to offer quality mental health support to this population (p. 381)." Citing Kosciw et al. (2016), Smith-Millman et al. (2019) shared that supportive school staff correlated with numerous benefits for LGBTQ students, such as increased academic achievement, feeling safer, better attendance, higher educational goals, and feeling more belonging in the school setting. Also reported was that despite the clear guidelines and ethical requirements for all school mental health professionals, prior research had shown that mental health professionals in schools often held biases against LGBTQ students.

In their results, central components from Smith-Millman et al. (2019) shared that providers with personal experience working with LGBTQ students had more positive attitudes than those who did not have experience. Those providers with a more acute

awareness of the risks LGBTQ students faced understood the possibility of more barriers to providing services, specifically potential pushback from administrators, parents, and the surrounding community. A significant predictor of having less bias, more experience working with, and understanding the risks of LGBTQ students was having an LGBTQ-identified friend. Interestingly, but necessary to recognize, professionals with LGBTQ identity sensed more barriers to working with this population. Some of the described barriers included personal experiences in school and community environments that were cruel and not supportive and anticipated backlash from stakeholders in the school climate. Race and school level predicted bias scores. Non-white participants and professionals who worked in secondary schools (middle and high school) reported more bias toward LGBTQ people.

School Counseling Research and Disability

Again, the research is limited regarding school counseling perceptions or support of students with disabilities. However, Bialka and Havlik (2020) conducted one recent study that explored school counselors' experiences with disability awareness and advocacy. According to ASCA (2016), school counselors are expected to be advocates for students with disabilities. Unfortunately, prior research has shown that school counselors are ill-prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Bialka & Havlik, 2020). Often, the strategies and interventions that school counselors received in their training focused more on changing or modifying the social behaviors of students with disabilities rather than on how to change the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of

non-disabled students about their peers with disabilities. Bialka and Havlik (2020) expressed:

> Research has indicated that students with disabilities experience higher rates of depression, conduct disorders, low self-esteem, substance use, bullying, and fewer friendships than their non-disabled peers, often because of negative attitudes and misconceptions that their nondisabled peers hold toward disability. (p.7-8)

In their research, Bialka and Havlik (2020) explored how elementary and middle school counselors apply social justice advocacy by implementing disability-related programming. Secondly, they also sought to learn what challenges the school counselors encounter when implementing the programming. Bialka and Havlik (2020) found that overall, most school counselor participants reactively applied disability awareness programming instead of a proactive approach. In addition, the participants' work was not extended to advocating in a broad systemic way. Their interventions were focused at the student level. School counselors should be proactive in systemic and policy change. Still, the participants said they did not feel sufficiently prepared in their training programs to do the more comprehensive systemic work.

School Counseling Research and Poverty

As of 2018, data showed that one in five children lived below the poverty line (Kitchens et al., 2020). Childhood poverty has been connected to a wide range of student consequences, with one of the most significant challenges being academic failure (Kitchens et al., 2020; Monoghan et al., 2020; Ricks et al., 2020). Students living in poverty during childhood are ten times more likely to drop out than those in higher-

income families. School counselors are expected to advocate for and promote equity in education. Therefore, school counselors should work closely with students living in poverty and persistently advocate for support and systemic change surrounding issues of poverty.

In 2014, in response to prior research showing that educators had "negatively biased perceptions towards low-income families (p. 5)", Cole & Grothaus investigated the perceptions of urban school counselors about their families, especially low-income families. The research results were disconcerting. Despite school counselors' awareness of the challenges and barriers low-income families face, school counselors reported numerous negative perceptions of low-income families that echoed the prior research on educator perceptions. School counselors believed families lacked the knowledge to help their child succeed, lacked positive parenting skills and or motivation, seemed not to hold education as a priority, nor seemed willing to participate in and support their child's education. A few participants mentioned their desire to help these families and potentially use community partnerships to assist them. However, even in those responses, counselors focused on families already willing to participate. They did not mention how they would reach out to or actively engage families not previously involved.

Two studies in 2020 explored school counselors' and counselors '-in-training self-efficacy levels related to their attitudes and attributes toward poverty. Ricks et al. (2020) focused their research on practicing school counselors, while Kitchens et al. (2020) focused their research on counselors-in-training. Both studies found that currently practicing counselors and counselor-in-training participants were likely to hold beliefs

emphasizing poverty as stemming more from personal deficient attitudes than societal barriers. Many comments in both studies demonstrated ideology, such as if people work harder, they could escape poverty, or implying that those in poverty must be satisfied with their living situations or they would work more to get out of their situation. The findings are troublesome as they suggested negative biases toward poverty. Key assertions blamed individuals for their living conditions and were connected to beliefs about "laziness and an anti-work mentality (Kitchens et al., 2020, p. 42)."

School Counseling Research: Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality is relatively new. Kimberlé Crenshaw described her advanced concept in her 2016 TED talk "The Urgency of Intersectionality" (Hays, 2022). Intersectionality is described in a significant text for counselors-in-training by Courtland Lee, titled "Multicultural Issues in Counseling (2019)." Lee (2019) illustrates:

> Intersectionality refers to the convergence and interactions of the multiple dimensions that make up cultural identity, which, in turn, have an effect on an individual's personality and worldview (Crenshaw, 1989; Jordan-Zachery, 2007; McCall, 2005). According to this perspective, to fully understand an individual's cultural identity and its corresponding development, it is crucial to consider that each personality dimension is inextricably linked with all other dimensions. Rather than looking at cultural identity solely through the lens of a single cultural dimension, it is necessary to understand the multidimensionality of identity, which, in turn, will offer a fuller understanding of personality (Hipolito-Delgado, 2009; Jones & McEwen, 2000; McCall, 2005; Robinson, 1999). (p.24)

Western ideology has typically labeled people into categories, but often, the intersectionality of identity was not considered and has caused deeper issues (Hays, 2022; Lee, 2019). More recent research is focused on the intersectionality of identity. Counselors must understand how intersectionality impacts students and creates more challenges and barriers, especially if students have multiple marginalized identities. The following articles are a few research studies focused on the intersectionality of identity and school counseling considerations.

Craig et al. (2018) researched the needs of primarily Hispanic and African American lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students. Prior research had demonstrated that the school experiences of LGBT students were often difficult due to discrimination, hostile and unsafe environments, and a lack of support. “School-based victimization is linked to health and psychological problems for LGBT students, including depression, anxiety, substance use, traumatic stress, isolation, and suicidality (p. 231).” Research prior had not focused on the intersectionality of LGBT with other “individual-level factors (for example, race and gender) and community-level factors (for example, geography, and urbanicity) (p. 232)”, which could have created even more significant risks for students with these intersectionalities. Therefore, Craig et al. (2018) sought to gain insight into the needs of students with multiple marginalizations to help inform school support staff in helping meet the unique needs of these students.

Craig et al. (2018) found emerging themes related to safety concerns. Students wanted to be protected from physical and verbal abuse within the schools and their homes. Students also desired affirming spaces that allowed them the freedom to strive for

academic success, build harmonious social relationships, and receive unconditional love. Craig et al. (2018) explained:

> Students explicitly expressed needs for safe housing, freedom from violence and harassment in school, inclusivity and belonging in school, safe school-based adults, and LGBT-affirming resources aimed at developing family support. (p. 234)

While there were positive findings regarding school counselor support for these students, such as providing office space for them to meet or supporting students struggling with discrimination, many negatives were still mentioned. One specific note was that "groups had to be squeezed into the small offices of counselors, with students often sitting on desks and floors, reflecting the lack of space dedicated to LGBT services within the school settings (Craig et al., 2018, 236)".

Overall, the research of Craig et al. (2018) emphasized the unmet emotional and physical safety needs of LGBT students with multiple marginalized identities. Implications for school counselors were to understand their responsibility to be "safe adults" for these populations in schools, the numerous unmet needs, and the need for advocacy and support for these student populations.

Another investigation of intersectionality was conducted by Shell (2020). This research recognized the disproportionality of African Americans in special education. Shell (2020) wanted to gain insight into school counselors' experiences working with these students and their perception of disproportionality. ASCA (2016) defined a position statement describing the roles and responsibilities of school counselors when working

with students with disabilities. Shell (2020) states, “Students with learning challenges, especially African American students, often require the benefits of school counselor advocacy to prevent erroneous special education placement, identification, or disproportionality in special education (p. 85).”

Shell’s (2020) findings reflected that school counselors strived to provide services for all students but admitted to challenges in providing services to African American students with disabilities, in special education, or at risk of being inappropriately placed. The participants defined challenges as tensions with special education educators and “time constraints, duties assigned by their administrators, and their caseload sizes “ (p. 90).” Findings also pointed to school counselors not being prepared or adequately trained to intervene or advocate for students who may have been inappropriately placed in special education or those at risk for referrals.

Summary: What This Research Conveys

Comparing the earlier research focused on school counselors’ unique training, positioning, and implied multicultural competence with the studies concentrated on multicultural competence actions and perspectives related to various marginalized groups and issues, there appear to be major inconsistencies, if not a significant disconnect. A disconnect is understandable because, generally, most research has been more “tunnel-vision” and focused so narrowly that the “big picture” has been left. This study seeks to broaden the picture and understand the complexities and connections that impact the school counselors’ ethical practices of social justice and multicultural advocacy.

Systemic Considerations

Now, with the foundational theories explained, it is essential to provide insight into systemic and group-dominated aspects shown in recent research that might influence and affect the ethical practices of school counselors.

Perception of the School Counselors Through the Eyes of the Education Staff

A small amount of school counselor research has sought to understand how educational administration and teachers perceived the roles and responsibilities of school counselors. The literature is minimal but provides insight into systemic perceptions of school counseling and the impact of the system on school counseling activities and roles. It is imperative to understand that administrators typically are primary decision-makers and hold the most power on a school campus (Chata & Loesch, 2007). Teachers make up most of the educational staff (NCES, 2021). School counselors comprise less than 2% of the education system (NCES, 2019). Since assertions have been made implying a level of power and respect school counselors hold, it is necessary to review research about the perceptions of school counseling from those who dominate most of the education system.

Research Regarding Administrators' Perceptions of School Counseling. An early research study seeking to understand principals' conceptions of the school counselor role was conducted by Amatea and Clark (2005). This study was significant because the ASCA National Standards and the ASCA National Model had been developed in the prior six years. Additionally, researchers previously noted that role conceptions of school counselors as leaders within school counseling literature were not evident in school administration literature. Amatea and Clark (2005) found that:

> This group of school administrators had four distinctively different preferences for the school counselor role. Interestingly, these differing role conceptions parallel the conceptions of the counselor role inherent in the school guidance and counseling program models advocated historically by members of our field. (p.24)

However, the most present-day grouping of the innovative school leadership role, emphasized in the ASCA National Model (2003), was least described by administrators in the study. Amatea and Clark (2005) also concluded that administrators preferred counselors to function in a more traditional role despite the ongoing discussions and the evolving role of the school counselor. The suggestions that stemmed from their finding were that there was an apparent need for a more cognizant development of counselor role expectations and leadership skills within counselor education programs and by counselors themselves.

Chata & Loesch (2007) took the next step in evaluating future school principals' perceptions regarding school counselors' roles. They noted that for school counselors to fulfill appropriate roles and functions, per the ASCA National Model, school counselors, and principals needed to have an effective and collaborative relationship. The necessity was based on principals having the authority to influence the school environment, and what they value most would affect their behavior and decisions. "Basically, school principals control whether school counselors can perform the roles and functions advocated by ASCA (Chata & Loesch, 2007, p. 35)." The findings of this research were surprising and positive in a couple of ways. The most significant aspect of this topic was that principals in training could differentiate appropriate and inappropriate activities

related to the ASCA National Model. This result was surprising because active school principals in prior research could not distinguish. Chata & Loesch (2007) recommended that school counselors emphasize the roles and functions of a school counselor to their principals. They also stressed the importance of clearly differentiating and stressing the different domains of their work: academic, career, and psychosocial development.

The research of Blake (2020), thirteen years later, demonstrated similar issues to those of years before. One favorable implication was the movement toward evaluating the organizational structuring of school counselors within a high school setting that contributed to role confusion and ambiguity. Administrators, school counseling personnel, and counselor educators were interviewed and observed. A large amount of the findings of the research were similar to decades of prior research. However, a significant statement by Blake (2020) implied a needed change of direction in research that prior research did not appear to suggest. Blake (2020) stated, "Previous research suggests role ambiguity and role conflict for school counselors are endemic to the education system as a whole" (p. 327) and suggested that considering the education system as a whole needed further research beyond one specific district.

Lane et al. (2020) performed a research study involving over 500 building administrators in Kansas regarding their perceptions of the role of school counselors. This study acknowledged the ongoing issues of school leadership and school counselors' differing understanding of the role and duties of school counselors. Additionally, emphasis was made on the impact of administrators on school counseling:

> By virtue of their leadership role and authority, school principals impact and often largely determine, the role of school counselors in their buildings by assigning counselors' direction, duties and tasks, and time priorities…Administrator perceptions thus appear to play a significant factor in determining how counselors spend their time. (p. 3)

Some of the most concerning yet telling results were that over 3/4 of administrators were *not very familiar or not at all familiar with* the ASCA National Model and the Kansas Comprehensive School Counseling Program. Additionally, over half of the administrators were *not very familiar or not at all familiar with* The Kansas Curricular Standards for School Counseling. Implications were similar to prior research emphasizing school counselors' necessity of advocating and educating about their roles. Unlike earlier research, however, further suggestions were made regarding principal preparation programs and professional development for principals regarding the roles and responsibilities of school counselors per the ASCA National Model and definitions of the profession.

In November 2022, ASCA developed a survey for school and district administrators. The survey was "about their familiarity with the ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling, and other issues (ASCA, 2023a, p.3)." The survey had 1,630 responses, representing all 50 states and 2 U.S. territories and 12 respondents that were based internationally. Sixty-three percent, close to 2/3s of respondents, said they understood "to *a great extent* that school counselors are certified/licensed educators who support students' academic success, career development and social/emotional

development through comprehensive school counseling programs (ASCA, 2023a, p. 6).” When asked about the appropriate and inappropriate duties of school counselors, many respondents reported a significant amount of responsibilities fulfilled by school counselors that are out of the scope of practice, i.e., coordinating 504 plans, building master schedules, and coordinating state testing. Less than 10% of respondents were *extremely familiar* with ASCA Ethical Standards, Professional Standards & Competencies, and Student Standards. Approximately 30% of respondents were *familiar*, but over 30% were only *somewhat familiar.*

Interestingly, and somewhat concerning, is that nowhere in the report or the questions mention multicultural competence or social justice advocacy related to the school counselor roles. *Equity gaps* were mentioned but without specifics as to what those gaps may entail.

Research Regarding Teachers’ Perceptions of School Counseling. Like the research on principals’ perceptions of school counseling, in 2004, two studies focused on teachers’ perceptions of school counseling: Beesley (2004) and Clark & Amatea (2004). These research studies followed the now-established ASCA National Model (2003) during the increased standards-based academic focus and the increasing push for professional accountability.

Beesley (2004) investigated teachers’ perceptions of school counseling; this research focused on surveying teachers across the southwestern United States about their perceptions of school counselor effectiveness and strengths of school counseling. The

stance of Beesley (2004) was that teachers need to collaborate with school counselors for school counselors to support all students effectively.

Beesley's (2004) belief and results declared that "teachers are in a primary position to provide accurate and meaningful feedback on the effectiveness of counseling services" (p.266). Results also demonstrated that teachers were satisfied with school counseling services and reported strengths connected to school counselors providing services such as "classroom guidance, individual and group counseling, consultation, and coordination of special education services" (p. 266). Teachers, however, also felt improvement was needed in several specified service areas, "including career counseling, academic planning/college preparation, community referrals, and public relations (p. 266)."

While this section focuses on teachers' perceptions of school counseling, Beesley's (2004) research results demonstrate more profound implications. The first is that it is implied that teachers could provide "accurate feedback" regarding school counseling. However, teachers are typically not trained as school counselors. Up to the point of this research, it has been demonstrated that school counselors have endured decades of role ambiguity and constant shifts within their work, often determined by forces outside the school counseling profession. This research points to educators' continual critiques and the sought approval regarding school counseling; emphasis appears to support that the school counseling profession is nearly always defined by others within the education system, not by the profession.

Additionally, one highlight Beesley (2004) noted was that the research results were essential to inform counselor education programs since most school counselor educators had never practiced as school counselors. This highlight is critical, as most school counseling literature has not often pointed directly to this vital aspect, and it should be explored as to whether there has been a change in the profession in the last two decades.

The research of Clark and Amatea (2004) examined the perceptions of 23 K12 teachers about "necessary counseling and guidance services, how these services might be best delivered, and teachers' expectations about the school counselor contributions and working relationship (p. 132)." Clark and Amatea (2004) noted that teachers at that time often dealt with students struggling with personal and social problems that created barriers to their academic success. Still, literature was lacking from teachers' perspectives, which were considered imperative since they spent the most time with students. Results demonstrated that many teachers felt that counselor-teacher communication, collaboration, and teamwork were necessary. Many teachers noted the value of direct services such as small-group/large-group guidance and classroom guidance sessions. One of the areas most discussed by teachers was students with special needs. Teachers felt that the school counselor should be somewhat of a referral agent, providing students with special needs with resources and outside referrals.

Their research found some concerning aspects that had been echoed decades before and in the current research decades later. Most teachers did not understand the school counselor's role and contributions, and many believed that school counselors were

support staff to help them support students. Many felt that the increasing social and emotional issues and the growing diversity of students were intense. Teachers felt administrators and counselors needed to help teachers with ever-increasing expectations and needs.

Clark and Amatea (2004) also included in their article reflections from the interviewers, who were counselors in training. Some noteworthy comments and perspectives were connected to ongoing issues in the school counseling profession. Over half of the interviewers felt that teachers needed to know more about the roles of school counselors. Furthermore, like the running theme in many research articles, the interviewers felt teachers needed to be educated about school counseling roles. Some noted that teachers did not view the counseling process as being important. One statement made by one of the interviewers is still profound today and continues to highlight what may be the actual positioning of school counselors in the school system:

> I never understood that counselors were seen as subsidiary to teachers. It bothers me that counselors offer so much and go through such extensive training to be seen merely as subordinates. In my interview, I realized that the teacher appreciated counselors for what they did but saw them as simply "support staff." (p. 137)

Building more on the few prior research studies of teacher perceptions, Reiner et al. (2009) researched to explore whether teachers supported the ASCA definition of the role of school counselors and to assess teachers' perception regarding the school counselors' use of their time. Positive results showed that the mean teacher responses fell

between agree and strongly agree for 13 of the 16 *appropriate* responsibilities for school counselors. Twelve items were *inappropriate* activities for school counselors. For 5 out of the 12 *inappropriate* items, teachers agreed that school counselors should have been engaged. The results demonstrated that teachers aligned with the ASCA National Model suggestions for many *appropriate* activities but also expected school counselors to perform many inappropriate activities for professional school counseling. Teachers felt administrators and counselors needed to help teachers with ever-increasing expectations and needs.

Cholewa et al. (2016) posited that school counselors, through consultation, assist teacher-student interactions and classroom management by using problem-solving, communication, and behavior management skills and understanding students' social and emotional issues. Additionally, in the consultation process, school counselors can affect all students in the teacher's classes by equipping the teachers with new skills. Cholewa et al. (2016) also discussed prior research that reported that school counselors consulted very often and, in many cases, felt very confident in their consulting skills.

This research demonstrated that, generally, the participants found value in counselor-teacher relationships and asserted that the lack of these efforts might have adverse outcomes. Participants also emphasized that counselors must establish strong relationships with students and be available. Findings also expressed that teachers' engagement in the consultation was encouraged when school counselors were available and visible, offered services and education, equipped teachers, and followed up and followed through. Interestingly, when considering the described move from expert

consulting to collaborative consulting within school counseling, teachers acknowledged that school counselors had a unique skill set that most teachers did not possess. Teachers shared that seeking consultation with the school counselor is often related to the unique skill set of the school counselor. Another curious result of this research was that most teachers would not typically consult with school counselors about academic concerns.

Like many others before, the implications this research emphasized was the necessity of school counselors to educate stakeholders about their roles and services. Various possibilities and resources were shared regarding how school counselors could implement this education. Additionally, implications regarding counselor education focused on potentially educating counselors in training on establishing solid relationships with stakeholders and promoting school counseling services, most specifically, academic services.

Finally, recent research by Villares et al. (2021) explored how elementary teachers' perceptions of school counselor impact might differ depending on whether the school counselor and teacher collaborated to deliver a Student Success Skills program. In their background, Villares et al. (2021) emphasized that teachers are under constant pressure to show students' academic progress through standardized testing. Due to this pressure, any school counseling programs delivered in the classroom can be viewed as time taken away from the core subject curriculum. As described in the previous research, Villares et al. (2021) also accentuated the necessity of teacher support in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. Growing research showed that interventions and training in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) encouraged social, academic, and

self-management results. Therefore, Villares et al. (2021) sought to determine if there would be a difference in teachers' perceptions of the SEL of teachers who collaborated with the school counselor to deliver the SEL vs. those who did not.

This study showed that teachers who collaborated with the school counselor in delivering SEL perceived their school counselor to have a more significant impact on the posttest. Villares et al. (2021) suggested that teachers' comprehension of the work counselors did to support learning in the classroom and students' development of SEL skills increased positively over time. They did note, however, that it could not be claimed that the perception change was a direct result of the SEL program. Implications made because of this research highlighted that school counselors' demonstration of classroom lessons could help teachers understand counselors' roles better. They suggested that school counselors invite teachers to collaborate to develop the school counseling curriculum. The necessity of school counselors advocating and educating about their programs and roles was implied in this research, as in decades prior.

The research shared here shows an ongoing struggle in education regarding the role and duties of school counselors. Additionally, despite decades of advocating and educating educational staff regarding school counseling, minimal progress has been made in the perceptions of academic staff. It also conveys a potential disconnect from school counselors' asserted "unique position" and implied power and the reality of their experiences.

Systemic and Social Dominance Considerations

Ironically, numerous research and commentaries have used and intertwined systemic and social dominance considerations for decades outside of school counseling. This combination is often considered in education research where school counselors are nested. Additionally, we can look to news, societal commentary, policies, government battles, and citizens' polarization to see the interactions systemically and the influences of social-group dominance. This analysis can be extensive. I will provide various examples of ecological systems and social dominance considerations for this study.

Dominance, Bias, LGBTQ, and Anti-Movements in the Education System

Inequities within the education system involving race, religion, gender, socio-economic level, and ability are apparent from its inception. For many, the intersectionality of identity can create even more inequities. For principals, teachers, and school counselors, the gap in student and educator racial demographics is significant (ASCA, 2020a; Taie & Lewis, 2022a; Taie & Lewis, 2022b; The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016). School counseling statistics show that white school counselors comprise 76% of ASCA members (ASCA, 2020a). White teachers comprise 79.3%, and White principals comprise 77.7% of the education system (Taie & Lewis, 2022a; Taie & Lewis, 2022b). White superintendents comprise 65% of national education, with Hispanics only 14% (Zippia.com, 2023). White males also dominate the higher levels of the education system and government policymaker positions at over 75% (Taie & Lewis, 2022a; Zippia.com, 2023; Johnson, 2021). In 2018, a national survey by the National School Board Association reported that school board members surveyed

were 78% White, 10% Black/African American, 3% Latino(a)/Hispanic, Less than 1% Asian, and 1% American Indian. White dominance is apparent in the staffing of education, counseling, and government, despite the change in student demographics and national statistics showing white students make up 45% of the education system, which is declining (NCES, 2023).

As discussed earlier, White Affluent Christianity was foundational to U.S. public education (Roche et al., 2020). While finding educational and counselor religious affiliations statistics is difficult, we can look to recent national data and our 117th Congress for a general idea. Nationally, 70% of Americans identify as Christians; four in ten identify as white Christians (Public Religion Research Institute [PRRI], 2021). The Majority of the 117th Congress overwhelmingly identifies with a form of Christianity. Finally, research has shown links between Christian dominance in education and the impact on marginalized groups (Dupper et al., 2015; Persinger et al., 2020; Marshall & Hernandez, 2013).

People of color have the most significant poverty rates, except for Asian populations. In 2016, statistics showed that 31% of Black, 26 % Hispanic, 10% Asian, and 10% White children were living in poverty, and research has continually demonstrated links between poverty and lower-than-average academic performance and rates of school completion (de Brey et al., 2019; Irwin et al., 2023). A great deal of poverty and low academic performance are directly linked to “redlining” in housing and what some now call “redlining” in education (Kummings & Tienken, 2021). Redlining is embedded in racism and has impacted people of color for decades. To futher show

systemic intertwining, Turner et al. (2016), like Roche et al. (2020), discuss the foundation of education stemming from the Puritans and The Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647. Turner et al. (2016) discuss how this Act reflected a belief that the community was responsible for the well-being of the children. Hence, the community funded the teacher's salary and the children's education. Today, that concept continues hundreds of years later in that a decent portion of school funding is through property taxes, meaning that children who live in poverty, often children of color, struggle to receive equitable education related to the foundations of whiteness, racism, and Christian dominance.

Regardless of many positive movements to create racial equity in the U.S. education system, racism, biases, stereotyping, and White supremacy continue to impact the inequities of the education system profoundly. Thousands of research reports, commentary, and statistics are related to these issues within the education system. When considering that school counselors are nested within the education system, it is crucial to understand the environmental factors that relate to the focus of this study. Numerous research that provided education system insight for this study suggest social dominance and systemic impact considerations, tremendous inequities, issues in administration/educational staff preparation, and ongoing issues in creating multiculturally aware and responsible school environments (Barakat et al., 2019; Brooks & Watson, 2019; Cruz et al.,2022; Davis et al., 2022; Diamond & Lewis, 2019; Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020; Diem et al., 2016; Grace & Nelson; 2019; Hanes, 2017; Huchting & Bickett, 2021; Kiang et al., 2021; Leath et al.,2019; Mansfield, 2015; Owens

& McClanahan, 2020; Porter, 2020; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Steketee et al., 2021; Stone-Johnson et al., 2021; Sugrue & Hanna Daftary, 2021; Weiner et al., 2021)

Some educational research dives deeper and focuses on biases' influence on educational inequities. They also point to considerations for this research study regarding the potential impact of biases on school counseling actions and practices. Research on bias in education highlighted the realities of biases and the adverse effects on the education system and helped inform systemic awareness for this study (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Beachum & Gullo, 2020; Chin et al., 2020; Eberhardt, 2019; Fergus, 2017; Legette et al., 2021; Quinn, 2020; Starck et al., 2020; Turetsky et al., 2021)

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on inequities and detrimental experiences for LGBTQ students within the education system. Social Justice advocacy and ethical practices of school counselors related to LGBTQ issues have grown more specific in the last decade. Various research in the educational realms pointed to ongoing issues and negative impacts associated with LGBTQ experiences and helped inform this study (Elischberger et al., 2016; Fantus & Newman, 2021; Goldstein-Schultz, 2022; Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014; Marshall & Hernandez, 2013; McQuillan & Leininger; 2021; Persinger et al., 2020; Smith, 2018; Smith & Payne, 2016a; Smith & Payne, 2016b; Stargell et al., 2020)

In 2023, political discourse reached extreme highs. This discourse has dramatically impacted public policy and education policy, which conflicts with the ethical practices of school counselors. It is imperative to point out the impact these movements have on the educational environment as well as the roles and responsibilities

of school counselors. “Anti-CRT” and “Anti-Diversity-Equity-Inclusion” movements have gained steam in recent years. In September 2021, ASCA published “Current Issues in Education: Critical Race Theory.” In the discussion, ASCA made clear its stance on school counseling:

> Systemic racism, oppression, and white privilege are real. Both our nation’s history and current events are rife with examples to support this reality. The impact of racial disparity in education continues to be a crucial conversation as educators and other stakeholders address the painful truth that all groups of students in the United States have not achieved outcomes at the same level. From literacy to graduation rates, significant achievement and opportunity gaps demonstrated the considerable work needed to help students of all backgrounds achieve the best possible outcomes. (p. 1-2)

The publication explained CRT and the school counselor’s role and provided advocacy resources. There was no guidance or support for instances where policy or bills could inhibit school counselors’ ethical practices.

The TIME article “Exclusive: New Data Shows the Anti-Critical Race Theory Movement is ‘Far from Over,” (2023) reported that between January 2021 and December 2022, 536 anti-CRT measures had been introduced at all levels of government, and over half-241- had been adopted or enacted. July 2023, Florida sparked outrage when “education officials approved new standards for teaching African American history Wednesday in response to the “anti-woke” policies touted by Gov. Ron DeSantis

(Atterbury, 2023).” The outrage came as revised education standards said, “African Americans received some ‘personal benefit’ from slavery (Atterbury, 2023).”

The anti-CRT movement in political realms has become an “umbrella term for teaching anything progressive, such as issues of LGBTQ identity.” Additionally, more conservative citizens and politicians have been using the term “anti-woke” to push back on what has been deemed progressive ideology (Alfonseca, 2023). There has been significant growth in “anti-trans” rhetoric and legislative bills. According to Trans Legislation Tracker (2023), which tracks anti-trans bills, in July 2023, there were 562 bills in 49 states. Of the bills, 354 were active, 79 had passed, and 129 had failed. A large majority of these bills were related to minors and issues of gender-affirming care or relating to school issues such as bathroom use and whether trans youth could play sports as trans youth and not specific to their assigned at birth gender.

Beyond policy changes impacting what can be talked about or taught in schools nationwide, book bans have also increased nationwide. In an article by Meehan and Friedman (2023) updating the current data regarding book bans, they report that PEN America had recorded a significant increase in book bans, much related to new state laws and policies impacting public schools and libraries. Despite a 2022 poll conducted by the American Library Association showing that over 70 % of parents with school-age children are against book bans, they have continued. Most book bans impact marginalized people as they are related highly to race, gender, American history, and LGBTQ+ identities.

Finally, in addition to the already discussed inequities related to students living in poverty, another issue is currently in the news. In the summer of 2023, Republican leaders were working on budget cuts that would cut federal funding for school lunch programs providing free lunch for needy students (Reynolds, 2023). Despite political beliefs or ideology, the statistics show that many U.S. children live in poverty and rely on schools for food.

Summary and Conclusions

Through this extensive review of approximately a century of school counseling and the ups and downs of trying to establish understood roles and the identity of the school counselor, many issues have been eluded to that have not been a focus of school counseling literature, training, and research. Numerous contradictory implications are repeated, potentially missing much bigger considerations that impact school counseling. Predominantly, the reality of the embeddedness of school counseling within the education system has not been explored. Additionally, research about aspects of the education system regarding multicultural and social justice advocacy, which could create barriers and challenges to school counselors' ethical practices, has yet to be explored. When looking at research regarding training experiences in school counseling, there is a mismatch between what is conveyed, that school counselors are trained to be multiculturally competent and social change advocates (ASCA, 2022a; ASCA, 2019b; ASCA, 2023b; CACREP, 2016) and reality. Therefore, there is an indisputable need to explore the application of multicultural and social justice advocacy practices and school counselors' experiences in the broader environment and embeddedness within the

education system related to school counselor ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy.

In the next chapter, I will explain the methodology of this research, detailing the research design and rationale for utilizing this design. I will also discuss my role as the researcher. Methodology aspects, such as participant selection and requirements, instrumentation, the procedures for recruitment of participants, and the analysis of the data, will be explained. Finally, considerations of trustworthiness and ethical procedures will be detailed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The intent of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of school counselors related to ethical practices of school counseling and social justice advocacy while working in the education system. Exploring the experiences of school counselors in applying multicultural and social justice advocacy may provide helpful information about potential challenges and barriers, may illustrate training and role advocacy needs, and may help to enhance the alignment of school counselor training with the education system-embedded experiences. In this chapter, I explain the research methods, design, and reasoning behind applying this approach. I also discuss my role as the researcher and provide details of participant selection and the instrumentation type used. Additionally, I describe the research procedures that were applied and explain how I ensured ethical practices and considerations for trustworthiness in this study.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research question guided this study: How do school counselors experience their roles in terms of social justice and multicultural advocacy? Exploring lived experiences requires researchers to dig deeply, expand on questions, and relate back and forth with the participants to portray the essence of their experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Phenomenology provides access to prereflective worldly experiences; prereflective experiences are the ordinary experiences lived within and through daily existence (Vagle, 2014; Van Manen, 2014). Qualitative phenomenology strives for a more “direct contact with the world” (van Manen, 2015, Location 399).

For this study, I used hermeneutic phenomenological methodology because it enabled me to explore the expansive and detailed personal descriptions of the lived experiences of school counselors concerning multicultural and social justice advocacy in the education system. Recent research and commentary in school counseling literature encouraged a move toward a more in-depth understanding of school counseling experiences through systemic consideration and social dominance ideology (Lantz et al., 2020; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021; Wilcox et al., 2020). Qualitative research was necessary to accomplish the more in-depth considerations. Van Manen (2015) emphasized that a person can gain a certain level of satisfaction when they grasp the theoretical ideas of phenomenology. However, authentic understanding comes with "understanding it from the inside" (van Manen, 2015, Location 390). Phenomenology strives to provide a more thorough understanding of everyday experiences, or the essence, and to bring people into more direct contact with the world.

Hermeneutic phenomenology evolved from prior phenomenological theory by Heidegger. Today, phenomenology is a theory and a research methodology. Hermeneutic phenomenology asserts that a person cannot separate themself from the world. People exist within the world. Heidegger (1962, 2010) called the notion of being in the world Dasein. People's being one with the world is translated as existing within a world that is constantly interpreted by interpretative beings (Vagel, 2014). In Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, understanding is attained through foresight or fore-conception. Foresight or fore-conception is not without biases, preconceived understanding, and

judgments; therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology considers these when interacting within the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer 2004; Heidegger, 1971) process. Within the hermeneutic circle process, foresight can be recognized as people gain meaning, moving back and forth between parts and the whole. Using this methodology, I explored participants' lived experiences through the hermeneutic circle process while also considering my personal biases, judgments, and preconceived notions. Hermeneutic methodology differs from other forms of phenomenology in that it does not postulate that the researcher is separate from the world they observe.

Quantitative methodology has been used in school counselor research, especially related to roles, identity, and school counselors' multicultural and social justice competence (ASCA, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2023a; de Brey et al., 2019; Dameron et al., 2020; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Irwin et al., 2023; Kendi, 2019; Merlin-Knowblich & Chen,2018; Moss & Singh, 2015; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2022; Shi & Carey, 2021; Taie & Lewis, 2022a, 2023b; The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016). However, quantitative research cannot describe or clarify broad and interconnective experiences in the same way that qualitative research can. Quantitative research does not allow for further clarification of experiences or for the researcher to add to the interview questions for deeper understanding (Glesne, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative methodology provided me with an opportunity to dive deeper into the lived experiences of school counselors and obtain a straightforward understanding of their world. Van Manen (2015) states that "the essence of a phenomenon is multi-dimensional and multi-layered" (Location 1640). Previous

school counseling research in this area focused on statistical analysis or the frequency of behaviors. Unlike previous school counseling research related to multicultural competence and social justice advocacy, the current qualitative inquiry allowed me to explore the multiple layers and dimensions regarding the counselors' understanding of what multicultural and social justice advocacy entailed, how they enacted the ethical practices within their environment, and the potential barriers or challenges to these practices, which were not richly described through quantitative research.

Role of the Researcher

My experiences as a former school counselor fueled my interest in this topic. As a school counselor, I had many experiences related to applying the ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy within the education system. In my experiences, there were challenges and barriers to applying ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy. Therefore, as the primary researcher, I considered my biases, judgments, and preconceived understanding as I moved through the research process (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My role as the researcher encompassed being the primary data collector; therefore, I identified my ideology and values. I took other roles through this research process, including observer, interviewer, and data analyst.

All understanding has fore-conception (Vagle, 2014; Van Manen, 2014). Due to my experiences as a former school counselor, I brought preconceptions related to the topic to my research. As the primary data analyst, I used the hermeneutic circle process (see Peoples, 2020; Peoples, 2024; Vagle, 2014; Wrathall, 2006). According to Heidegger, this process is movement back and forth between parts and the whole and

back again as a deeper understanding of the data evolves. Within this process, my biases, judgments, and preconceived ideas were considered through journaling as I interpreted the data (see Gadamer, 2016; Glesne, 2016; Peoples, 2020). Journaling enabled me to be aware of my potential projections and revise my current conceptions with a more evolved understanding through personal reflection (see Gadamer, 2016; Glesne, 2016; Peoples, 2020; Peoples, 2024).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The population sought for this study included current or former licensed or certified K–12 school counselors. In seeking a deeper understanding of the experiences of school counselors, I used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was ideal for this research because it implied that I was seeking information-rich cases that provided a meaningful understanding of the central phenomenon of this study (see Creswell, 2007; Peoples, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The potential to apply snowball sampling was appropriate if finding participants was not satisfied through purposive sampling. However, I did not need snowball sampling (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I sought diverse participants based on race, age, and range of experience. Diversity was ideal because the topic of this research involved multicultural competence. The criteria sought for participant selection were the following (see Appendix B):

- racially diverse participants
- gender diversity
- age diversity

- diverse representation from various areas within the United States

The sample size I sought for this research was eight to 15 participants (see Peoples, 2020). However, the sample size in phenomenological research focuses on data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no new information is obtained from the research interviews (Fusch & Lawrence, 2015; Gill, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Instrumentation

The instrumentation I applied to this research was a combination of semistructured interviews (see Appendix C), with follow-up interviews to fill any gaps, as well as my position as researcher and notes taken in the process. Semistructured interviews are used when the researcher has specific questions that will be asked of all participants, which are used to guide and organize the interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additionally, semistructured interviews allow the researcher to use flexibility (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The interview questions are developed to ensure that critical elements of the research question are covered and to balance the research question and the natural flow of phenomenological research (Peoples, 2020). The natural flow allows participants to comment on other aspects that may be relevant to the study. Some interview questions were used as needed, to probe, or as follow-up questions. Follow-up interviews provided opportunities for clarification or to ask additional questions to gather further information not obtained in the first interview.

Interviews were audio recorded. Two recording devices were used for each interview to prevent loss of information if one technology failed during the process.

Additionally, notes were taken but kept at a minimum for ease of flow and to ensure I maintained openness to the participants' experiences (see Vagel, 2014).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment strategies included posting research information in the online bulletin areas of the ASCA and ACA. Additionally, school districts in the United States were randomly picked, and emails (see Appendix A) with the study information were sent to counselors and counseling directors. I also sent the research information to a few researcher colleagues affiliated with counselor preparation programs (see Peoples, 2020). Additionally, Walden University posted the research information on the participant pool website. Finally, I posted information on social media including LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram.

I provided information about thee study once I received contact from potential participants. Participants were provided information regarding their right to leave the study or exit participation at any time. Before the interview, participants were provided a questionnaire requesting personal demographic information and information specific to the research topic, such as the U.S. location where they had worked as a school counselor and general demographics of the student populations. I reviewed the questionnaires to ensure that participants met the selection criteria.

Data Analysis Plan

I used the following process in my research, adapted from Giorgi's work (see Giorgi, 1985; Peoples, 2020; Peoples, 2024):

1. I transcribed and reviewed the audio recordings. Individual transcripts were read in their entirety. Repetitive statements and filler words (e.g., “um,” “like,” and “well”) were deleted. In reading through the transcripts, I documented my reflections in a journaling process.
2. I established initial meaning units (see Giorgi, 1985), which were parts of data that showed a characteristic of the phenomenon I investigated. For example, all participants described the demographic makeup of the student populations in their schools. I assigned the meaning unit “diversity of student population.” Most participants also discussed challenges to applying ethical practices in school counseling. The meaning unit I assigned was “challenges to applying school counselor ethics.”
3. I began to look for themes emerging from the information, along with continuing to consult my journaling and considering my biases. I conducted follow-up interviews to fill gaps and seek additional information not gathered in the initial interviews. For example, most participants noted the impact of representation or lack of representation of marginalized groups, not only in the school setting staff but also in their counselor education situations. Participant 1090 noted that “my (counseling education) cohort was incredibly diverse. We had lots of guys. We had students of color. We had trans students. We had ages from right out of college to 50 or 60, I think. I loved it, but there were people that really had a hard time with it. The more privileged didn’t want to dive as deep and didn’t want to do the work that we’re asking everyone to do,

and we're counseling because that was part of the program." Participant 2050 reported that "interestingly enough LGBTQ, that population, at the high school I worked at prior, they had a huge support structure for those and allies. There was a huge group that when I was there, helped them become part of getting the grand funding to actually host their annual ball at that local small school." A journal entry sample was the following: "More diversity in staff representing the student population would mean more advocacy actions." I noted that most participants validated my beliefs, though a couple of experiences partially opposed my beliefs.

4. The situated narrative was established by organizing experiences thematically. For example, one theme was perceived importance of representing marginalized groups in profession and in schools.
5. General narratives were compiled from the situated narratives. This brought all of the participants' experiences together into a general narrative. For example, all participants expressed experiences and understanding of the importance of representing marginalized groups in school leadership and/or school counselor training programs. All participants shared experiences related to negative situations due to lack of representation or positive experiences because of the representation of marginalized students. Social justice actions and ideology, in most reported experiences, were more supported when there was a higher representation of marginalized groups.

6. The general narratives were analyzed. Themes were sought from all or most of the participants' general narratives. These main phenomenological themes were compiled to create a general description and were considered through theoretical lenses. For example, one theme was school counselors illustrate the significance of having representation of marginalized groups. Through experiences individually and in groups, through discussion, learning from each other, and diverse peoples, most school counselors expressed how the representation of marginalized groups in the school setting provided positive support and often meant more multicultural and social justice advocacy. Representation can help fight against legitimizing myths and positively affect ideological asymmetry.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In this research, I ensured that saturation was reached to establish credibility and provided thick descriptions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Dependability in research relates to the "stability of the data" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 189). Dependability is represented when there is a rational argument for the data collection approach, and the data is dependable for the argument. Credibility in qualitative research relates to the research design and how the researcher will gather data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability and credibility in this research were sought by describing procedures in great detail, ensuring that future researchers could replicate the research. Finally, I used journaling to evaluate biases, preconceived ideas, or judgments to support the study's trustworthiness.

Ethical Procedures

I worked with the Institutional Review Board (IRB 08-06-24-0985624) process to ensure ethical research practices. I did not conduct any research until IRB approval. Participants were provided information about the research process, including recording interviews, and they consented to participate in the study and recording the interviews (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Identifying information was not provided in my research. Participants were informed about confidentiality and the option to leave the study or end their participation at any time (Peoples, 2020). Each participant was assigned a participant number. As the primary researcher, I was the only person accessing the identifying information. All files and folders were stored in an online storage service, and I am the only person with access to the data. The data will be secured for a minimum of five years. The data will be destroyed following Walden's policy and procedures. Additionally, I adhered to the ASCA code of ethics (ASCA, 2022a).

Summary

This research sought to understand the lived experiences of school counselors within the education system, particularly related to ethical practices and applications of multicultural and social justice advocacy. In this chapter, I explained the purpose of this research, the population, sampling procedures, and the methods applied. Additionally, I detailed the ethical considerations and how I ensured trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school counselors when enacting multicultural and social justice advocacy within the education system. In applying the hermeneutic circle process, I worked to identify common themes across participants' experiences. In Chapter 4, I discuss the process by which I coded the data, first into meaning units and then into themes. Throughout the process, I considered my preconceived ideas and personal experiences as a school counselor through journaling. In this chapter, I also provide information about the setting, participant demographics, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and results.

Setting

The study was conducted through Zoom interviews. I interviewed participants from my home office, which was private and confidential. No personal or organizational conditions influenced participants within the research setting. Most participants were interviewed from their homes, and two were interviewed from their work offices.

Data Collection

Recruitment information was posted in online bulletin sections of the ASCA (2024) and the ACA (2024). Emails were composed with the research information and sent randomly to school counselors and counseling directors throughout the United States. The research information was also sent to a few researcher colleagues affiliated with counselor preparation programs. Additionally, Walden University posted the

research information on the participant pool website. Finally, the research information was posted on social media including LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram.

After being contacted by potential participants, I provided information regarding participation in the study, such as participants' right to exit at any time throughout the study. Before the interview, participants completed a questionnaire addressing demographic information and information relevant to the research topic. I reviewed the information to ensure that participants met the selection criteria.

The data were collected from nine participants through semistructured interviews. Most participants were interviewed, and then a second short interview was conducted to clarify any data from the first interview. The first interviews averaged approximately 35 minutes, and the second interviews averaged 10 minutes. The data were recorded by audio through Zoom, and a backup recording was taken through my phone to protect the data from technology failures. The recording on my phone was deleted once I confirmed that Zoom captured the interview.

Data Analysis

I used the following process in my research, adapted from Giorgi's work (see Giorgi, 1985; Peoples, 2020; Peoples, 2024):

1. I transcribed and reviewed the audio recordings. Individual transcripts were read in their entirety. Repetitive statements and filler words (e.g., "um," "like," and "well") were deleted. In reading through the transcripts, I documented my reflections in a journaling process.

2. I established initial meaning units (Giorgi, 1985), which were parts of data that showed a characteristic of the phenomenon I investigated.
3. I began to look for themes emerging from the information and continued to consult my journaling and consideration of biases. I conducted follow-up interviews to fill gaps and seek additional information not gathered in the initial interviews.
4. The situated narrative was established by organizing experiences thematically.
5. General narratives were compiled from the situated narratives. The situated narratives combined all of the participants' experiences into a general narrative.
6. The general narratives were analyzed. Themes were sought from all or most of the participants' general narratives. These main phenomenological themes were compiled to create a general description and were considered through theoretical lenses.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To establish credibility, I provided thick descriptions and met data saturation (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Dependability and credibility were demonstrated in the detailed procedures taken and described, ensuring that future researchers could replicate this research. Dependability was ensured by showing that the data collection approach was appropriate and necessary for the type of data sought (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Credibility was attained through the process taken to gather data, per the ethical expectations of the method applied and the IRB (see Ravitch & Carl,

2016). Finally, a journaling process was used throughout the process to evaluate biases, judgments, and preconceived ideas to support the trustworthiness of the research.

Results

Tables display the demographics of the participants. Then, I discuss a discrepant case and show the thematic meaning units that emerged. Then, each theme is described, and quotes from each participant are added to support each theme. The general narrative included all of the results and meanings from this research. Finally, the general description applied the meanings to the general population of school counselors and discussed the meanings through the theoretical lenses of hermeneutic phenomenology, ecological systems, and SDT.

Demographics

Tables 1 and 2 display demographic information collected from the survey before the interview. Two items were not included in the demographic survey but were shared during the research interview process: counselor work status (current or former) and marginalized identities.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participant number	Employment status	Age (years)	Gender identity	Racial identity	Marginalized identity
1001	Current	59	Female	White	Female
1020	Current	56	Male	White	Gay
1090	Current	41	Cisgender female	White	Female Queer Nonmonogomous
2050	Current	60	Female	White	Female
1030	Former	33	Male	Black	Black male
1040	Former	38	Male	Black	Black male Bisexual
1070	Former	44	Female	Black Caribbean Haitian	Black Caribbean-Haitian Female
2010	Former	39	Male	Black Jamaican	Black Jamaican Male
2080	Former	67	Female	White	Sexual identity Female

Table 2

Professional Background of Participants

Participant number	Experience as a school counselor (years)	Level	States worked	Year of master's degree completion
1001	33	K–12	Vermont New Hampshire	1990
1020	11	K–12	Arizona DC-Virginia North Carolina	2008
1090	11	K–12	Ohio	2015
2050	5+	K–12	Vermont	2012
1030	7	Elementary middle	Georgia	2015
1040	8	Elementary middle	Georgia	2012
1070	10	High	Florida	2005
2010	15+	K–12	Michigan	2009
2080	26	Middle high	New York	1993

Note. K–12 = kindergarten through Grade 12.

Thematic Meaning Units

Table 3 represents the thematic meaning units that emerged from the research through the hermeneutic circle process. The table also shows which participants loaded onto each thematic meaning unit. There was one discrepant case, which is highlighted first. After the thematic meaning units table, each of the thematic meaning units is explained.

Table 3

Thematic Meaning Units

Theme	1001	1020	1090	2050	1030	1040	1070	2010	2080
Theme 1: Social justice bound by context of the environment	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Theme 2: Perceived negative impact of political and religious movements	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Theme 3: Perceived importance of representing marginalized groups in profession and in schools	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Theme 4: Perception of group status-privilege or marginalization	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Theme 5: Life experiences as multicultural and social justice teacher	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Theme 6: Perceived negative impact of systemic hierarchy	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Theme 7: Perception of inequitable practices inflicting harm to students	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Theme 8: Negative experiences and harm in applying social justice advocacy	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Theme 9: Experiencing and perceiving disregard for school counselor expertise, roles, ethical practices	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Theme 10: Personal experiences of marginalization and harm	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Theme 11: Perceived positive partnerships in multicultural and social justice advocacy	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x

Discrepant Case: Participant 2050

Participant 2050 did not support five out of the 11 themes in this study. There appeared to be a few reasons why. Participant 2050 was the only participant contracted as a school counselor, and she was not hired as an employee like the other participants. Participant 2050 noted that being a contractor allowed many freedoms she knew would not be accepted in other school dynamics. She was able to avoid a lot of the politics of the education environment. She felt respected and was allowed to practice her expertise and training without much interference from leadership or the education system.

Additionally, the school she worked at was an anomaly in many ways. It was a tiny rural school. The staff were predominantly White, but the student population was diverse; many came from other countries. Participant 2050 shared that the school had become known for its work with neurodiverse students, and that seemed to be the predominant focus. Teachers were encouraged to learn Spanish to serve the student population better. Many teachers were married to other teachers or staff in their school. Overall, it was a very supportive and kind community that seemed to want to help and support those in need.

Participant 2050 noted one interesting dynamic. She shared a situation in which the school had put a restraining order on a parent who was very aggressive regarding trans students and wanted to be protective. However, she also noted that the surrounding community was very anti-trans, and she had concerns about the few trans students she knew and wondered how they would be able to manage in the community. One leader in the school was a pastor outside the school, and his wife was a teacher. They did a lot of

mission work. Participant 2050 noted that she did not feel that their religious beliefs influenced the school but also noted that they were different in that they had a child who was nonbinary.

Theme 1: Social Justice Bound by Context of the Environment

Participants discussed different aspects of social justice that demonstrated that the concept of social justice and its application varied due to context. Various aspects that seemed to impact the context of social justice were the demographic makeup of the student population and staff population (representation of marginalized students or not), region of the country, political ideology and/or atmosphere (progressive versus conservative), type of school (e.g., charter, public, Title I), employment status of the school counselor (i.e., employee versus contractor), and power dynamics and systemic influences (groups who were in leadership or had financial influence).

Participant 1001 reported that "there is no social justice in our school. We don't talk about what that could even mean." Participant 1020 said

> I was trained in what is called Courageous Conversations. I was trained as a facilitator. We were taught how to have courageous conversations with staff members, teachers, principals, parents, but also identifying our own biases as White people. We would do this training as a team. There'd be two or three of us, but then we would go visit other local schools and we would do this training. I would say the facilitating with these conversations about race and ethnicity, and culture, and then those minority achievement coordinators, those were good partnerships as a counselor.

Participant 1090 reported

I was at a public charter school for the arts and it was a safe place for our LGBTQ students who did not feel safe in their home schools. It was much more progressive. We had a gender pronoun doc that we would share with the staff, so they knew this is what the student goes by. No, they don't have this when they call home, so you know how to refer each way.

Participant 2050 said

I'm an independent contractor. Which I find has been more beneficial than not because I am not as immersed in the politics of the region…I get to advocate and have my voice come forward. I can be really creative in ways that I think other schools would frown upon, with the students and how I approach them.

Participant 1030 mentioned

What we saw with the administrators, it wasn't as diverse, where it was primarily White staff, and there was, this was at the school where honestly, I ended up leaving because there was a lot of discussions of racial tension and stuff going on. There are people who had been in the district like 30 years, where maybe it wasn't as diverse and with the diversity, they struggled with the change.

Participant 1040 reported

To be honest, on a school level, I think I live in an outlier. I've been very grateful to be in a space to where I was able to cultivate what my program looks like. Our executive director and principal are very pro-social justice…I mean, any kind of hesitancy will come more from the district and political aspect of things.

Participant 1070 said

I worked in one location. It was a Title One school. Being Black Caribbean, I can identify with the student population I used to work with. I had a good amount of students I was able to relate with. I was also the only counselor that spoke Haitian Creole. We could talk to some of the parents and some of the students there because a good amount of our population was from that culture as well. We ended up getting a social worker that also spoke Haitian Creole. So, I collaborated with him a lot.

Participant 2010 mentioned

There's a big powerhouse that is a community partner within the district that I work that pumps significant amount of money to keep the larger demographics of the community feeling well because they're looking at how their business will thrive, how families are gonna thrive, because they're around the community and they're a power influence...(they) don't take kindly to saying 'we're multicultural advocacy focused.' Even though 98% are people of Color, even at the district leadership, it's predominantly Black folk, but systemic racism…the system bars it when you advocate for multiculturalism, and for that to be in there, it's not well received. Community partners themselves don't fully understand multiculturalism or advocacy... They mention the language, but the action don't match what is needed to help students succeed.

Participant 2080 reported

> Well, our school board seemed to have been hand-picked by the superintendent for a long time the superintendent was there. They were just "yes people" to our superintendent. She rewarded them actually from New York. She sent three of four of our board members to San Francisco for diversity training. But that was her reward. We were the poor school district, but she's sending board members to San Francisco. She didn't send any of us out of state anywhere. So, the Board were puppets to the superintendent for years, and years.

Theme 2: Perceived Negative Impact of Political and Religious Movements

Participants discussed various ways political and/or religious ideology movements impacted their schools and their work as counselors. Participant 1070, who left school counseling in 2015, noted that she did not remember political and religious movements impacting their school or her work.

Participant 1001 said

> Given some of the racism that I have seen I wondered, are we gonna hear about more about that? Because New Hampshire has started to follow some of the more conservative states and putting into legislation that is tamping down on how educators can talk, and the things that we can say, and all of that.

Participant 1020 reported

> I didn't even realize when we were first in AZ, the whole Mormon thing. Talk about a perfect storm working in AZ, especially in (Tucson, AZ District). You had a lot of White people. Then you had a lot of conservative White people. Then you had a lot of conservative Christian or Mormon people. Then there were just

people who were anti-diversity or anti-DEI, any of that. So, then you're dealing with all of that, then you have homophobic people. Then we live by the border, so everyone's anti-immigrant. So, if anyone looks different than you in Arizona, walls go up, or red flags go up. It was different. Very subversive in a lot of ways I found. Kind of like, not hidden bias or hidden discrimination but it was like subtle. It was like there were things I realized, that I would work with people who were very nice to me, but then they vote for people who want to undermine you or get rid of you.

Participant 1090 mentioned

There was a very beloved teacher who just retired, and he was toxic, and he was the World History, ninth-grade teacher. There was a group of kids who would be singing his praises, and there was a group of kids, they're like, 'He's the most racist idiot ever.' It's very divisive in the school. The teacher wore a pin that said, 'Equity, not equality.' As soon as you would walk into his room, he had all of his opinions posted around the room. We have a Debate club called the Debatriot. This Friday, they're going to be talking about Trump vs. Kamala, and I'm like, ok, but they do have that space here. They've tried to funnel that space into Debatriot because there were other spaces, like when the Israel-Palestine situation blew up, there were kids talking about it in front of the whole school, at our morning meetings, which is where the whole school meets and this cannot be a space for opinion.

Participant 2050 shared

> This is Trump Country. I will not get into politics at this school. I chose not to. But it is there. You can see it. I can hear people talk about it…I mean we can't say that it doesn't affect people, the politics, and the way they think about the world in education.

Participant 1030 said

> When a lot of publicized police killings started to uptick, that was around the pandemic and stuff like that. We were seeing a lot of change there and I think because of all the change that was happening at the same time as a lot of these public things that were happening, a lot of that got lost in the mix. There wasn't a lot of emphasis at that place and a lot that really wasn't necessarily brought in by administration, but I still felt that amongst my students, when I would have my sessions.

Participant 1040 reported

> I live in GA. We are what they would deem a red State. You know our governor is a Republican, so a lot of things do tend to waiver on the not-so-advocacy side of things. We haven't had a full book ban, but they have taken a couple of books away from our libraries, whether it be private or public...Conservative politics is the core reason.

Participant 1070 said, "I guess when I was there (left in 2015), there weren't really political things. That wasn't really something that I experienced being an impact."

Participant 2010 mentioned, "All neighboring school districts have issues--the more White districts. We're hearing that, for example, a teacher had an LGBTQ flag in

his classroom to promote inclusivity, and they're asking to take it down because other White Parents complain about it, or conservative parents complain about it."

Participant 2080 explained

> There were some things I wasn't prepared for, because before that, I had my bachelor's in social work and I worked for a private agency. So, things I was not prepared for were the politics. Just so many politics…and the pecking order down, and the superintendent at the time, and that stuff, took a long time for me to get used to.

Theme 3: Perceived Importance of Representing Marginalized Groups in Profession and in Schools

Participants discussed the importance of having representation of marginalized groups not only in school staff but also in how it impacted them personally in their professional lives and in training to become school counselors. The following quotes relate to either their experiences in counselor education or what they have experienced within the school setting regarding the representation of marginalized groups.

Participant 1001 shared

> Our staff is not representative of our student body….20-25% of our student population is either BIPOC or comes from other countries. The other kind of diversity that I think is important is that we do have economic diversity...more Section 8 housing than a lot of other places have in the state...We have zero racial diversity on our staff. (This Participant noted that they have zero social justice advocacy.)

Participant 1020 mentioned

We have a social worker. She's African American, The other counselor, she's African American. I rely on them a lot because a lot of times the teachers and staff, and the students that are African American, or minority already had a relationship with her and she's been an advocate for them. A lot of times, they will come to her before they come to me. I think that there are people who are a minority, whether you're African American, Latino, Asian, I think if you see people who look like yourself, it's easier to approach them at times, and not have a mistrust with a White man per se.

Participant 1090 said

My (counseling education) cohort was incredibly diverse. We had lots of guys. We had students of Color. We had trans students. We had ages from right out of college to 50 or 60, I think. I loved it, but there were people that really had a hard time with it. The more privileged didn't want to dive as deep and didn't want to do the work that we're asking everyone to do, and we're counseling because that was part of the program.

Participant 2050 explained

Interestingly enough LGBTQ, that population, at the high school I worked at prior, they had a huge support structure for those and allies. There was a huge group that when I was there, helped them become part of getting the grand funding to actually host their annual ball at that local small school.

Participant 1030 mentioned

I was the only Black man in my group (counselor education). I was the only man in my group and there were 18 people within my cohort. During my undergrad time, my professor who was a White woman was like, 'Hey I want to put you in touch with someone. I really want you to speak with this individual.' She put me in touch with the director of the Master's program and he was a Black male who was at the time, still doing school counseling. I remember having just a simple 30-minute conversation with him and being so inspired. I knew I always had a passion or interest in mental health but seeing that all these founders and theorists, they were all White males, and I was into myself, 'Oh, this isn't for me. Why don't people who look like me do this?' So, to see a Black male in that position was so inspiring to me.

Participant 1040 shared

Coming through the (counselor education) program, I'm a Black male. I'm a unicorn in the program. I did not feel I received the proper training in the classes. I probably had maybe one, at most two, multicultural classes. To be honest, it was very surface level. A lot of my training came from experience, even my internships were under White women. I didn't really have a pool of peers or potential mentors of people of Color that could help me with certain situations.

Participant 1070 mentioned

It (the school) was diverse, but of course, it was predominantly minority students there. When I first got there, I didn't think that the principal or just the higher staff really represented the demographic of the school we were at or the teachers. They

were less ethically diverse...but over the years, you saw a shift in the diversity of the staff, and I think over time it became to kind of represent, I guess, the demographic of the school.

Participant 2010 said

The professors (in counselor education) were more diverse. The cohort were not so much. At one point, we had more Black professors in the department than White professors…I think the head that started the program ensured that multiculturalism was infused in every aspect of the curriculum, even before CACREP required it...The White students did challenge when they didn't want to hear. They challenged some of the professors and sought refuge from the other White professors...the White professors too were acculturated to ensure that this is embedded.

Participant 2080 described

We tried to get the Gay Alliance to come and do a group. But, you know, we get 'No, because in middle school you couldn't possibly know and why would we want to suggest this to our children?' Even though we came up with all the research and the support, but it took a long time, and we have some gay teachers that were able to finally step out and stand up to people like, 'I'm Gay.' We've always had gay teachers, but they didn't feel the freedom to be able to come out with who they really were.

Theme 4: Perception of Group Status-Privilege or Marginalization

Participants discussed how they witnessed differences in support of students based on race, economic standing, and LGBTQ.

Participant 1001 shared

> When we had a mental health team meeting that had both our counselors and our administration there, I relayed these stories (of racism), and I just said, 'We really need to start educating and talking about this and making it part of our culture, because we're not, and by not talking about it, we're being complicit. Because if I saw those two incidents, what's happening that I am not seeing?

Participant 1020 stated

> There were a lot of White people, but there were also a lot of Latinos, there were African Americans, there was some diversity, but there was no support. I really liked the Student Services Director. She probably could have done more, too. If I am not mistaken, she was Latina, but she was somebody that I think could 'pass for White' I didn't feel she did enough to support people like me, when we did bring up things. I think part of it is her hands were tied, too, because her bosses didn't want to hear it, and they didn't care about it, and it wasn't important because we were kind of the periphery or on the outside or being marginalized.

Participant 1090 shared (when she was a homeless liaison at her former school)

> It was exceedingly difficult to get anything up and running, and both of us,

For other reasons, I no longer work there. I don't think that anybody took that over, and there were at least 15 students who were homeless at that school. So that population is massively being underserved.

Participant 2050 mentioned

When it comes to gender and or sexuality, because I have worked with students who are trans, and I feel for them because I don't know how they're going to navigate this community, if they stay here in the future, because they are very much underground with their identity. There is a trans group that is supportive, but they keep themselves anonymous.

Participant 1030 explained

There was absolutely an element there where the parents have identified that there were concerns there. The students would come to me, and you could tell there was a sense of helplessness amongst them where I'll have students come to my office, and they're like, 'I'm just showing up in this way, and this is happening.' I would go, and I would observe. I would go to the classroom, and the child was engaging in no different way than any of their peers within the classroom. I noticed particularly, with my Black students, there was a sense of frustration, and feeling of there was a lack of support there, outside myself and maybe two or three other Black teachers that were present, that they feel that they can speak to and have some type of support.

Participant 1040 said

Within my school, because we have a high demographic of Black population, which can be a subset at times because it's not normally the case in a lot of big areas. I am very zoned in on Black boys, for sure. I'm very unapologetic about it, especially when it comes to suspension rates and expulsion.

Participant 1070 mentioned

What you may tend to find in certain schools, or when you are dealing with low SES schools that they may not challenge those students as much. They may not push them or encourage them to take the more rigorous courses like the AP courses; the honors courses. Many of them do work during high school to help their families. So, you got to understand the context of their own situation, when they're outside the school setting.

Participant 2010 explained

The former school that I was in, they were more conservative, even though the principal identified as a gay male…I wish they would have advocated for more of the Black students who were not able to read, because for me that's a marginalized issue.

Participant 2080 shared

Our situation was a unique one. Our town had two separate school districts…East and West. I was East…and the saying always was 'West is best. Least is East.' The other side of the district had more money and was less diverse than we were. Although they had an urban-suburban program. We didn't. They were always competing.

Theme 5: Life Experiences as Multicultural and Social Justice Teacher

Most Participants shared that their growth and learning were self-driven and that life experiences taught them more than their education programs. Many felt their understanding of multicultural or social justice issues was either unsupported or not taught well in their counselor education programs.

Participant 1001 stated

> I think understanding a little bit more of what their experience is, or I mean, I know that's broad, right? But just, what are the ways they can be affected, that are different than us, that they go through? I picked up some of that here and there, maybe through an hour and half workshop or those kind of little things.

Participant 1020 shared

> I'd say 80% of it was on my own personal time. Just researching things. Reading about things. If I didn't know about something, I would either research it or ask or talk to people that represented teachers or other counselors. The other 20% was the course that I took. It was a professional development called Courageous Conversations.

Participant 1090 explained

> I'm always finding new things like either blind spots or biases that just, I get challenged. I seek out the social justice stuff, the evidence-based school counseling conference which Ohio State typically puts on, and then there's American University that's there. I don't remember. That's my favorite one because I feel it's strictly for school counselors, and it's very social justice-

oriented. I'm constantly trying to find professional development that is meaningful because sometimes there's a lot out there that's not or it's review for me.

Participant 2050 said

You know, I am going to tell you this. I think about this often. I know we had to do internship hours as Masters and as Ph.D students. That didn't prepare me. Reading books didn't prepare me. Living life, traveling, meeting people, challenging my thoughts, my expectations, and getting out in the world. That was my best teacher.

Participant 1030 mentioned

You know, when it comes to your training, I always feel like your program gives you a great foundation. But, the application, the actual hands-on experiences are always gonna be a totally different thing, and that's where you really get that wealth of experience from.

Participant 1040 stated

For me, it has been my experiences, me being intentional about forming relationships with people from across the country, who does go to an all-White school, and having conversations like, 'Hey, I have this situation, how do I handle it?' Or 'what is going on?' I think developing these relationships really has expanded my expertise on how to handle certain situations within the school. That has been helpful. Again, my experiences have been my number one teacher, not the classes or the one class itself, for sure.

Participant 1070 shared (Relating to why she was the counselor she was)

> I knew when I was in high school, I didn't have the best experience with the school counselor. So that kind of helped motivate me and feel my desire to kind of say, 'No, I don't want any kid that had the experience that I had when I was in high school.'

Participant 2010 stated "I am Jamaican American. I consider myself Black…My world views are different, and my values and experiences are very different."

Participant 2080 mentioned

> There was a lot outside my role as a counselor too. I used to advise many clubs, and actually, when many more African Americans were moving into our school, me and the psychologist started a step team. We did a step team, and it was hugely popular. We traveled with them, took them to nursing homes and youth conferences, and took it around. I also started a multicultural club, and we put on assemblies.

Theme 6: Perceived Negative Impact of Systemic Hierarchy

Participants discussed different aspects of systemic hierarchy and how it impacts the work of school counselors, their roles, and ethical practices around advocacy. Many described ways that the hierarchy created challenges and barriers to their training. Many shared how the hierarchy impacts students and advocacy actions around student populations, especially marginalized students.

Participant 1001 explained

I went from all this weird psychopath, dysfunction, to a school that was just straight-forward and old fashioned. But, there are nuances, and there are things that we need to do. But,it's going to be tricky work because we're really trying, educating, to make social change because there is a whole system of oppression, that it's built into everything.

Participant 1020 shared

In North Carolina, they have passed a bill here that, for example, let's say you have a student named Katrina, but he goes by Kit, born female, but goes by male pronouns and the name Kit. You cannot call that student by their preferred name or pronoun unless you tell the parent first. I am thinking, what happened to confidentiality? It's like the kid tells you something in confidence, the student's not hurting someone else or hurting themselves, they're sharing something in confidence. Being gay, lesbian, or trans, it's not dangerous. So, then if you say, the kid is never going to come tell you something in confidence again, or ever trust you again.

Participant 1090 said

The school itself has such a high-needs population, that I advocated to become a counseling lead and hiring more counselors that I would help supervise those counselors. I thought that would be great. But, what it turned into was an admin role. They put me on Title Nine stuff. I had to investigate the Title Nine students that I had really good relationships with and found out the gross parts of them, which was impossible then to be able to have an unbiased, constructive

conversation with them, and it made me hate that. I tried to educate my administrators about the role of counselor and why Title IX is so destructive to forming that safe and welcoming atmosphere. At first, my concerns went unheard. It wasn't until one of the admin received proper training that they told me that I shouldn't have been in that position to begin with, which is what I shared in the beginning.

Participant 1030 mentioned

I would say that just when it came to my challenge in advocating for that, it was that the hierarchy piece, where I am the lowly school counselor, and you're admin, those are the people writing my reviews, so you want to be mindful of how you address things; you feel like you are walking on eggshells because again, these are the people who are evaluating you, but you have your students who you want to advocate for.

Participant 1040 stated

We have to be smart and intentional on how we advocate for our kids and to ensure that we have the support…because you have to be strategic in how you present things. Unfortunately, everything is political these days. You have to learn how to play the game…A lot of school administrators don't understand that we follow a different code of ethics as school counselors.

Participant 1070 shared

We did put in a formal complaint through the union about that (being pulled from their counselor duties), and I guess under the subheading that the counselors are to

> do whatever the rules of the principal are assigned, that could mean anything...even deal with behavior issues, and there were moments where I felt uncomfortable, like, 'No, They need to go get the principal. I am not the one that's supposed to be dealing with any of the behavior issues'
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> Participant 2010 mentioned
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> Administrators are threatened by us because of our knowledge base. You see, the problem is we were trained as leaders, we were trained as data specialists…we are like the person that pokes the bear to say, 'You can't do this.' They don't like that. So, we're not seen up there, not even part of the leadership team...we are always advocating for change, advocating for need, and we are always giving principals more work...so, now you are looking as the enemy.
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> Participant 2080 shared
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> Just the whole politics, and the pecking order down…Our school board seemed to have been hand-picked by the superintendent, for a long time the superintendent was there. They were just "yes people" to our superintendent...A lot of those board members 25 years ago are still on the Board.

Theme 7: Perception of Inequitable Practices Inflicting Harm to Students

Participants shared situations where marginalized students were not treated well or had different experiences than privileged groups within the school environment or how the environment (i.e., political or influential power) prevented support for marginalized students.

Participant 1001 said

Last year, I witnessed two racial incidents that were right there, in front of me- blatant. I couldn't believe what I heard or saw, and there truly was…they were ignorant, completely ignorant to what they had said or done. I communicated with the parent of one of the kids, that was saying the racist things. The parent, you know, I got an answer that they don't really understand what racism is. And, even though they were kind of apologizing for their child, I could tell they didn't really feel their child had done anything wrong.

Participant 1020 explained

There was a lot of transphobia. I had at least two students at (School name) that transitioned while they were in school. The parents of one student reached out to me and shared that the students had been trans at home, wearing dresses for years. The parents really wanted the staff to know. They wanted their child, if they felt uncomfortable using the boy's bathroom, to be able to use a unisex bathroom or one in the nurse's office. They were like, 'We want you to tell the staff, not just the teacher and the principal, because if the staff sees her on campus, we want her to be accepted.' I did that, and I remember I got really chastised by the principal and the assistant principal for doing that.

Participant 1090 said

I had students coming to tell me some of their experiences that were negative here as a result of microaggressions or just complete lack of awareness. I've done presentations to the staff on it already. I want to make sure that the staff knows this is what our kids are experiencing. They seem to really appreciate that, too,

because that's not stuff that they think about. A staff member last year was talking about a student that she has become really close with and she said word for word, 'He's smart. He talks like a White person.' I let that conversation go because she needed time for emotional support. But I revisited it before the end of the year and said, 'Hey, I just want you to know that this is an example of a microaggression,' and she thanked me.

Participant 1030 explained

In the second school where it was really diverse amongst the students, but not diverse amongst the staff, we started to just see some discrepancies in how discipline matters were handled. For example, you had actions within the school where it's Black and White, this is a referral, etc. You vandalize the school; that's a referral. However, you had other things that were considered more subjective, such as the student being disrespectful, which we saw a lot of our marginalized students get dinged for. We saw the discrepancy, it was huge. As a result, the students were spending less time in class because they were in in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, etc.

Participant 1040 said

We are a charter school, so we don't have to abide by all the rules of the traditional public school. We do have some leeway, but overall, there are some things that, from a State level, they are trying to crack down on. Recently, the African American AP class was taken out of the curriculum.

Participant 1070 explained

Oftentimes what I would notice or I remember noticing is that some kids are stereotyped like they're bad kids. They're the troublemakers and things like that. Sometimes, when you're scheduling students, or you'll have a teacher that comes and said, 'This student is in my class. Can they be moved?'...There's a middle school that was a feeder school, and that middle school was also predominantly minority, and the stereotype, a lot of the kids that come from that, 'they're the bad kids.' They're from this school, and these are the 'rough kids.' Versus the other middle school, that's feeding other kids that they're not a minority. They may be more of White or Asian background. The school may be like, 'Ok, these are the good kids.'

Participant 2010 said

There is a problem where we're in a high school, and we have kids in an alternative high school that are credit deficient, and they are credit deficient from the other school. They are allowed to go on, go on, go on. Nobody sees the data, looks at the data, and used the data to make decisions. Even now, when we do reading tests standardized tests, and the proof is there that these kids need a little bit more. They're still not getting what they need. The resources are not good towards them. The kids are frustrated...You're in a system where the system is working against itself, and at the end of the day, it's the kids who are suffering.

Participant 2080 mentioned

A middle school student came to me to let me know she was gay and wanted to support her gay friends…I had permission from the principal at the time (to do an

> event to focus on it)…We did it as anti-bullying…We just went around the school. We had videos and a parent at the PTSA meeting, like two nights before this was supposed to happen, and saw the posters in the hallway and flipped out. The principal the next day made us take down all of the posters and cancel our event...That's one thing about our school district, they didn't want to do anything that would make them look bad...but because you had one member of the PT flip out, she got nervous and wouldn't let us do it.

Theme 8: Negative Experiences and Harm in Applying Social Justice Advocacy

Participants shared personal experiences or explained the environmental considerations or penalties of others who applied social justice advocacy.

Participant 1001 said

> I'm too old. I am too close to being done. I'm like, 'No, I'm doing what it right and what I feel passionately about, and I don't give two hoots what those people are saying,' but other people are concerned, you know, there are other faculty that really take that thing seriously.

Participant 1020 mentioned

> I don't remember a ton of resources to support counselors dealing with multicultural or social justice issues. It's like, we knew counselors who were blatantly discriminated against. I can think of an African American woman who worked at an elementary school who was blatantly discriminated against. I don't really know how that was all resolved. But it was blatant, and I'd never heard of student services or anyone really providing any kind of support to deal with that

> or any kind of real training. One other counselor was actively fighting for social justice stuff. I know how they were treated and kind of discounted. You try to do the right thing, and then, 'It's damned if you do, you're damned if you don't. It's like you try to do the right thing, but then you're marginalized in a sense because you're like the squeaky wheel.

Participant 1090 explained "They (one school the Participant worked at) tried to declare themselves an anti-racist school, but it was awful. It was such an awful situation, and so many staff members just shut down, and it was so negative."

Participant 1030 mentioned "You have to tiptoe about how you address things and you bring your concerns to their attention, but you have to do so in a way where you're not coming off as the 'angry Black male', or something along those lines or someone who's coming from a place of bias."

Participant 1040 shared "I think that school counselors, we need to be well versed on political advocacy, as well, because that is very important, because from friend's experiences, you could be iced out, and you could be Blackballed because you're trying to do the right thing."

Participant 1070 explained (Negative result of a formal complaint by a group of counselors to the district regarding their roles and duties)

> I don't think there was much change there. Did we get lunch duty? Oh my God, it didn't change…It's interesting, and at one point, we had a walkie-talkie, so they can reach you at any time, and we're like, 'No, we don't want walkie-talkies.

Participant 2010 said

> Last year, I dealt with a lot of retaliation, but it was back and forth in terms of my writing and my professionalism and how I did things. I don't take on the stress. I really sort of get to a point where I don't care. I am going to do what I need to do for students. That's the important thing, even if I step on toes. I'm very bold. I have become an advocate, and I realize that to advocate for students and call people out, to be a whistleblower, it's a lonely space to be in... Some days, I just want to resign and leave because I can't take it anymore...There's so much happening that needs to be uncovered in the school district, and it's not. Everybody's afraid to talk because they're afraid of retaliation.
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> Participant 2080 described
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> When I was at the high school, and the director of counseling, the assistant superintendent was acting as principal. I was told (to do the statistics), I did the statistics for real, and he was furious, and they were right. They were real stats. But it was about how many kids did not graduate. He flipped his lid. That was one of the screamers, and he told me to go back and do it. I said, 'but I don't know any other way to do it.' He basically started up, 'You just need to figure out a way.' I was like, 'You want me to make shit up?' And, he was like, 'Well, I'm not saying that,' but he was.

Theme 9: Experiencing and Perceiving Disregard for School Counselor Expertise, Roles, Ethical Practices

Participants shared how they experienced disregard for their expertise and training, roles, and the impact on ethical practices. Many shared that how they are trained

and the expectations of the profession are not how the education system receives them, and they often deny them.

Participant 1001 mentioned

> I had a principal for a year and a half that was horrible, and that wanted to have her thumb on me like this, and was not very knowledgeable about a lot of things. So, it was hard. I will say that the assistant principal-they were tight. If they had found out I was doing something and they didn't have their fingers in the pot, so to speak, or controlling or telling me I could or couldn't do it. It wasn't good.

Participant 1020 shared

> Then there're times I've been with admin at meetings or whatever, and it's about social-emotional stuff, and you can't get a word in edgewise, and you would think we would be the first people you go to because that's what we're trained in. But, like I said, these are the same people, admin, who have no idea.

Participant 1090 said

> A school counselor is so misunderstood. They are put on all kinds of tasks, whether or not they actually want to do that, because the majority of the jobs require scheduling, and testing, and IEPS and 504s, all the things that shouldn't be a counselor. The biggest issues is protecting student confidentiality and also advocating for the students. Everyone wants to know everything. I am uncomfortable with how much personal information gets divulged when discussing students.

Participant 1030 explained

> Who evaluated me was my assistant principal. However, if there were schoolwide initiatives that we want to implement, then that would be assessed and determined by our overall principal. I do recall thinking along the lines of its (evaluations) not necessarily applicable to us. I remember it being very teaching-related, and more importantly, it wasn't taken as seriously by the administrators. I remember my AP just like, 'Hey, I went in here. Go ahead and sign off on it.' Da, da, da. It wasn't taken seriously whatsoever.

Participant 1040 explained "A lot of school administrators don't understand that we follow a different code of ethics as school counselors. I have to remind them and present specific rules, so I don't break them."

Participant 1070 mentioned

> We were being pulled from doing our actual role. Most of our time was schedule changes or scheduling students, testing, lunch duty, bus duty, all of that...Going into the profession, you have all these hopes that you would be able to do more for the kids and students and be able to provide those standards that we are taught...I just felt it lacked something, and what I really wanted to do in the profession and what I was hoping to do in the profession, there were so many barriers to that. I even speak to former colleagues, and they tell me it's gotten worse.

Participant 2010 stated

> The problem is I couldn't be a school counselor because the districts weren't set up to receive school counselors. They were set up to have you as schedulers,

> which continues today. I did not expect to be a scheduler without a voice...not seeking the bigger picture, the removing of systemic barriers, speaking out, the use of data to influence...They have this whole narrative of what the school counselor should do that remains. The school counselor is the junk drawer that catches everything. Your role is not defined. You're one against everybody else in the building, including the principal. You're 2-3 in the district, against the district. So, because you're so limited, you really don't have a voice. Every day, I continue to advocate for myself as a counselor, for the profession, and for students, parents, and families, and leaders.

Participant 2080 explained

> When I first became a school counselor, teachers didn't like school counselors because they thought we were lazy in our office, that we were matched with administration, but administration shit on us. Some of the teachers were horrible.

Theme 10: Personal Experiences of Marginalization and Harm

Most Participants shared experiences of marginalization within the profession and in their training as school counselors related to their marginalized identities.

Participant 1001 shared "I would just say the only way I've ever felt marginalized is my identity as a female. That, I've definitely faced sexual harassment in my workplace over the years for sure."

Participant 1020 mentioned

> There was a time in AZ where students started a rumor about me being gay and stuff like that and had said some other things that were really inappropriate. It was

completely untrue, but I knew that if I was a straight man, that never would have been an issue. It was, but I did not feel supported by the school district. I didn't feel supported by the assistant superintendent at the time. I didn't feel supported by the school because I was told that the students would be disciplined for spreading false rumors or gossip. The assistant superintendent told my principal not to do anything, just don't act on it, sweep it under the rug. It was more to protect the school district than it was to support me.

Participant 1090 said

I had a student hit on me last year when I was wearing this dress. With the support of my female colleague, I went to the head of the upper school (basically the principal) and the dean of students, who were both Male, and I told them what happened. After a few days, I told the head how I wanted to deal with this. He provided a little pushback, but I stood firm and explained why it was important to me. I was allowed to sit in a controlled space and share my thoughts with the students.

Participant 1030 described

I had one administrator come into my office after school and was like, 'Hey, you know since you're a Black male, how do you feel we need to handle this?' And, so, that's already some tokenism right there. And, here I am in the role of the school counselor, and I'm like, 'How do I, how am I supposed to handle this?' It was particularly uncomfortable because she was kind of going behind the other administrators and even the principal because they didn't agree with her. So, you

> want me to come up with an approach to this, but you don't even have support from your colleagues? 'How am I gonna go against my principal? How am I gonna go against my administrators with this idea, where you guys aren't even all aligned?' So, it was just a very uncomfortable situation.

Participant 1040 shared "Although I am not closeted, I do not push my relationship in anyone's faces. More people know now because my husband is now a (public government figure), but before this past year, not too many people knew I was married to a man."

Participant 1070 said

> I just recall one (Male) professor that I had that I had to advocate for myself in regards to how I was graded. Being in that one particular class and figuring out, 'Yeah, something's not sitting right.' But, again, I had to advocate and address that before they got out of hand.

Participant 2010 shared (He related this to being an outspoken, highly educated, Black Man)

> Funny enough, this is the first of my entire career, I got an 'ineffective school counselor role' (evaluation) because, of course, the rubric that was set up, my role at the present school is not set up to match the rubric. Therefore, it's going to be ineffective because you didn't ask me to do those duties, but yes, you're evaluating it. So, there is a problem with that, and I spoke out against it. I did not sign up for my evaluation because I did not agree to it or approve it...They don't

take kindly to me saying things or advocating for things. So, I have reclused to sit in my office sometimes and don't do anything.

Participant 2080 mentioned

Did I ever feel marginalized? I sometimes, especially in the early years, certainly as a woman. I worked for some Italian men who thought it was ok to scream and yell at us. Those were my principals and an assistant superintendent where they would just yell. One even told me I was just gonna have to get used to it. So, I think as a woman, I was really marginalized.

Theme 11: Perceived Positive Partnerships in Multicultural and Social Justice Advocacy

Most participants shared ways they have had positive partnerships within the education system and community that supported social justice advocacy.

Participant 1001 explained

I actually had an initiative because the town I live in is different than the town where I go to work. I live in Vermont, which is a much more progressive state, and there's a lot of social justice movement going on in pockets around the state of Vermont. There was something going on in my own community, which was social justice, basically just a chance to get people to talk. It was led by a high school group at our high school that is doing a social justice problem-based learning class. I tapped into those resources because of the school I used to work at, and we were able to bring those kids down to our school, and do an afternoon training with some of my older middle school kids, and then bring those middle

school kids to the faculty to hen say, ‘Hey, these are the things that we’re seeing, and these are the things that we’re concerned about.

Participant 1020 shared

What I really liked about the middle and high school in Arlington, VA, they have what are called minority student achievement coordinators, and they are assigned to each school and they represent the needs. It’s basically a counselor position, but it’s solely to work with minority students to support them. So, whether that’s arranging college tours to HBCUs, but sometimes I had students that were African American or Latino, and I didn’t necessarily know the best way to approach the situation with a family, something that was sensitive. There was a gentleman that worked there, and I could go to him, and then there were times that I would meet with him and parents together.

Participant 1090 said

I immediately thought of when I was the homeless liaison at my former school and myself and the social worker at the time. We got a grant; I think it was for $16,000. Our goal was to give food to students that needed it for home. We also wanted to fundraise for a van to pick up students because the public transportation didn’t come to the school. Before I left, we spent a small amount on leftover containers for the kitchen staff to create overnight meals, and to buy weekly/monthly city bus passes.

Participant 2050 said

> I work really closely as a volunteer outside of the school in New Hampshire with the Domestic and Sexual Violence Support Center. They are the ones that bring materials to the schools. I will also recommend things to them, and they will do it with the support of the school.

Participant 1030 mentioned

> Basically, we partner with one of the community partners, and we hosted a dinner where the community was able to come out, the parents came out, and they sat at different tables, and we came up with various prompts where it was basically talking about bias, within teachers, within parents, etc., how things were happening and they generated some conversation. I will say it brought some pretty challenging conversations to light, again, it was a bit uncomfortable, but I think some people, they were able to take something away from that.

Participant 1040 shared "I feel we have had very positive responses from not only the students but the teachers, faculty and staff, the admin, as well as board members, and the community itself."

Participant 1070 described

> We had the counselor from the district that came in-house as well. We even had a social worker in-house. I know I worked really close with this social worker when it came to finding resources outside for the students. A lot of times parents were more likely to come to what the school offered, rather than go outside to the other agencies.

Participant 2080 explained

> The NCBI (national diversity training and leadership group). They had a main office in the city of Rochester. Also, with the Turkish Society and the Ukrainian Society, especially for interpreters, because of Speech and language kids. They would be coming directly from Turkey, directly from the Ukraine...We reached out to those centers to help us out with registering students and interpreting for us.

General Narrative

The concept of social justice being bound by the environmental context evolved throughout each Participant's interviews. All Participants touched on numerous nuances that impacted the idea of social justice within the school environment. All Participants discussed the demographic makeup of their school leadership and student population. Participants 1030, 1040, 1070, 1040, 1070, and 2010 noted that leadership diversity was significant in how social justice was considered, especially in schools with more diverse student populations. Participants 1030, 1040, and 2010 indicated that power dynamics were at play in the broader systemic considerations. They described situations where more diverse leadership was prevented from more social justice-oriented focuses. These situations ranged from political aspects of the system and surrounding community, financial influences, and racial dynamics, where more powerful and influential leaders were White, and diverse leaders felt silenced or intimidated not to push social justice focuses.

All Participants shared the types of schools that they worked in, and this also had an impact on social justice concepts. Participants 1090, 2050, and 1040, who worked in Charter schools, private schools, or schools specifically supporting diverse or

marginalized students, often seemed less bound by traditional public school pressures, were less impacted by political or community pressures, and were more flexible in social justice focuses. Participants 1001, 1020, 1030, 1070, 2010, and 2080 worked in public schools. These Participants shared that their schools/districts were influenced and impacted by political and community ideology.

All Participants discussed how the political environment in their community and the nation interacted with how leadership in their districts handled social justice ideologies and focuses. In addition to political ideology, Participants 1020 and 1090 described how religious ideology, which was tightly tied to political movements, negatively influenced social justice ideology and actions within one of the school districts where they worked.

Participant 2050's experience was an anomaly. The Participant was a contracted school counselor vs. an employee of the district. She described the district she worked within as one that resides in a conservative political area and had a large, diverse student population, with a primarily White staff and leadership. However, there was a decent amount of social justice focus for students within her district, and Participant 2050 stated that she could also avoid the area's politics due to being a contractor. Participant 2050 admitted to having much freedom to do her work, though she did not feel that would have been the case if not working as a contracted school counselor.

Regarding political and religious movements, Participants felt that political and religious movements (often tied to the political environment) negatively impacted social justice focuses and usually impeded support for marginalized students. Participants

shared that movements such as Anti-Critical Race Theory, Anti-LGBTQ, and book bans are impacting their schools, even from basic concerns for staff and advocates and ramifications they might experience. Participant 1040 and 2010 noted that they did not feel as affected within their school, but they admitted to being aware of the negative impacts on other surrounding schools and communities. Noticeably, these two Participants worked in more racially diverse schools with racially diverse staff. These Participants have noticed effects such as the removal of Black History education courses, and Participant 1040 noted that he felt book bans have impacted LGBTQ predominately. As discussed above, the type of school usually determined how much influence political and religious movements had over social justice ideology and actions. Based on Participant experiences, political and religious movements greatly influenced public schools.

All Participants expressed experiences and understanding of the importance of representing marginalized groups in school leadership and/or school counselor training programs. All Participants shared experiences related to negative situations due to lack of representation or positive experiences because of the representation of marginalized students. Social justice actions and ideology, in most reported experiences, were more supported when there was a higher representation of marginalized groups.

For Participants 1090, 2010, 1030, and 2080, representation had a positive personal impact in their counselor preparation programs, but for a couple of different reasons. Two of these Participants are White females, and two are Black males. For the White females, having a diverse cohort and/or faculty in counselor education was

meaningful and helped them to learn and continue in their growth of understanding the experiences of diverse people and a greater understanding of marginalization for many groups.

For the Black Males, representation was necessary due to their own experiences of marginalization. Participant 2010 shared that in his counselor preparation program, there were more faculty members of Color than White faculty members. The cohort was less diverse, but due to the staff representation, the more privileged students were forced to face the realities of oppression and marginalization. He admitted that this often did not happen when the leadership was from more privileged groups. Participant 1030 shared how he had believed that he could not go into counseling as a profession because most of what he had experienced was that it was a field dominated mainly by White people, and psychology theories stemmed predominantly from White males. It was not until he was introduced to a Black male who was the director of a Masters counseling program that he realized he could enter the field and had a good mentor to help support him.

Participant 1040, a Black bisexual male, felt the lack of representation created deficits in training. He thought that with more diverse staff or students, there could have been a better opportunity to learn more about working with different populations and understanding the marginalization of various groups beyond personal experiences. He also felt that being the only Black Male in his program, and one of only a couple of Males in total, also created challenges in feeling understood and represented.

Participants 1001, 2050, 1020, and 1070 shared that they had minimal training around multicultural and social justice concepts. These Participants also reported a lack

of diversity or representation in their cohort or the faculty. All of these Participants shared that they had to learn about diverse groups or marginalization from personal experiences or seek professional development after their counselor preparation program.

All Participants discussed experiences of group status being apparent. Participants were very clear about the student groups that were afforded privilege and those that were often marginalized. Participants shared that student groups were usually treated or supported differently depending on where their identity fell, especially regarding race, economic standing, and if they were LGBTQ.

Predominantly, all Participants admitted that White students were continuously supported, and all acknowledged White privilege. Students with higher economic status tended to be supported more or have more access to support than those with lower economic status. Participant 1090 shared an example of a student who came from extreme financial affluence, and she felt that this student was receiving tremendous support due to the family's economic influence in the school. Yet, students she worked with who were from low economic situations were not getting the support they needed, even with a large grant the district received to support these students.

Participant 1030 shared that there was a lot of diversity and students with lower economic status at the Title One school he worked at, and while data was showing the needs of students, he did not feel a lot was being done to support students. He felt "they didn't have anything to grasp onto." Compared to the other schools he worked at, this one was very diverse, had students from lower incomes, and did not have additional support

such as a Parent Teacher Organization, which was available in other schools, with predominantly White students of affluence.

Participants 2010, 2080, 2050, 1020, and 1040 shared negative experiences involving LGBTQ students. Often, these experiences were related to the political and/or religious ideology of the surrounding community or pressure placed on the school districts from the broader system or families not to support LGBTQ students. One exception was the experiences of Participant 1090. She worked at a public charter school for the Arts. This school was very affirming for LGBTQ students. School type was key here and showed flexibility for certain types of schools to be more supportive of typically marginalized students.

All Participants shared how life experiences, such as personal growth, seeking professional development, travel, and personal experiences with marginalization, taught them how to be more multicultural and social justice-focused. Participants 1001, 2050, 1020, 1070, and 1040 discussed that these experiences were more of an education of multicultural aspects and social justice advocacy than they felt they had learned in their counselor education programs.

All but Participant 2050 discussed aspects of systemic hierarchy and the impact on school counselors, their roles, and ethical practices. Participants described how systemic hierarchy impeded their work as school counselors. Topics included concepts that the education system was built as a system of oppression and that leadership influences prevented counselors from performing many of the professionally defined

roles and ethical practices and created many barriers and challenges to their professional training, including multicultural and social justice advocacy.

Participant 1020 shared about a passed State Bill that required counselors to inform parents of students requesting to be called by a different name or pronoun before they were allowed to use the preferred name and pronoun with the student- this created conflict regarding counselor/student confidentiality and trust dynamics.

Participants 1001, 1090, 1030, 1070, 1090, and 2010 shared aspects of having to answer to leadership or principals who hold power and often felt that they did not respect or care what the school counseling profession's roles or ethical practices were. Some also shared that the principal was their evaluator and frequently felt this dynamic impeded performing ethical practices. These Participants felt that they often had to meet the expectations of leadership and principals over their defined training and ethical practices.

Participants 1040 and 2080 talked about the broader systemic impact that impedes the roles and practices of school counselors, such as school boards and the political nature of different parts of the education system.

All, except Participant 2050, described situations of marginalized groups not receiving support in the same way that more privileged students received or were harmed by inequitable or discriminating practices. Many described situations of racism, transphobia, homophobia, experiences of microaggressions, discipline disparities, stereotyping, and biases. Often, students were harmed beyond the initial situations, as their experiences were usually not validated or supported by leadership or staff, and they frequently received undue punishments or consequences.

Participants 1020, 2080, and 2010 shared stories of trans and gay students who were not accepted, respected, or supported within their school environment. Participant 2050 shared that she was aware of trans students on campus but also worried about how they were going to maneuver the conservative community around them, as they were not "out" as trans people. As mentioned before, this district was a bit anomalous as the environment was concerning for the Participant; however, she also shared a situation where a parent who was aggressive and very anti-trans was legally prevented from being on campus.

Participants 1070, 1030, 1090, 1040, 1020, 2010, and 1001 all shared examples of Black and Brown students experiencing harm and discrimination due to race. Many shared examples of students being stereotyped and judged as disrespectful when Participants understood behaviors to be more cultural. Discipline inequities were prominent, with students of Color experiencing more discipline or being viewed as problem students. Participants shared examples of data showing where there were needs for Black and Brown students, yet often, it was ignored, or Participants thought that more effort was put into the needs of White students. If students of Color experienced racism or microaggressions, Participants felt that often, White faculty and leadership did not handle the matters appropriately or make students feel validated in their experiences.

All Participants, except for 2050, discussed negative personal experiences when applying social justice advocacy or shared awareness of situations where colleagues were fearful of or received retaliation for advocacy efforts. Participants 1001, 1020, 1090, and 1040 shared examples of colleagues and staff being retaliated against, shutting down, or

fearing retaliation for being an advocate. Participant 1020 described personal retaliation and harm he was aware of regarding more than one colleague- even sharing legal complaints filed against the district, but he shared that last he knew, those colleagues had not had favorable outcomes trying to fight the retaliation. Participant 1040 also shared awareness of Blackballed colleagues- iced out because they tried to do the right thing.

Participants 1030, 1070, 2010, and 2080 all shared personal experiences of retaliation. Participant 1030 shared that being a Black Male, advocacy was challenging because he felt that often, in a school with more White leadership, there are always concerns about being perceived as an "angry Black Male." Participant 2010 shared similar experiences; he shared that there has been a struggle in advocacy approaches based on how others perceive him as a Black male. Participant 1070 shared that she and other counselor colleagues tried to advocate for their roles and against many non-counselor roles they were being expected to do. She shared that not only did they not feel heard, but after filing grievances in their district, the leadership put even more non-counseling expectations on them following their complaints. Participant 2080 shared numerous incidents of retaliation and harassment, being yelled at and intimidated by administrators and even told to "fix data" that was not favorable for the school. She also shared about putting together an event and working hard to support students one time; a parent complained because it supported LGBTQ. The event was canceled without the Participant's involvement, and she felt it undermined her support of students as a counselor.

All Participants, except for 2050, reported numerous ways they experienced disregard for their expertise, roles, and ethical practices. Participant 2010 summarized many of the Participants' experiences poignantly. He stated, "The problem is I couldn't be a school counselor because the districts weren't set up to receive school counselors. They were set up to have schedulers…The school counselor is the junk drawer that catches everything. Your role is not defined. You're against everybody else in the building, including the principal. You're 2-3 in the district, against the district. So because you are so limited, you really don't have a voice."

Participants shared struggles with far more non-counseling expectations and a lack of respect for school counseling training and expertise. Some Participants were expected to do discipline; many were scheduling, testing, participating, and writing IEPS and 504s plans. Many felt that there were often challenges and barriers to their ethical practices, and even when they advocated and educated about their roles, duties, and ethical practices per the counselor profession, it often was ignored or dismissed by leadership and administration. Participants highlighted that one of the most significant issues they encountered was confidentiality. They frequently were pressured within the school setting to break student confidentiality. Most shared that how they were evaluated was either not taken seriously by the administration, or they felt that the evaluations did not fit the school counselor's role. Participant 2010 shared that he was negatively evaluated in one of his final evaluations because what they evaluated him on was not what he was expected to do daily.

Participants 2010, 1040, and 1070 shared that they had left the school counseling role mostly because they weren't allowed to do what they were trained in and often felt disregarded for their expertise. All have moved into mental health therapy roles, with two still employed within the school setting but under different contractual conditions. Both shared that in the role of a school therapist, they are given much more freedom and feel that they can help the students in ways they were prevented from in the school counselor role.

All Participants, except Participant 2050, reported personal experiences of marginalization and harm related to their marginalized identities within their roles as school counselors. Participants 1001, 1090, and 2080 shared experiences of sexism, sexual harassment, and retaliation, with Participants 1001 and 2080 noting that these experiences were ongoing for years and experienced by more than one person. Participant 1070 shared a situation in her counselor education program, which was uncomfortable, and she felt that she was not being graded fairly. Her professor was a White male. She was not sure if it was due to racism, sexism, or both, but did mention she felt she was not being treated fairly.

Participants 1030 and 2010 expressed many situations where they experienced racism or were perceived through racist lenses as Black males. Participant 1020 shared experiences related to his being gay and the mistreatment by students and staff that he endured. He described an experience where he was not protected as an employee when students made false claims that could have jeopardized his career. He felt that the school district pretended they would punish the students involved and contact parents, but then it

was “pushed under the rug” and ignored. Participant 1040 shared that he did not feel he had experienced direct marginalization for being LGBTQ. However, he noted that he was not pushing his relationship in anyone’s face but that more people were aware because his husband is a government figure now, leaving a tone that he knows that the surrounding culture was not as accepting of a gay couple in a way that heterosexual couples are welcomed.

Finally, all Participants, except Participant 2010, shared that they experienced positive partnerships in multicultural and social justice advocacy. Participants 1020, 1040, and 1070 discussed good working relationships with other district personnel with specific supportive roles such as minority student achievement coordinators, social workers, and generally admin and the school board. Participant 1001 discussed tapping into a movement in her community around social justice to bring training and education from her community to the community where she worked. Participant 1090 discussed partnerships with her school’s kitchen staff, which helped create overnight meals for homeless students. Participant 2050 shared about close work with a Domestic and Sexual Violence Support Center, which provided education and materials to the school. Participant 1030 shared about a community partner who helped set up a community dinner to discuss bias and hold challenging conversations. Participant 2080 shared about a partnership with a national diversity training and leadership group and with the Turkish and Ukrainian societies in their area. These entities helped educate and provide support, such as connecting the school with interpreters who could assist with communication between the schools and the families.

General Description

The experiences conveyed by the school counselors exemplify Martin Heidegger's notions of *Dasein, fore-sight* or *fore-conception,* and the *hermeneutic circle. Dasein* is reflected in the school counselors' understanding of *being* within the world and how they interact with it, which is bound by the state of the world in which they find themselves engaged. To this world, they bring a *fore-sight* or *fore-conception*-preconceived notions about the world. Through a *hermeneutic circle* process of movement back and forth from one's understanding to the experiences and revision of understanding, the school counselors continued making sense of the world they are part of. This process enhanced the meaning, and preconceived understanding, biases, and judgments were revised.

School counselors enter their profession with *fore-sight* regarding their professional responsibilities toward ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy. The school counselors' discussions around the numerous nuances that influence social justice within the school environment illuminated their understanding of the world and, through experiences in the field, gained new meaning regarding the heavy systemic interplay and social dominance that challenge school counselors' roles and ethical responsibilities. Repeatedly, the experiences of school counselors highlighted the intricate aspects of social dominance existing in the education system: *behavioral asymmetry*-the mechanism that maintains and produces group-based social hierarchy, *ideological asymmetry*-social ideologies that help coordinate the actions of individuals and institutions, *legitimizing myths*-the attitudes, values, stereotypes, beliefs, and

ideologies that are the foundation to how social value is distributed through the social system, and *social dominance orientation*- the desire for group-based dominance one has.

School counselors' training lacks focus on the education system's effect on the professional and ethical practices of school counseling. Often, school counselors' *fore-conception* is that their expertise and professional ethical practices will be honored and respected. Through experiences, these preconceived notions evolved into a more profound and somewhat stunning understanding of the systemic implications of the education environment and its profound social dominance ties and the impact on the ethical practices of school counselors.

In nearly every aspect of the system, *microsystem* (direct effect on an individual's development), *mesosystem* (interconnections among those involved in the microsystem), *exosystem* (does not directly impact the individual, but parts of the microsystem), *macrosystem* (influences of the greater society and culture), *and chronosystem* (ex. Historical events, environmental change that influence development and lifestyle), school counselors illustrated the power dynamics at play. The elaborate dance between *behavioral and ideological asymmetry* was evident within their community, school districts, families, school boards, political policy, and ideology, where those with social dominance have more influence and opportunities to skew the resources toward more privileged groups and create barriers for those groups who are marginalized.

The demographic makeup of school leadership and student populations are connected to how social justice was considered within the schools and their districts. More diverse staff representing diverse students can create more opportunities for social

justice focuses and actions. However, systemic and social dominance influences had an intense entanglement here. Many aspects of the system control the school counselors' multicultural and social justice actions, especially those influenced by social dominance. What was revealed is that when leaders or those with influential power are White and have more financial or political influence, social justice actions, and focus are significantly inhibited, and diverse leaders are silenced or intimidated. These situations of power display a high *social dominance orientation* of those in power.

School counselors' *fore-conceptions* that multicultural and social justice advocacy is applied holistically within the profession evolved to a new understanding that social justice concepts are influenced by the types of schools where school counselors are employed. Systemically, charter and private schools had more freedom than public schools and generally seemed less affected by the surrounding political and community requirements. However, that freedom could also allow charter and public schools even more flexibility in asserting higher *social dominance orientation* within their schools without much oversight of ensuring equitable practices. This freedom could also encourage even more systemic influences, such as tapering charter and private schools, to fit the *legitimizing myths* of the community and their political and/or religious ideology. While the flexibility of the charter and private schools has had some positive aspects, such as supporting students of color or LGBTQ students, these private and charter schools are rare and not typical.

School counselors maintained that political ideologies from the *macrosystem* are interwoven systemically, with their strong *behavioral asymmetry*, throughout their

communities and nationwide, and this greatly influenced how, especially public school districts, handle social justice focuses and actions or non-actions. Some school counselors also highlighted that in some areas, extreme religious ideology is also tightly interwoven within political ideology and often supports *legitimizing myths* foundational to the *ideological asymmetry* that negatively impacts social justice actions and ideology within the schools. This negative impact was not surprising for many school counselors, especially those with multiple marginalizations; this is *Dasein*. For other school counselors, especially those with less personal experiences of marginalization, their *fore-sight* was altered through experiences, gaining the new understanding that this was the world they find themselves in.

The interconnections of *legitimizing myths* of political and religious ideology that create the *ideological asymmetry* were interwoven throughout the system, negatively altering social justice focuses and often blocking support for marginalized students. Current movements within the *chronosystem* and *macrosystem*, such as Anti-Critical Race Theory, Anti-LGBTQ, and book bans, were forcing *legitimizing myths* and increasing the *social dominance orientation* of the dominant groups, which was trickling down through all levels of the system. The removal of courses, such as Black History, and the removal of books that support racial or cultural experiences or support for LGBTQ demonstrated the intense social dominance thriving throughout the country. These movements (*behavioral asymmetry)* negatively impacted advocacy for students, especially marginalized students, due to fears of ramifications and potential retaliation and punishment for advocacy efforts.

The school counselors illustrated the significance of having representation of marginalized groups. Through experiences individually and in groups, through discussion, learning from each other, and diverse peoples, most school counselors expressed how the representation of marginalized groups in the school setting provided positive support and often can mean more multicultural and social justice advocacy. Representation can help fight against *legitimizing myths* and positively affect *ideological asymmetry*. Additionally, school counselors expressed how representation in counselor education was necessary. Representation in counselor education programs promoted a deeper understanding of working with diverse populations, allowed a more thorough training, deeper discussion, and learning, supported marginalized groups, fought against *ideological asymmetry*, and allowed marginalized groups to feel more heard and seen.

School counselors were keenly aware of group privilege and marginalization, significantly highlighting social dominance *behavioral asymmetry* concepts. Due to their experiences of marginalization, most school counselors entered the profession with *fore-sight* regarding privilege and marginalization, substantiated throughout their experiences as school counselors. The school counselors agreed that many groups (White, affluent, heterosexual, cisgender, Christian, non-disabled) are afforded privileges that many groups (people of color, low-socioeconomic, LGBTQ, disabled, non-Christian) are not; how students identified within these groups dictated how they were treated and supported in the education system.

School counselors described social dominance as rampant in the education system, entwined within each system level. While many school counselors entered the

profession with these preconceptions, many were less aware and understanding, but their insights and understanding evolved through *Dasein*. The school counselors overwhelmingly agreed that White privilege was predominant and most widespread within the education system (emphasizing high *social dominance orientation* of the predominance of White leadership*)*. White students were continuously supported. Students with higher socioeconomic status tended to have tremendous access and support, especially compared to those with lower socioeconomic status. This dynamic fits the predominate *legitimizing myth* that implies that poor people have hardships because of individual responsibilities and can change their situations with hard work (Protestant work ethic concept). Most of the school counselors expressed that LGBTQ students experienced tremendous marginalization that frequently stemmed from political and/or religious ideology (*legitimizing myths* that fuel *social dominance orientation*-all foundational to *ideological asymmetry* within the education system) in the surrounding community or due to pressures from the broader system (*chronosystem, macrosystem, and exosystem)* not to support LGBTQ students.

The concept of *Dasein* and gaining new meaning through a *hermeneutic circle* process was intensely illuminated in the school counselors' descriptions regarding the significance of life experiences, such as seeking personal growth, professional development, traveling, and having personal experiences with marginalization. These life experiences were all aspects of learning to be more multicultural and social justice-oriented, leading to what appeared to be a low *social dominance orientation* for school counselors and altered *legitimizing myths*. Within these life experiences, school

counselors learned much more about multicultural and social justice advocacy awareness than in counselor education programs.

Most school counselors deeply felt the power of systemic hierarchy and the influences on school counselor roles and ethical practices. Social dominance (*behavioral asymmetry)* and systemic entwinement created countless challenges for their work, and they made clear that this was a system built to oppress and that leadership often prevented counselors from performing professionally defined ethical responsibilities, such as multicultural and social justice advocacy. The systemic powers reported by school counselors that created the challenges and barriers came from State legislation, administration, school boards, or the political nature of different facets of the education system (*Exosystem, Macrosystem)*. Most school counselors entered the profession with *fore-conceptions* that their roles and expertise would afford them a certain degree of respect and that students would be treated equitably. However, in time, through gaining insight into the education system and negative experiences, their *fore-conceptions* were altered, and they grew disheartened by the reality of the education system.

One primary issue described by school counselors was dealing with administration. Often, the principals or leaders who held the educational power did not care or show respect for the school counseling profession's defined ethical practices or roles. Educational leadership trumped school counseling as a profession within the education system. Administrators, such as the principal or assistant principal, often evaluated the school counselor, which also put pressure on school counselors to meet the expectations of the educational leadership despite their defined ethical practices.

As school counselors describe, *ideological asymmetry* was apparent in the education system. They illustrated high levels of racism, transphobia, homophobia, experiences of microaggressions, discipline disparities, stereotyping, and biases (*legitimizing myths)* that exist for marginalized students. These students experienced immense inequality compared to the more privileged students. The harm these marginalized students experienced often extended beyond singular experiences and were usually continually invalidated or not supported by leadership or staff.

The systemic power and influences created many challenges and negative implications for school counselors when they applied multicultural and social justice advocacy. Many school counselors expressed a significant fear and worry about possible retaliation for advocacy efforts within the education system (*behavior asymmetry)*. Often, the fear had a basis, as many school counselors witnessed or had personal experiences of pushback and retribution when applying multicultural and social justice advocacy. Typically, the leadership in the education system was not trained in school counseling, and the systemic makeup pushed the education system agenda despite what the school counseling profession dictated in its ethics. Many school counselors encountered retaliation, dealt with legal ramifications, intimidation, and harassment, and experienced significant harm to their livelihood and mental health. Through these experiences, the notion that school counselors are respected for their expertise and ethical practices was chipped away to an alarming reality that this was often not the case.

School counselors expressed a considerable disregard for their expertise, roles, and ethical practices within the education system. The education school counselors

received in their counseling programs was that they are “uniquely positioned” in the schools and regarded for their specific expertise, which was altered as they moved through their experiences and engaged with others in school counseling. The systemic and social dominance interplay set up the education system to favor dominant groups, especially educators and administrators, in this sense. School counselors made up a significantly small percentage of the educational staff, and their training and professional expectations differed from those of educators and administrators. School counselors were often dismissed and not considered for their extensive training and expertise, especially if it countered the education system’s agenda (*ideological asymmetry*) or school leadership and staff.

School counselors continued to experience expectations within the education system that were not the defined roles or responsibilities of a school counselor as outlined by the school counseling profession. They continued to perform inappropriate roles and duties as the strength of the education system continued to push these even though school counselors continuously advocated and educated them about the professionally defined appropriate school counseling roles and responsibilities. The systemic undercurrents made it challenging for school counselors to change these dynamics in favor of their professionally defined roles and responsibilities. The education system often used counselors to create student schedules, test, and monitor students before or after school, during lunch, or as needed for discipline situations. They were often responsible for writing or managing 504 or IEP plans. Usually, the expectations of the school system did not utilize the extensive training and expertise that school counselors possess. One of the

most significant issues school counselors expressed was confidentiality; the professional and ethical concept of confidentiality was often disregarded or not respected by the educational system administration and staff.

In addition to the expectations of school counselors performing roles and duties that were not professionally defined, they were also often evaluated for these roles and responsibilities. School counselors shared frustrations about not being appropriately assessed, and many also reported that their evaluators did not take the evaluations seriously. School counselors expressed that inappropriate assessment could significantly impact their career and financial well-being due to the systemic makeup, as evaluations often affected their contract retention or salary schedules. Due to these frustrations of being unable to apply their training and professionally defined roles and responsibilities, as well as the impact inappropriate evaluations could cause, many school counselors were leaving their roles for private or school therapist positions. Many former school counselors shared that the new roles allowed them to apply their training fully without the extensive barriers and challenges in the education system.

Understanding social dominance was personal for school counselors as they also experienced marginalization and harm related to their marginalized identities. They also witnessed the systemic interactions and how this, partnered with social dominance (*behavioral asymmetry* and high *social dominance orientation* of the leadership), had created numerous encounters such as sexism or sexual harassment, racism, and harm related to sexual identities (*legitimizing ideologies)*. The school counselors expressed that

these negative experiences were rampant and frequently personally and professionally harmful.

Finally, school counselors experienced positive partnerships to promote multicultural and social justice advocacy. Often, the partnerships were formed with other community groups, agencies, or school personnel who share in their efforts to support marginalized students or groups. Many of the partnerships helped with racial dynamics, supported cultural or language accessibility, helped to educate about diverse groups, supported students who experience low socio-economic backgrounds, provided allyship for many marginalized groups, and helped to educate about relational safety. School counselors reported that often the positive partnerships thrive when the educational system is supportive, or there is more diversity in leadership or powerful influences who support multicultural and social justice advocacy actions.

For the school counselors, *Dasein* alters their *fore-sight* or *fore-conception*. Through their experiences and group interactions, pre-conceived beliefs and understanding evolved to a somewhat daunting understanding of professional school counseling. Most school counselors left their education programs with high hopes of helping students thrive, supporting and advocating for equity and social justice, and expecting respect and regard for their training and expertise. Unfortunately for many, the reality of the school counseling world they found themselves within is a significant mismatch to their preconceived notions. Many grew disheartened in their growing understanding of the systemic nature of the education realms and the social dominance that infiltrated most aspects of the system. They left the profession for more private

sector or school therapist positions where they felt that what drove them to be school counselors was finally honored and met with fewer challenges and barriers.

Summary

This section introduces the results of the research. The setting, data collection process, data analysis steps, and trustworthiness are described. Then, the results are laid out. First, charts sharing the demographic characteristics of the participants are provided. Then, a chart of thematic meaning units highlights which participant loaded for each of the thematic meaning units. One discrepant case is described, and then each meaning unit is more deeply illuminated with participant quotes. A general narrative is composed of thematic meaning units, and then, finally, a general description is developed by applying theoretical lenses to the general narrative. The next chapter will provide an interpretation of the findings and an analysis comparing prior literature to the findings. Implications and positive social change recommendations will also be presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In Chapter 5, I interpret and compare the research findings to pertinent prior research. Significant findings are discussed, limitations of the research are highlighted, and recommendations are provided. Finally, implications for positive social change and the conclusions are presented.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I discuss the key topics highlighted in Chapter 2 and compare them with the findings of the current study. Not all previous research is addressed. Rather, the more significant studies are connected to the results of the current study.

School Counselor Roles and Identity: School Counselors' Unique Position

The concept of the roles and identities of school counselors has been a challenging topic. School counselors have attempted to apply professionally defined roles and expectations in their practices for over a century but have been subjected to the broader educational, political, societal, and economic forces (Lauterback et al., 2018) that drive the roles and identities of school counselors. Despite efforts within the profession to create defining standards, expectations, ethical practices, a school counseling model, and school counselors advocating and educating about their professionally defined roles and responsibilities, school counselors continue to fight an uphill battle in being able to fulfill and apply the profession's defined roles and identities.

The general assertion in prior research was that school counselors held a unique position as a go-between for students and families and the school. School counselors frequently have a better sense of what students are encountering beyond their education

realms and are there to be an advocate (ASCA, 2022a, 2023b). Additionally, the specialized training that school counselors receive in mental health and social support, separate from the focuses typical of educational training, was also tied to the concept of unique positioning. However, the most substantial implication had been that school counselors held some level of power (Field & Baker, 2004) similar to that of administrators.

Perception of the School Counselors Through the Eyes of the Education Staff

Amatea and Clark (2005) sought to understand principals' conceptions of the school counselor role. They found that administrators preferred counselors to fulfill more traditional education-setting responsibilities (mainly their understanding of school counselor roles) despite ongoing discussions and the evolving roles of school counselors. Fifteen years later, Blake (2020) found similar results, but positive implications arose pointing to the need for further research exploring the potential impact of systemic facets on the role confusion and ambiguity of school counseling. Then, in 2020, Lane et al. performed a study that involved over 500 administrators in Kansas and their perceptions of school counselors' roles. The results indicated differences in what administrators understood school counselors' roles and responsibilities to be and what the profession defined as appropriate roles and responsibilities for school counselors. Finally, in 2022, ASCA surveyed school and district administrators. Findings indicated that 60% of participants reported being familiar or somewhat familiar with appropriate duties for school counselors (ASCA, 2023a). What had been continuously recommended for at least 2 decades was that school counselors needed to educate and advocate for their

professional roles and responsibilities. What had not been explored was whether counselors were educating and advocating around their professional roles and what the systemic response had been.

This current study found that these challenges continue. Participants described some of the unique positioning concepts discussed in prior literature, but many descriptions did not fit others. As reported by current participants, school counselors are go-betweens for students and families and often advocate for students. However, the assertion that school counselors hold a level of power similar to administration was found to be predominantly untrue, especially in multicultural and social justice advocacy. Most participants described ways that they had to answer to higher authority in their schools. Typically, they had to clear many counseling aspects and approaches with administrators, or the administrators or people with influence in the education system had the power to thwart the advocacy efforts of the school counselors. Many participants reported numerous experiences in which this happened.

Most of the school counselor participants spoke about frequently advocating and educating regarding their roles and ethical responsibilities, while others described numerous situations in which they were frustrated or uncomfortable with what they were being asked to do. Participants also emphasized that they are often expected to perform inappropriate duties and that their ethical practices are frequently up against the expectations of the leadership or the structure of the educational system. A few participants shared experiences that escalated, leading to union complaints, legal situations, and experiences of retaliation and harm for trying to follow their

professionally defined ethical responsibilities. Additionally, many participants felt their expertise, training, and ethical responsibilities were not respected, especially regarding multicultural and social justice advocacy. Most of the participants pointed out that the biggest challenge they experienced, often enduring pressure and pushback, was around school counselor ethical practices regarding confidentiality. Numerous participants also shared the systemic level's impact on where power lay, and it was not with the school counselors. The current study found that participants' struggles seemed to be less about them not doing enough educating and advocating around their roles and responsibilities and more about systemic power and the agenda of the education system trumping the ethical practices of school counseling.

One anomalous case existed: a contracted participant who did not experience these issues. This result signals that a school counselor who is a contractor might have more freedom to apply ethical school counseling practices than employed school counselors, who are often under a contract similar to the educational staff. Literature regarding contractor work was minimal, especially within school counseling and the education system. Most literature on contractor work focused on business, technology, and government work. However, a clear description in the extensive writings demonstrated differences between contractor work and employee status (Gibbons, 2024; Rizvi, 2024). This anomalous case hints at a difference in the type of employment status, potentially making a significant difference in whether a school counselor can fulfill the ethically and professionally defined roles and responsibilities.

School Counselor Obligations: Multicultural and Social Justice Advocacy

The school counselor's obligations to multicultural and social justice advocacy have been defined, especially since 2015, when the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016) were released. The ASCA (2022a) Ethical Standards included numerous standards that specify the requirements of school counselors' roles and responsibilities involving multicultural and social justice advocacy.

This current study showed that the participants generally understood these obligations and demonstrated how they applied many of the multicultural and social justice ethical standards. Although counselor education programs played a part in participants' knowledge of the obligations, they discussed that many aspects were lacking in their counselor education. Many felt they had not understood the extensive complexities of the education system or the intricacies of power dynamics that could impede their ethical practices. Additionally, most felt that coverage of multicultural understanding was not as extensive as needed, and social justice advocacy was not a topic covered in counselor preparation for most of the participants. However, the timeline of when the counselors were in their education programs is important. Most were finished before the release of the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016).

One of the more notable results of this study was that the curriculum and instruction in multicultural and social justice advocacy in counselor education programs often lacks a significant understanding of the power dynamics of the education system, the intricacies of the systemic power, the foundation of the system, and its oppressive design. Many participants encountered unexpected challenges and often felt that aspects

of their beliefs around the nature of professional school counseling versus the reality of attempting to advocate for equity and change were different. Additionally, those who had believed that their specialized training, expertise, or professional ethics were a protective factor often found that these were ineffective when confronting the power dynamics of the education system.

Bigger Picture: Truth of Multicultural Competence and Social Justice Advocacy

Moss and Singh's (2015) research was essential to the current study. Moss and Singh stressed that prior literature had continued to emphasize how crucial it was for school counselors to address marginalization and inequities in the education system. However, Moss and Singh noted that up to that point, previous literature had not discussed the actions or approaches that could be used to address inequities and shift away from traditional methods of school counseling.

The present study found that the need for actions and approaches to address marginalization and inequities continues today. Most participants shared ways they were attempting to address issues and expose the inequities, but many admitted that their counselor preparation had not addressed these ideas or had done so minimally. However, most participants shared their desire for ongoing professional and personal development, and many described that support or training in addressing inequities and marginalization is lacking in professional development opportunities for school counseling today. The participants did not feel that there were unified in go-to approaches for school counseling, and often they attempted to do whatever they thought they could.

Multicultural Competence of School Counselors

Previous research on the multicultural competency of school counselors demonstrated that exerted levels of competency may not be what was believed and hinted at other influential factors to the low levels of multicultural competency. Merlin-Knoblich and Chen (2018) showed some problematic responses from school counselors that highlighted that more privileged and monolithic ideologies were prominent and that many school counselors were continuing to follow assimilationist foundations and ignored systemic oppression. Merlin-Knoblich et al. (2020) hinted at the systemic implications and the embeddedness of school counselors within the education system. Merlin-Knoblich et al. noted that essential issues such as multicultural competence may not exist as assumed but that the systemic educational environment may impede or disregard ethical counseling practices. Dameron et al. (2020) focused on multicultural competence through the counselor education approaches of multicultural education (counselors receiving one multicultural course compared to multicultural ideology being infused throughout the program). Dameron et al.(2020) found that school counselors who had experienced an infusion of multicultural aspects throughout their program reflected higher perceived knowledge, awareness, and skills regarding multicultural concepts.

The participants in the current study differ from Merlin-Knoblich and Chen (2018) in that they acknowledge the oppressive nature of the education system, understand that privilege and marginalization of different groups are prominent, and seem determined to support all students and expose inequities to the best of their ability. However, a potential difference that might impact the results is that Merlin-Knoblich and

Chen did not note the racial dynamics of their participants. According to the racial makeup of school counselors who are members of ASCA, 76% are White, and 11% are Black (ASCA, 2020a); it is possible that a large number of the school counselor participants in the Merlin-Knoblich and Chen (2018) study were White. Additionally, their research noted sexual orientation, but only 4% of their respondents were LGBTQ. The current study had a higher percentage of Black and LGBTQ participants. Therefore, the differences may be due to school counselors' marginalized identities compared to school counselors with privileged identities. These differences might also demonstrate the strength of group social dominance, even within trained school counselors.

Merlin-Knoblich et al.'s (2020) findings were foundational to the interests of the current study in acknowledging that there could be more to the embeddedness of school counselors in the education system and that this system might impede or disregard ethical counseling practices. My research found that this is a significant reality for school counselors. Numerous experiences were shared regarding the systemic power, its impact on counselors' ethical practices, and how often these ethical practices, especially around multicultural and social justice advocacy, are impeded or quashed within the education system.

To some extent, my research confirms the findings of Dameron et al. (2020) but also point to further considerations. What seems clear is that for school counselors to have proper multicultural humility and to work best to support all students and work against inequities, multiculturalism and social justice awareness must be infused not only throughout training but throughout a lifelong journey. Most current participants shared

that their learning and understanding of multicultural and social justice concepts came throughout their life experiences and personal or professional development pursuits. Additionally, most participants noted that one course is insufficient, and it takes time, interactions with diverse people and ideas, and understanding concepts of privilege, marginalization, power dynamics, and oppression to understand what it means to be a multicultural and social justice advocate.

Multicultural Competence in Counselor Education

Research demonstrated that marginalized counselors in training and counselor educators frequently experience negative experiences related to biases and stereotypes, which show up through microaggressions, tokenism, and discrimination (Baggerly et al., 2017; Chan et al., 2018; Lester et al., 2021; Marasco & Astramovich, 2022; Paone et al., 2021; Seaward, 2018). My research found some of that to be true. One element that seemed to help many school counselor participants when they were in training was having representation of typically marginalized people in the leadership of their counselor education programs. More representation tended to reduce negative situations or increase the frequency with which these would be called out and challenged, and more discussion would occur to educate counselors in training as to why these situations were problematic.

Social Justice Advocacy in School Counseling

Prior research focused on social justice advocacy in school counseling had been minimal. From 2020-2022, commentary literature implied that there needed to be more focus on the systemic intricacies of education (Savitz-Romer & Nicola (2021). Some also

focused on the deep need to understand the group dominance and power dynamics in the education system, potentially impeding the social justice advocacy of school counseling (Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022). Roche et al. (2020) wrote a poignant article that provided a background on the foundation of the education system and discussed the concept of historicity, which is a concept that acknowledges that when people are born, the existing world—the surrounding culture and environment, are projected on them, which ultimately influences morals, perceptions about the world, and decision-making abilities.

Roche et al. (2020) explained that when the concept of an education system was being developed, education was focused on teaching people about White Christian ideology. Education was important for society to learn to read the Bible. The origins and the ideologies have negatively impacted and harmed many diverse people who were non-White and non-Christian throughout the years since the inception of the education system. Roche et al. (2020) emphasized that through historicity, it is necessary to understand the foundational ideology, its history, and how these ideas have continued to harm within the systemic levels of the education system.

My research reflects that many of the concerns for Roche et al. (2020) and the systemic and social dominance entwinement impact on school counseling are very prominent. School counselor participants discussed the privilege afforded to White students, especially those with more economic affluence, and many shared that White Christian ideology and conservative political movements often impede support, if not inflict harm on marginalized students. School counselor participants' descriptions of

numerous experiences signaled that the education system and the social dominance in each part of the system have not changed much from the foundational beginnings of the education system. Unfortunately, because there has not been much focus on these aspects in counselor education programs, school counselors have walked into a system that often presents challenges that many were not expecting, nor are they sure how to fulfill ethical practices of multicultural and social justice advocacy within this environment.

Multicultural and Social Justice Focuses: School Counseling and the Education System

Race Dynamics

Research in school counseling around racial dynamics has been minimal. However, thousands of research articles, commentaries, and data in the education realm point to severe racism, biases, stereotyping, and White supremacy (examples of some looked at for this research--Brooks & Watson, 2019; Cruz et al., 2022; Davis et al., 2022; Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020; Kiang et al., 2021; Steketee et al., 2021; Sugrue & Hanna Daftary, 2021). White school counselors have dominated the profession since its inception (ASCA, 2020a). Moss and Singh's (2015) article "White School Counselors Becoming Racial Justice Allies to Students of Color: A Call to the Field of School Counseling" discussed how Whiteness, White privilege, and less awareness of the impact of Eurocentric counseling theories may impact how White school counselors interact with students of Color. The article also mentioned that White school counselors often help to maintain the status quo.

This current research showed agreement with most research on racial issues in the education system. The White school counselor participants had some understanding of White privilege and did acknowledge that racism is problematic in the school system. Some White participants spoke about specific ways that they were working to recognize the racial dynamics and challenges and be sensitive to the mistrust students of Color might have. About half of the White participants expressed specific experiences where they applied multicultural and social justice advocacy actions to fight racism or to support students experiencing racism or racial injustices. In a few instances, White school counselor participants shared situations where they applied actions but also, to some extent, did not appear to fully understand how to work against racism for students, or out of fears of rocking the boat or retaliation, may have stopped themselves from futher advocacy efforts.

Many of the school counselor participants shared instances where they were aware of or witnessed racism or racial inequities. They noted that students of Color were disciplined more frequently and disproportionately. If students of Color reported inequities or mistreatment, they and their families were often dismissed by the administration. Stereotypes or White supremacy beliefs that “White was good” and “Black was bad” show up in discipline practices, inequities in class enrollment, or even access to student opportunities. Some school counselor participants, especially the Black participants, described situations where grades or learning issues of students of Color, especially Black students, are often not a priority for the leadership in the school, even when data shows it as an extensive need. Additionally, many Black school counselor

participants noted that frequently, students of Color are not encouraged to take more advanced courses or challenged to reach their higher potential and that the assumption is that they are not as capable as their White student counterparts (concepts highlighted in Shure et al., 2019).

One interesting dynamic that should be highlighted relates to school types and racial demographics. For one particular public school, the leadership was representative of the student population, and there was a large population of Black and Brown students. Data showed an immense need for academic support. However, as reported by the school counselor participant, it seemed that the leadership was hitting barriers in genuinely being able to support the students' needs due to other aspects of the education system, which were more White-dominant. Another school counselor participant discussed another school. This school was a public charter school that primarily catered to Black and Brown students. The leadership was representative of the student population, and due to being a charter school in a network that supported students of Color and did not have a lot of White leadership or other systemic interferences that public schools seem to encounter, the use of data, numerous supports, and social justice advocacy were foundational to this school.

For Black school counselor participants, especially a couple of the males, social justice advocacy around race is complex. While they advocate for students of Color, there was a very real underlying understanding that advocating for students around race either left the possibility of being viewed as an "angry Black man," or in many cases, they were tokenized.

One additional result of interest relates to the research of Kim et al. (2021). This research focused on factors that might influence whether Asian Americans seek assistance from school counselors. The model minority stereotype was discussed—the concept that all Asian Americans excel in academic, social, and career areas. One White school counselor participant shared that they worked with a high population of Asian students. This school counselor described that the previous year's biggest challenge was the work they had attempted with Asian students. The descriptions this school counselor provided reaffirmed the stereotype of the model minority, talking about "them" as being so "intellectually mature" but then claiming that the challenge was they "emotionally do not get the opportunity to be able to mature." This counselor shared that it was challenging to "figure out," and what they tried, would not work. The experience described seemed to reinforce stereotypes and biases. Unfortunately, the school counselor did not seem to have insight that it may have been their cultural stereotypes and biases, and even potentially White supremacy ideology, that created the disconnect, not an emotional immaturity, of Asian students.

LGBTQ+

In the last few years, the information and focus on research around LGBTQ+ and school counseling advocacy has dramatically increased. In 2017, Shi and Doud highlighted that LGBTQ populations often face different struggles than other minority groups. This population frequently received more prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination substantiated by religious beliefs from the general population. Additionally, it was noted that the families of LGBTQ were not always the positive and

significant resource that they often are for other minority groups. In their research results, Shi and Doud (2017) found that school counselors' self-perceived competency in working with LGBTQ was low and also showed some disturbing beliefs that school counselors held regarding this population. Other research also revealed challenges but positive progression in some areas of beliefs and ideologies around this population (Kanamori & Cornelius-White, 2017; Kosciw et al., 2016; Smith-Millman et al., 2019). Some results showed that more experiences with LGBTQ populations helped to create more positive attitudes in counselors and more support for LGBTQ students, creating numerous benefits for LGBTQ students.

My research showed that school counselors provide much support for LGBTQ students. Many school counselor participants described numerous ways that they support these students. Most participants also shared their knowledge that this is still a population under attack in many communities and politically (ex., book bans and state and federal legislation around notification of parents, pronoun/chosen name usage, trans people in sports, and bathroom use issues). Many believe that the foundational negative beliefs about LGBTQ, especially trans students, are predominantly driven by conservative politics and religious ideologies. Often, the school counselors shared that they encountered challenges in ethically supporting LGBTQ students because of political policies or social dominance in the education system dictating how to approach LGBTQ student situations. It is important to note, however, that many of the school counselor participants either were a part of the LGBTQ population themselves or had close contact with family or friends who were LGBTQ. In this research, the percentage of LGBTQ

counselors represented is much higher percentage-wise than typically reported in some of the previous school counselor data.

Disability

The topic of disability was less focused on by the participants, at least in the sense of students in special education. Some school counselor participants mentioned challenges for students regarding reading, lack of support for students with lower grades, or even frustration with passing students on to the next grade instead of acknowledging the data and putting things in place to support struggling students.

The one case in this research that was anomalous, where the contracted school counselor participant worked, was mostly students of racial minority and with neurodivergence or learning disabilities. The contracted school counselor, in this case, had much more interaction with students with disabilities than the other school counselor participants had reported.

The lack of emphasis on students with disabilities and the fact that most school counselor participants did not highlight working with special education align with the research by Bialka and Havlik (2020). Usually, the training counselors received in Bialka and Havlik (2020) concentrated on strategies and interventions for modifying the social behaviors of students with disabilities instead of providing proactive education and advocacy around changing perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes around disability. This research found that school counselor participants' experiences with disability awareness and advocacy tended to be more reactive and not proactive and that they often focused on the student level, not on a broad systemic level; this indicates that this still appears to be a

population of students who may not be receiving school counseling support that is ethically defined. It also suggests that counselor education might not be teaching counselors in training sufficiently about the topic of student disabilities and what social justice advocacy around disability looks like in school counseling.

Poverty

A few prior studies (Cole & Grothaus, 2014; Ricks et al., 2020; Kitchens et al., 2020) had found that school counselors' awareness of low-income families and poverty was often negative and instead of attributing poverty and low-income issues to societal barriers, they frequently attributed it to personal deficient attitudes of those who experienced low-incomes or poverty. This research did not explore precisely the attitudes of school counselor participants around poverty. However, throughout the interviews, no experiences were communicated that pointed to negative beliefs about personal ownership of people who experience poverty. Additionally, many school counselor participants noted deficiencies and inequities in the education system for students who lived in poverty, and many noted there was a noticeable difference in the support and accessibility of opportunity for affluent/privileged students in comparison to students experiencing low-income or impoverished living.

Intersectionality

Two research articles referenced explored the intersectionality of identity. Craig et al. 2018 explored the needs of primarily African American and Hispanic, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students. Findings suggested that these students desired safe and affirming spaces that allowed them to pursue academic success, develop pleasant and

amiable relationships, and receive unconditional love. Positive results showed that many school counselors strived to meet these needs. However, the overarching conclusion was that many unmet needs exist for these students in the education system. School counselors needed to understand their responsibility to these students, the need to be safe and supportive adults, and advocate for these populations.

Shell 2020 explored the disproportionality of African American students in special education and the experiences of school counselors working with these students. While the results showed that school counselors tried to provide services to these students, many challenges and barriers were mainly related to not being adequately prepared or trained in special education. As noted in the disability section, the current research results aligned with the findings of Shell 2020 and indicated that this area is lacking in school counselor preparation programs.

This current research found that some counselor participants reported some intersectionality. Mainly, what they described was related to the intersectionality of students of Color living on low income and in poverty. One school counselor participant noted that one school bussed students from a Section 8 housing area into a very affluent school district. The students from the Section 8 housing area were nearly all Black students, and the rest of the district's students were mainly White. This school counselor (who is Black) noted challenges and stereotypes that were created but also demonstrated awareness around concepts like inequitable housing practices and redlining practices that generate many disparities. Another school counselor (who is White) also highlighted some issues related to lower income and race. She underscored that where she worked,

there were two main high schools. One was in a more affluent area and was predominantly White, and the other was more diverse students in lower-income areas. She also noted the frustration with the biases and stereotypes and the refusal that seemed prominent that many people did not want to recognize systemic issues that created these problems.

Systemic and Social Dominance Considerations

Dominance, Bias, LGBTQ, and Anti-Movements in the Education System

Previous research, data, and commentary surrounding the education system demonstrated the dominance of groups. White people dominated the roles of school counselors, principals, teachers, and superintendents (ASCA, 2020a; Taie & Lewis, 2022a; Taie & Lewis, 2022b; NCES, 2023). White males dominated the education system's more powerful and influential positions and government policymaker positions (Taie & Lewis, 2022a; Johnson, 2021). This White dominance in many systemic aspects prevails despite the declining White student population (45%) in our school system (NCES, 2023). The Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) reported in 2021 that 70% of Americans identified as Christians, but only four in ten identified as White Christians. Roche et al., 2020 highlighted the long historical foundation of the education system, predominantly rooted in White Christian ideology, and the negative impact on non-White and non-Christian peoples over centuries.

Research and data have shown that people of Color have the highest rates of poverty and continuously show connections between low academic performance and poverty (de Brey et al., 2019; Irwin et al., 2023). Additionally, political issues around

"redlining" in housing and some beliefs about "redlining" in education also demonstrate dominance and systemic influences on more marginalized groups (Kummings & Tienken, 2021).

Numerous research from the education system reviewed for this study has shown that despite many positive movements to create racial equity in the education system, White supremacy, racism, biases, and stereotyping continued to impact the inequities in the education system overwhelmingly (Brooks & Watson, 2019; Cruz et al., 2022; Davis et al., 2022; Grace & Nelson, 2019; Kian et al., 2021; Leath et al. 2019; Owens & McClanahan, 2020; Sugrue & Hanna Daftary, 2021). Some of the research took deeper dives that focused on the negative impact of biases on inequities in education (Beachum & Gullo, 2020; Chin et al., 2020; Legette et al., 2021; Turetsky et al., 2021). Finally, numerous research from the education system focused on inequities and detrimental experiences of LGBTQ (Fantus & Newman, 2021; Goldstein-Schultz, 2022; McQuillan & Leininger, 2021; Persinger et al., 2020; Stargell et al., 2020).

In 2023, political discourse started to escalate with movements impacting public and education policy--movements such as "Anti-Critical Race Theory" and "Anti-Diversity-Equity-Inclusion." A TIME (2023) article highlighted that from January 2021 to December 2022, there were 536 anti-CRT measures introduced at all levels of government, and over half had been adopted. Anti- LGBTQ initiatives were increasing, especially anti-trans bills. In July 2023, there were over 500 bills in 49 states, most related to minors and gender-affirming care or related to school issues.

According to most school counselor participants, this research found agreement with these continued struggles. Whiteness is still dominant in the noted positions. Most of the counselor participants described many instances of White dominance and how it influenced the support or lack of support in different groups of students. Many school counselors noted personal experiences of how White dominance impacted them not only as school counselors but personally as Black professionals. Many school counselor participants shared about the political movements and their impact on their school environments, and some noted the ties with White Christianity and the political influences in their schools impeding their work. A few school counselor participants mentioned many instances where biases and stereotypes negatively harmed marginalized students. Most of the participants mentioned or were aware of the political movements of "Anti-CRT," "Anti-DEI," and "Anti-Trans," and noted book-bans had been experienced in their areas, along with the removal of courses like African American History or other similar things like clubs focused on racial diversity. Some of the school counselor participants discussed the inequities for students living in poverty, and a couple even noted the intersectionality of students of Color living in poverty, especially noting the "relining" and other systemic aspects that created challenges for these students. Finally, some of the participants shared experiences that involved the negative impact of movements and social dominance groups on the trans youth in their schools.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is the small sample size. Small sample sizes can potentially leave out additional relevant experiences. While the participants seemed very

open and honest in their interviews and provided very detailed accounts, there is always the chance they withheld information or were cautious in their answers due to confidentiality or judgment concerns. Participants may have also provided answers they thought I was seeking as the researcher. These limitations can have an impact on the transferability of the research.

Recommendations

This section will discuss various recommendations for future school counseling research. First, there is a significant need for a deeper understanding of the education system and the prominent group social dominance, profound within each level (Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022; Roche et al., 2020; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021). School counselors can be better prepared to understand the systemic powers and accurately understand how these aspects can challenge professional school counselors' ethics and standards, especially around multicultural and social justice advocacy. There is also a need for school counselors to have a deeper understanding of the history of the education system, the oppressive foundation on which it was built, and how inequities have persisted for generations for marginalized populations (Roche et al., 2020).

Future research could expand on the experiences of school counselors and further explore the implications of systemic and social dominance on the ethical practices of school counselors, especially concerning multicultural and social justice advocacy (Moss & Singh, 2015; Merlin-Knoblich &Chen, 2018). Additionally, research can focus on what school counselors and/or school counselors in training understand regarding the political and social ideology impact on the foundation of the education system and how

they affect the school counseling profession (Roche et al., 2020). Future research might also be more targeted in seeking different perspectives for a more holistic understanding. Research involving White counselors or counselors with more privileged identities could explore their knowledge of systemic dominance, the history, and data surrounding marginalization in the school setting, and further explore their multicultural humility, what they understand, and how they are applying multicultural and social justice advocacy, as well as learning more about how they gain an ongoing understanding of multicultural aspects in their lives (Merlin-Knoblich &Chen, 2018; Moss & Singh, 2025; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022; Roche et al., 2020; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021).

Research focusing more on the experiences of diverse school counselors with marginalized identities is severely lacking. Therefore, future research could focus on reaching out to these populations of school counselors to seek their experiences, their perspectives of personal marginalization, and those of students, as well as to explore their understanding of systemic dominance and the history of the education system (ASCA, 2020b; ASCA 2021b; ASCA 2022b; ASCA, 2022c). One additional research consideration around social dominance and diversity perspectives in school counseling would be to explore why diverse representation in the profession of school counseling continues to be lacking despite the growing diversity of the country and the higher diversity of the student population (ASCA, 2020b; ASCA 2021b; ASCA 2022b; ASCA, 2022c; Brooks & Watson; 2019; Carrero Pinedo et al., 2022; Chan et al., 2018; Kanamori & Cornelius-White, 2017; Lantz et al., 2020; Lester et al., 2021; Merlin-Knoblich & Chen 2018; Merlin-Knoblich et al., 2019; Paone et al., 2021; Seward 2019; Sugrue et al.,

2021; Weiner et al., 2021). One interesting dynamic in this research was that all Black school counselors had left the profession of school counseling. Three of the four shared that they felt they could not do the work they were trained to do, and two of them shared personal experiences related to their marginalized identities that also contributed to them leaving their school counseling roles.

Next, the identities and roles of school counselors continue to be a serious challenge. There are differences between working within a mental health setting and the education system (Blocher et al., 1963; Lambie et al., 2019; Walley et al., 2009). The training for both is very similar. Therefore, future research could explore why it is challenging for school counselors to gain respect for their training and expertise and why the professionally defined roles and duties are often disregarded in favor of what the education system dictates as school counselors' roles and responsibilities (Amatea & Clark, 2005; ASCA, 2019; ASCA, 2022a; ASCA, 2023b; Beck et al., 2018; Blake, 2020; Brasfield et al., 2021; Fan et al., 2019; Fye et al., 2020; Gysbers, 2010; Lane et al., 2020; Lambie et al., 2019; Lauterback et al., 2018; Pincus et al. 2021; Peterson, 2019; White, 2021). Is it purely the nature of the education system? Or, are there other reasons why it is challenging for school counselors to be respected for their expertise, counselor identity, and professionally defined roles and responsibilities? One potential exploration would be to research the experiences of school counselors or mental health professionals performing contractor work in the education system and how those experiences differ from those of school counselors employed similarly to educational staff.

Additionally, future research could explore why the profession continues to bend to the education system instead of pushing the strength and expertise of the training school counselors receive (Lantz et al., 2020; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021; Wilcox et al., 2020). Research can explore the negative experiences many school counselors have encountered when applying their ethical practices and explore if there are better ways to support school counselors, either legally or professionally, as many school counselors have left the profession due to retaliation, harassment, or personal harm when they attempted to apply the school counselor ethical practices.

One other consideration for potential research exploration is investigating whether a more academic focus in the design of the ASCA School Counseling Model (ASCA 2019b) created deficiencies for school counselors in being able to support students' mental health needs, potentially sending the wrong impression of school counselor training, expertise, and defined roles to the education system or signaling that the profession could easily be bent to fit the desires of the education system, which minimized the respect school counselors should have for their mental health training and expertise (Lantz et al., 2020; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021; Wilcox et al., 2020).

Next, research can continue to explore multicultural competence and focus on whether a more cultural humility approach is being developed, how school counselors in training are being taught around cultural humility, and how professional school counselors continue developing multicultural awareness and humility (Holcomb-McCoy,

2022; Kendi, 2019; Lekas et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2019). Additionally, it's important to explore what options school counselors have for professional development opportunities around multicultural humility and how this humility shows up in their applications of ethical practices. Finally, future research can focus on how school counselors and/or school counselors in training perceive the concept of social justice, how it's applied in school counseling, and the challenges and barriers encountered (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Kendi, 2019; Lekas et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2019).

Recommendations for school counseling preparation programs and professional associations are crucial as well. First, counselor education programs can focus on educating about systemic and social dominance issues in the education system and describing ways they might negatively impact ethical practices and strategies that can be utilized to approach barriers and challenges to ethical practices (de Brey et al., 2019; Irwin et al., 2023; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2022; Taie & Lewis, 2022a; Taie & Lewis, 2022b; The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016).

School counseling preparation programs could educate school counselors in training about the education system and how political movements or legislation impact the education system and the work of school counselors (Merlin-Knoblich &Chen, 2018; Moss & Singh, 2025; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022; Roche et al., 2020; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021). It's important to teach about the education system's historical foundation (Roche et al., 2020), the ongoing marginalization, and inequities, infuse this throughout the program, and encourage ongoing learning well into their professional development beyond their preparation programs. Additionally, school counseling

preparation programs can seek ways for school counselors to have experiences related to the education system throughout their programs and not just in their practicums and internship stages (Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021).

Further recommendations are that school counselor education programs and professional organizations could dive deeper into the mismatch between what is taught in school counselor preparation programs regarding the professional roles and responsibilities and what school counselors actually encounter in their professional positions(Amatea & Clark, 2005; ASCA, 2019; ASCA, 2022a; ASCA, 2023b; Beck et al., 2018; Blake, 2020; Brasfield et al., 2021; Fan et al., 2019; Fye et al., 2020; Gysbers, 2010; Lane et al., 2020; Lambie et al., 2019; Lauterback et al., 2018; Pincus et al. 2021; Peterson, 2019; White, 2021). It is essential to explore how realistic the ethical standards and professional position statements are, especially around multicultural and social justice advocacy, when faced with the fundamental nature of the education system and political legislative influences. It is crucial to understand better if the standards and positions should be altered to fit the reality of the education system or potentially add more to counselor preparation to ensure counselors have an accurate picture of the challenges and barriers they might encounter and ways to handle them best (ASCA, 2022a; Merlin-Knoblich &Chen, 2018; Moss & Singh, 2025; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022; Roche et al., 2020; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2021). .

School counselor preparation programs and the professional associations can continue exploring, teaching, and informing about multicultural and social justice advocacy concepts and finding ways to grow and change as the environment and cultural

societies change around us (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Kendi, 2019; Lekas et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2019). Multicultural competence has been a primary focus. However, many feel that moving more toward cultural humility is a better position for school counseling. Cultural humility also considers the influences of privilege, power dynamics, and social dominance, which need to be considered more in school counselor research, preparation, and the profession (Lekas et al., 2020). Additionally, the professional organizations might examine how counselors are being held to professional ethics and standards, as it appears by previous research and this research that often what is exerted is that school counselors are meeting these ethical standards (ASCA, 2022a). However, the data and research frequently do not reflect these exertions.

While ongoing cultural humility is required overall, some topics need additional focus. Ethical standards in school counseling support students with disabilities (ASCA, 2022a; ASCA, 2023b). However, there is an apparent need to educate school counselors about disability better and ways to support and advocate proactively for students overall, not just reactively at the individual student level.

Another topic that needs more focus and training in school counselor preparation and professional development relates to transgender and non-binary students (ASCA, 2022a; ASCA, 2023b; Kanamori & Cornelius-White, 2017; Shi & Doud, 2017; Simons et al., 2017; Willoughby et al.2010). While there seems to be growth in school counselors advocating for these students, there are still a lot of biases, stereotypes, and religious and political influences that are negatively impacting these groups of students. School counselors need to understand the ethical responsibilities of supporting these students,

mainly because current systemic influences and legislation significantly target these groups of students (ASCA, 2022a; ASCA, 2023b).

The professional organizations and school counselor preparation programs can work to define the concept of social justice better in ways that help provide a united concept within the profession and also leave an understanding that many contexts can impact social justice advocacy and its application (ASCA, 2022; Crook & Stenger, 2015; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Kendi, 2019; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). Social justice advocacy concepts and applications could be infused throughout school counselor preparation, with ample opportunities to learn about examples of situations where social justice advocacy is needed (especially around historically ongoing issues in the education system that relate to inequities—for example, how redlining is connected to more people of Color living in poverty, and how living in poverty impacts the learning and mental health of these students), strategies to approach social justice advocacy, and what school counselors can do when encountering challenges or barriers to ethical practices of social justice advocacy. Additionally, school counselor preparation programs and associations can be honest and realistic regarding the nature of social justice advocacy challenges in the political and education system environments (Dameron et al., 2020; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Kendi, 2019; Merlin-Knowblich & Chen,2018; Moss & Singh, 2015; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022). Additionally, they can work to provide more support and ways for school counselors to continue learning and growing through professional development, extending past their school counselor preparation programs.

Finally, the school counseling profession could have an honest and open exploration and recognition of the negative experiences that many school counselors endure when applying their ethical practices, especially around multicultural and social justice advocacy. Many school counselors have experienced retaliation, harassment, personal harm, and legal situations, and many have left the profession because of these issues and the lack of support in dealing with these issues.

Implications

Gaining more insight into the education system in which school counselors are embedded stands to open a whole new world of understanding drastically. As has been shown in decades of research in education and school counseling, despite many movements to support equity in education, there continues to be an ongoing struggle to make any headway (Cruz et al.,2022; Davis et al., 2022; de Brey et al., 2019; Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020; Irwin et al., 2023; Grace & Nelson; 2019; Leath et al.,2019; Owens & McClanahan, 2020; Sugrue & Hanna Daftary, 2021; Tienken, 2021).

School counselors have struggled with a professional identity and respect for their roles and responsibilities for over a century. Is it possible that understanding the system they are embedded in is the key to breaking free from these struggles and finally moving toward an ethically practicing and impactful profession that is respected for its expertise, training, and ability to support students holistically in ways not reachable before?

Gaining more understanding about how marginalization and oppression have been foundational to the education system, the ties that exist today, and the ties that are also connected to the profession of school counseling can help bring positive social change in

that knowledge is power. There remains a tremendous social dominance in the education system, the school counseling profession, and within the political powers that influence both these fields (ASCA, 2020a; Taie & Lewis, 2022a; Taie & Lewis, 2022b; NCES, 2023). Often, those with more social dominance and privilege struggle to understand the nature of many oppressive structures that create challenges and barriers for many marginalized groups because they are not experienced personally. Learning more and requiring more challenges faulty ideology, biases, and stereotypes and helps to bring more people together to advocate and speak out against the issues that create oppression and marginalization for our students. Additionally, the ultimate goal of school counseling is to help bring equitable practices to play for all students while caring for their mental health and social realities and providing academic support.

While difficult, these explorations might also illuminate challenges and social dominance within the school counseling profession. It might highlight issues such as why the profession is still predominantly White and why it is not easy to bring more diverse people, different perspectives, and voices into the school counseling profession. It might also better promote and encourage the experiences of the small population of diverse school counselors. A deeper understanding of many of these issues can help school counselors grow to be more reflective and understanding of cultural humility, promoting more respect and integrity for the profession, and working more appropriately toward equity and support for all students, not just certain privileged groups. What has been demonstrated is that there are many issues, progress has struggled, and what has been

suggested and explored prior has not created the changes or the equitable support for all students that is desperately needed.

Returning to the introduction of this research and the words of Ibram X. Kendi, Ph.D. (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022),

> School counselors must radically shift their attention from the failure of the students to the negligence of our education system to support students who are the most marginalized. School counselors can and must intervene. If they are not increasing the opportunities for all students, then we are doing a disservice. School counselors—as people who engage with multiple stakeholders, including parents, students, teachers, administrators—must take advantage of their unique positionality to support the humanity of all students and fight for equal access. (pp. xv–xvi)

The overarching implication is that if school counselors do not understand the system of education, the negligence and oppressive foundation, the social dominance implications, or the entwinement of different aspects of the education system with political and religious ideology and movements, and how all impede and influence school counselors and their ethical practices —then a disservice is done to our students, predominantly marginalized students.

Conclusion

We must understand why what has been tried in the past, the ethical standards, the position statements, and the unique training and expertise of school counselors have not had the desired positive change for students overall, especially marginalized students.

School counselors have exceptional training and bring support and understanding to the education system, which is different from the training of educators. Ethical practices require school counselors to be multiculturally humble and social justice advocates. They are trained to understand various implications that play into mental health, impacting academic success and social dynamics, yet often are not allowed to do the work they have been trained for and seemingly do not receive respect for their expertise. There have been numerous movements in support of promoting equity for students. Professionally and individually, movements have been in place to educate about the roles and duties of school counselors. The MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016) was released a decade ago. Still, the struggles continue. It is time to broaden our knowledge around the ongoing and existing challenges and barriers and look for other possibilities that might get closer to the root causes, such as understanding the education system and the implications of social dominance throughout.

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Appendix A: Email Call for Study Participants

Subject Line: Seeking School Counselors

Email Message:

> Hello, a new study about the experiences of school counselors related to multicultural and social justice advocacy is being conducted which could help counselors and counselor educators better align with the professional ethical standards, promote more effective professional advocacy, and better support equity in the education system.

About the study:

- Online Demographic questionnaire (10 minutes)
- One 60-90 minute interview, audio recorded (no videorecording)
- One Follow-up meeting for clarification of data and to allow any additional comments or feedback from volunteer (15-30 minutes)
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identity you

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Current or previously licensed or certified K-12 school counselors

This interview is a part of the doctoral study for Michele Lynn, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place until sufficient research data has been collected. Please Email Michele.Lynn@Waldenu.edu to let the researcher know of your interest. You are welcome to forward it to others who might be interested.

Appendix B: Participant Demographic Questions

- What is your age?
- Describe your gender identity
- What is your racial identity?
- How many years have/did you practice as a school counselor?
- What level(s) of K-12 education do you/did you work in? (elementary, middle, high)
- What state do/did you work in?
- What year did you complete your counselor education?

Appendix C: Interview Questions

- Describe the diversity of your workplace.
    - How diverse is your student population?
    - How diverse is your educational staff?
- Tell me about your cultural identity. What aspects of your identity would you describe as marginalized and why?
- Describe what multicultural and social justice advocacy means in the school counseling role.
- How do you enact forms of multicultural and social justice advocacy in your role as a school counselor?
- How do you partner with other school district and community stakeholders to encourage multicultural and social justice advocacy for students?
    - What positive supports or partnerships have you experienced in multicultural and social justice advocacy for students?
    - Describe barriers or challenges you've encountered to enacting multicultural and social justice advocacy for students?
- Who impacts your role or has "authority" over your position in the school, if any? For example, are you evaluated by a principal, student services, or counseling director, or do you have to clear any school counselor's actions with a principal?
- Describe how you were prepared for multicultural and social justice advocacy as a school counselor in your counselor preparation programs.

- Describe how you have used your preparation of multicultural and social justice advocacy.
    - Were there any situations where you did not feel prepared?
- What are some things you wish you would have learned during your training involving multicultural and social justice advocacy involving your role or your students?
- Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences of applying multicultural and social justice advocacy as a school counselor that I did not ask?