Mindful
Continuing Education

Surveying Professional Needs, Perspectives, and Ethics in School Counseling

Introduction to the Special Issue on School Counselor Preparation and Supervision

As co-editors, we are excited to introduce seven meaningful conceptual and research manuscripts in the *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision's* first special issue on school counselor preparation and supervision. These articles focus on three overarching themes: pre-service preparation and learning, ethical decision making practice, and counseling developmentally, culturally and linguistically diverse students. The authors of these articles present salient issues affecting the preparation and supervision of the 21st century school counselor.

Pre-service Preparation and Learning

The opening article in this special issue draws readers' attention to how counselor educators can facilitate learning opportunities for school counseling students by initiating collaborative relationships between students in school counseling and educational leadership programs. DeSimone and Roberts report the results of a mixed-methods pilot study in which they used internship sites shared by school counseling and educational leadership students to analyze three important categories of perception data: (1) aspiring principals' perceptions of school counselor utilization; (2) aspiring school counselors' beliefs about barriers that hinder implementation of comprehensive school counseling activities; and, (3) aspiring school counselors' and principals' beliefs about the value of joint learning experiences. The results of the pilot study highlight how perceptions influence the practice of these two important groups of school leaders. The authors found several factors influenced school counselor and principal practice that included time constraints, negative school culture, and poor principal-counselor

relationships among the 105 participants. Recommendations for how school counselor educators can cultivate relationships between educational leadership and school counseling students prior to graduation are offered.

Through a thematic analysis of student work artifacts (i.e., weekly journals, small group reflections in class, and post-class surveys), Havlik, Bialka, and Schneider provide insight about incorporating service learning into an introductory school counseling course. Service learning is a method of instruction that engages students in volunteerism and reflection while fostering elements of advocacy and professional identity. The authors offer a rationale and practical suggestions for designing the service-learning activity, aligning the activity with overall course goals, and integrating the activity into the course. The authors also share a summary of student feedback that illustrates the utility of self-reflection, students' increased self-awareness, and a heightened knowledge and sensitivity to social injustices affecting today's youth.

Ethical Decision Making Practice

Ethics and ethical decision making remain an ever-present topic for school counselors. Gilbride, Goodrich, and Luke report the results of a landmark study in which they investigated the professional peer membership of school counselors and examine what resources they utilize most frequently when confronting ethical dilemmas. The authors' work illustrates the complexity of school counselors identifying a professional peer group because of their multiple, and sometimes competing roles within schools and districts. This article makes an important contribution to the knowledge base because it provides readers a richer and more accurate sense of the school counseling profession's demographic diversity. Furthermore, it illustrates how school counselors' varying roles are inherent with dilemmas requiring they employ a wide range of resources to make ethical decisions.

Next, Springer offers readers an ethical case study that illuminates how school counselors are challenged to strike the balance of ethical obligations and professional boundaries. Communicated through the lens of an untenured elementary school counselor, the article provides insight into the multifaceted and complex roles 21st century school counselors fulfill. The issues presented in the case highlight the need for more education and research on ethical decision-making, advocacy on various levels, and the awareness of informed consent in practice.

Working with Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Diverse Students

Effective school counseling practice requires attention to the developmental, cultural, and linguistic needs of students.   Schwartz's article provides readers with developmental considerations for early adolescent students' capacity to make meaning of their experiences. Schwartz reports the results of a qualitative study that sampled middle school counselors – via individual and focus group interviews – to better understand how school counselors support healthy meaning making of life experiences among middle school students. Schwartz found school counselors help students in identity exploration when students confront challenging life situations by encouraging reflection and acknowledging their important connections and relationships.

As the K-12 student population continues to increase in ethnic and racial diversity, school counselors must understand the unique needs of youth that experience systemic barriers. Storlie and Toomey present the results of a qualitative study of school counselors' perceptions of barriers when working with Latino youth in order to inform more socially-just preparation and practice among school counselor trainees. The authors highlight barriers that Latino youth currently face and provide recommendations for school counselors to enhance the academic, career, and personal/social development of this growing population.

Lastly, Hannon offers a critical review of the literature on urban school counselors' professional development needs and provides a rationale for more research that investigates their professional development and supervision needs. The review cites the imbalance between ample research informing school counselor educators to help prepare urban school counselors versus the limited research about their ongoing supervision and professional development needs.

It is paramount counselor educators continue to give thoughtful consideration to school counselor preparation and supervision. Such consideration has the potential to improve learning opportunities and outcomes for pre-service school counselors, thereby preparing them to be successful in the age of school accountability. Through this special issue, professional school counselors, counselor educators and school counseling students can build their knowledge related to pre-service preparation and learning, ethical decision making practice, and working with diverse students. It is our hope that continued interest in school counselor preparation and supervision remains a priority for our readers and for the counseling profession.

The Professional Peer Membership of School Counselors and the Resources Used Within Their Decision-Making

This study describes the demographic identity of a national sample of professional school counselors to, understand the manner in which they conceptualized their professional peer membership and explore what sources they use to make professional and ethical decisions. Results indicate that participants hold a wide range of opinions concerning who they view are their professional peers and participants used varied resources to make professional and ethical decisions. Implications and future directions for research are discussed.

Professional organizations, accreditation bodies, and counseling scholars agree that fostering a strong professional identity is important for the self-efficacy, competency, and the ongoing development of individual counselors, as well as the overall counseling profession (Luke & Goodrich, 2010; Murdock, Stipanovic & Lucas, 2013; Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards have outlined professional identity as one of eight foci of educational experience and training (2016). The American School Counseling Association (ASCA; 2012) underscored this in their National Model for school counseling programming that guides school counselor professional practice, a framework that has subsequently been found to support professional identity and clarify role inconsistency (Shillinford & Lambie, 2010).

The extant literature related to professional identity development in counselors has increased in the last decade (Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010; Luke & Gordon, 2012; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003), specifically related to how the professional identity of school counselors is both impacted and enacted (Gordon & Luke, 2012; Luke & Gordon, 2011).

Although scholars have called for the enhancement of the professional identity development of counselors (e.g., Gale & Austin, 2003), there remains uncertainty about how to operationalize and assess professional identity, as well as how to understand professional identity within specific systemic contexts (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003) or 'communities of practice' (Woodside, Ziegler, & Paulus, 2009). Defining community of practice and professional peer group membership is more complicated in the area of school counseling because school counselors are professional counselors, but also part of the educational team. Further, in many states school counselors are certified as teachers with a specialty area of school counseling. The purpose of the current study is to explore the current demographics of a national sample of ASCA members, to understand how practicing school counselors describe their professional peer group affiliation in relation to their professional identity, and what sources and resources they use to make professional and ethical decisions.

School Counselors' Professional Identity

In a seminal grounded theory study exploring the professional identity of 10 school counselors in the United States (U.S.) and the Caribbean, Brott and Myers (1999) described professional identity as the manifestation of a professional's self-concept in relation to a certain profession, such that this self-concept "serves as a frame of reference from which one carries out a professional role, makes significant professional decisions, and develops as a professional" (p. 339). More concrete behavioral indicators of professional identity have been advanced to include active professional organization membership and engagement in ongoing professional development (Wester & Lewis, 2005), as well as self-identifying as a professional, integrating professional skills and attitudes, and engaging in one's professional community (Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010; Gordon & Luke, 2012). While lacking conclusive empirical support,

this body of research suggests a relationship between how counselors conceptualize their role and their professional peer group, and how this self-conceptualization might be related to the types of resources they access as they make professional and ethical decisions.

Goodrich, Hrovat, and Luke (2014) explored the professional identity, practice, and development of Kenyan Teacher-Counsellors, the equivalent to professional school counselors in the U.S. Participants in the study noted the strengths and challenges of teacher-counsellors in the Kenyan educational system, including the lack of a strong professional identity and community of related professionals to help serve professional identity formation of this group. Context and community of likeminded professionals appeared to be important in this study to the development and ongoing growth of one's professional identity.

Wenger (1998) described one's membership within a professional community as joining a community of practice. He defined work engagement tasks that are necessary to transition into full membership within that community. Woodside, Ziegler, and Paulus (2009) applied the communities of practice research of Wenger (1998) to a study exploring 52 messages exchanged between five female school counseling interns over a 2-week period. The findings indicated that school counseling interns perceived numerous barriers in fulfilling work engagement tasks including: (a) a participant's "ability to interact with other members of the community"; (b) their development of "a shared repertoire of resources for negotiating meaning," including words, concepts, and ways of doing things; and (c) a sense of "accountability to the joint enterprise of the practice" (Woodside et al., 2009, pp. 21–22).

Fulfilling the above work engagement tasks appeared influential to these interns' success in their roles, as well as the long term development of their professional identity. Within this study, interns turned to persons identified as their peers to make sense of their experiences,

which then influenced how they went about doing their work. Understanding the experiences of interns is significant because school counseling students' internship experiences are key components in professional identity formation and future practice as school counselors. Further, it raises questions about how professional school counselors experience their role in the context of public PK-12 education, and how their peer group affiliation might later influence their professional behaviors within the school environment.

Demographic Composition of School Counselors

There are currently no comprehensive national data about the sex/gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, educational training, region, or grade level of current practice of professional school counselors. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) membership, though substantial, is an understood fraction of practicing school counselors nationwide. Although ASCA permits purchase of portions of their membership list, they do not provide detailed demographic information about members (S. Wicks, personal communication, April 3, 2014). Therefore, researchers are challenged to determine the representativeness of their school counselor participant sample with respect to the above demographic variables (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). This is potentially problematic, as the literature suggested that school counselor demographics may influence professional identity development (Costello, 2005). To date, we are unaware of any national studies conducted with a specific aim to better understand the interaction between demographic and professional peer group membership.

Research Questions

The present study was designed to explore the demographic and professional peer group membership of school counselors, and to determine what resources they used to help resolve professional and ethical dilemmas. The first research question sought to descriptively identify the

demographic identity of professional school counselors who are also members of ASCA. Specifically, the study sought to identify members' sex/gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, educational training, and region of current practice and their professional identity as reflected in their description who they viewed as their peers. The second research question explored the resources used by school counselors when making professional and ethical decisions in response to a specific case study. These questions were explored to gain a better understanding of how school counselors' demographic and counselor preparation variables influenced the decisions they made at work, as well as understand how resources, such as supervision and consultation, might be utilized by school counselors based upon their perceived community of practice.

Methods

Procedures

After receiving institutional review board (IRB) approval for the study, the research team formatted the survey instrument and demographic questionnaire into Qualtrics, an on-line based survey instrument provided by the primary researcher's institution. Using a membership list for ASCA, the research team sent an email to all members of ASCA, which included a link to the Qualtrics survey along with instructions about the survey, and a brief discussion of its purpose. Following survey consent, participants were asked to read a case study and then directed to complete a survey, which included demographic questions, questions about their professional peer group membership, and questions about the resources they used to make ethical decisions. Two weeks following the date of the initial email contact, persons who had not previously responded to the study were sent email reminders with a link to the survey so that they could complete the project. A final reminder was sent to non-responders four weeks following the initial survey email.

A total of 23,440 persons were initially contacted nationwide. Of those 23,440 emails, a total of 2,418 email addresses were found to be invalid. An additional 237 persons responded to the researchers to share that they had received the survey, but would or could not participate in the study. The final potential sample for our study was 20,785, of that group a total of 1463 persons (7%) entered the survey and provided partial data. Of those respondents, 884 provided complete data for the final study (60% of responders, 4.3% of potential survey sample).

Instrumentation

Demographic information. Questions included information about participant's socio-cultural identities (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious identity) and geographic region in which they resided. In addition, participants were asked about their education, years of experience in schools and as school counselors, and the accreditation status of the program from which they graduated

Professional Resource Scoring Instrument. Participants were first asked who they viewed as their professional peers (e.g., school counselors in their building, district, or state; national school counselors; members of ASCA; other educational professionals). Participants were then provided a list of potential resources they may access to make professional decisions including: conferring with principal or district office administrators; asking their supervisor; seeking professional consultation from trusted peers outside of the education setting; consulting ethical codes developed by professional organizations (e.g., American Counseling Association [ACA] and ASCA); a community resource related to the diversity characteristic of student (i.e. an LGBT resource center); exploring district policies and precedents; past legal decisions; seeking spiritual advice or praying about it when related to a moral dilemma. Participants used a Likert scale to provide an individualized score for the utility of each of these potential resources.

The professional resource item was created after reviewing other ethical decision making scoring instruments (e.g., the Intercultural Model of Ethical Decision Making [IMED]; Luke, Goodrich, & Gilbride, 2013b). The scoring instrument underwent multiple rounds of review, and the items were piloted with experts in ethical decision making (Luke, Goodrich, & Gilbride, 2013a) and tested with masters' students (Luke, Goodrich, & Gilbride, 2013b). Participants were provided a list of potential resources and asked to rate the likelihood that she/he would use that resource on a scale from 0 (not at all likely) to 10 (very likely). Results of those pilot studies found support for the instrument. Previous research into the IMED Scoring instrument found inter-rater reliability for the instrument at 0.89 (Luke, Goodrich, & Gilbride, 2013a).

Results

Participants

Eight hundred and ninety-seven ASCA members consented to fully participate in the study. Of these participants, 750 (84%) identified as female, 139 (15%) identified as male; three participants identified as transgender, and five participants refused to disclose their gender identity. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 72, with a mean age of 42.45 (S.D. = 11.98). In terms of ethnic identity, 835 respondents (93%) identified as non-Hispanic/Latino, while 49 (5%) identified as Hispanic/Latino; 13 participants did not answer this question (2%). When asked about race, 764 participants (85%) identified themselves as White/Caucasian, 89 (10%) as Black or African American, 11 (1%) as Asian, 11 (1%) as American Indian/Native American, and 4 as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 18 participants (2%) did not disclose their racial identity. As such, racial/ethnic information provided by participants appeared similar to prior school counseling demographic research.

The majority of respondents identified as heterosexual (839; 94%), with 15 respondents identifying as gay/lesbian (2%) and 14 respondents identifying as bisexual (2%); 28 persons refused to disclose their affectual identity. In terms of religious identification, the sample was very diverse. Two-hundred and seventy-three (31%) of participants identified as Protestant, 201 (23%) identified as Catholic, 25 (3%) respondents identified as Mormon/Latter Day Saints, 24 as Jewish (3%), 13 participants (1%) identified as Unitarian Universalist, and 2 identified as Buddhist (less than 1%). One hundred and twenty-five respondents (14%) identified as spiritual, but not religious, 44 (5%) identified as Agnostic, and 19 identified as Atheist (2%). Finally, 65 participants (7%) identified as having no religious affiliation, and 98 participants (11%) identified as having another faith/religious tradition.

Regional distribution of respondents was fairly even across the U.S., with 238 (27%) from the East, 242 (27%) from the Midwest, 225 (25%) from the South, and 188 (21%) from the Western region. Respondents were primarily master's level clinicians, with 710 (80%) identifying this as their highest degree. One hundred and seventeen participants (13%) identified a certificate of advanced studies or education specialist as their highest degree, and 48 (5%) identified as having a doctorate; 17 participants disclosed having a bachelor's degree (2%) and five participants did not answer this question. The participants had, on average, 8.8 years of experience as a professional school counselor (minimum of less than one year, maximum of 39 years).

Six hundred and one participants (67%) of the responding sample stated that their masters' degree program was accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). One-hundred and fifty-nine participants (17.7%) of

the sample) stated that their masters' program was not accredited. One hundred and thirty-seven (15.3%) respondents did not disclose the accreditation status of their masters' level institution.

Professional Peer Group Data

Eight hundred and eighty-four of the respondents to this survey completed questions related to whom they perceived as their professional peers. Of those respondents, 346 (about 39% of participants) identified school counselors in their local region (e.g., building [40], district [193], or state [113]) as their peer group. As such, their sense of affiliation appeared to be more influenced by common contexts of work within the larger professional field of school counseling. Two hundred and eighty-eight (32%) of the responding school counselors identified with a national focused school counseling peer group. Of that group, 216 respondents identified that they viewed school counselors nationwide as their peer group (24%) and seventy-two respondents identified school counselors who are members of ASCA as their peers (8%). Twenty-eight percent of the sample identified their peers not as school counselors, but other educational professionals in their school.

Ethical Decision Making Resources

To answer the second research question participants were asked what resources they used when making ethical decisions. Respondents were asked to rate the possibility of their using different resources on a ten point scale, with zero representing that they would not utilize this resource, and ten representing that they were likely to utilize the resource. The five highest rated resources that participants stated they would use to address an ethical dilemma were: (1) administrative policies (M = 8.39, S.D. = 2.1); (2) ACA/ASCA Code of Ethics (M = 7.96, S.D. = 2.5); (3) Consulting a colleague or professor (M = 7.86, S.D. = 2.4); calling the ACA Ethics Consultant (M = 6.39, S.D. = 3.1); and (5) past legal decisions (M = 6.37, S.D. = 3.0).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, we wanted to describe the demographic identity of a large national sample of professional school counselors who were also members of ASCA. Second, we wanted to explore the manner in which practicing school counselors conceptualized their professional peer group membership and what sources they use as they make professional and ethical decisions. The demographic results of this study were consistent with previous research in that we found that the majority of our participants identified as White women. This trend was consistent across all four regions. Compared to prior studies (Bodenhorn et al, 2010; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Owens et al., 2010), a slightly higher percentage of non-White school counselors completed the current study. Because of the paucity of demographic data available in the literature, it is impossible to determine if this result is due to an increase in the diversity among school counselors or merely due to participant response. The results do suggest however, that there is still a significant gap between the demographics of school counselors and the students they serve.

Current results indicate that there is a wide range of views of professional school counselors related to whom they view as their peers. Not surprisingly the majority of participants viewed other school counselors, either in their building, district, state or country as their peers, but over a quarter viewed themselves first as educators. Interestingly, while all of the participants were members of ASCA, only 8% viewed other ASCA members as their peers; far fewer than those that identified with the profession in general either locally or nationwide. The results of this study suggest that ASCA does not define the professional peer group of these participants, even as they overwhelmingly identify as school counselors.

Given the range of groups identified by study participants as peers, it was a bit surprising that no differences were found in resources that participants identified using when trying to resolve complex or ethical dilemmas. There were also no differences between school counselors that had graduated from CACREP-accredited programs and those who had not; nor were any regional differences found. These results indicate that school counselors who identify as educators are just as likely as school counselors who identify with the school counseling profession to turn to the ACA or ASCA ethical codes to solve ethical dilemmas. Not surprisingly, the most popular resource for all participants was administrative policies. However, even school counselors who identified their peers as other educators, viewed ACA/ASCA ethical codes and the ACA ethics office as equally important resources.

One significant implication of these results is a commonality of practice that transcends peer reference group. Since all participants were members of ASCA, even though only 8% identified ASCA members as their primary peer group, they may be more influenced, and thus more similar, in the practice standards and expectations promulgated by ASCA than they realize. As such, it would be useful to conduct this study with school counselors that are not ASCA members to explore any potential differences that may exist.

These results suggest that there is a standard of practice shared by some ASCA members that includes the importance of national norms and resources embodied in the codes of ethics. In addition, the respondents to this study also saw the importance of professional consultation, either from a peer or through the ACA ethics consultant, as important resources when faced with ethical decisions. Not surprisingly, administrative policies and past legal decisions all appeared to highly influence the participants within the study. Hence, it seems that being embedded in school systems and administrative functions appeared to motivate respondents' response to

potential ethical dilemmas. This could help to explain the very local nature of the peer group endorsed by many of the participants. Future research with non-ASCA member school counselors could explore whether particularly they also consult school and district level policy with the same frequency.

Implications

It is striking that in this study of ASCA members only eight percent of respondents identified other national members of ASCA as members as their peer group, in spite of the fact that 24% of respondents identified other national school counselors (in general) as professional peers. The question remains why the other 68% of respondents did not appear to be nationally focused in their professional peer group identification. It could be that the ongoing fractions within the field of professional counseling (e.g., Reiner, Dobmeier, & Hernandez, 2013) can be seen through the responses of the participants in this study, who identified more at the school or local level. As such, it appears necessary for ASCA, as well as the profession of counseling in general, to work to better reclaim the identity of professional counselors, and to instill the importance of a larger peer group and professional identity within each of their members.

It was encouraging that respondents saw the importance of consulting the ACA and ASCA ethical codes, as well as professional colleagues, when attempting to respond to ethical dilemmas. While it is certainly the case that school counselors need to operate within the law and district policies, ethical dilemmas often challenge current practice and school counselors are expected to respond to ethical dimension of a situation not merely based on the minimal legal standard. It appears that school counselors may be in need of additional ethical resources when facing these complex decisions, as ethical dilemmas can oftentimes be very abstract, and not easily answered with only legal and administrative policies.   It is important to note that school

counselors' ethical responsibility, while needing to be consistent with the law, can often require additional responsibilities.

School Counselor Preparation

As there is an established link within the school counseling literature between exposure to specific topics and experiences in counselor training and subsequent attitudes and behaviors in practice (Chao, 2013; Scarborough & Luke, 2008), there are several potential implications for counselor educators and supervisors. First, school counselor education programs may benefit from an internal audit to assess when and how the curricula addresses professional identity and peer membership. Additionally, the audit can assess if extra-curricular opportunities, such as membership in Chi Sigma Iota or other counseling professional organizations (Luke & Goodrich, 2010) facilitate strong professional identity development among school counseling students. Role ambiguity and role conflict has also been implicated as barriers to school counselor professional identity (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Dodato, 2014). Hence, more training opportunities are needed to support some school counselors to successfully navigate this and become exemplary school counselor practitioners (Scarborough & Luke, 2008) and school counselor leaders (Dollarhide, Gibson, & Saginak, 2008) with strong professional peer group affiliation and identities.

Related, research in other school counseling domains has suggested that school counselor education programs may focus more on knowledge and awareness, and give less attention to the development of related skills over time (Jennings, 2014; Luke, Goodrich, & Scarborough, 2011). Given that the current research suggests resourcefulness in aspects of professional decision-making, programs may wish to implement specific opportunities for students to experientially engage in activities to develop and enact the behaviors and skills associated with professional

identity (Luke & Goodrich, 2010). In addition, both group and individual supervisors have an obligation to identify opportunities to focus on and develop supervisees' professional peer group membership as it relates to their counseling. Given the importance of modeling and feedback, trained school counseling supervisors (Swank & Tyson, 2012) can identify opportunities to work with school counselors-in-training on their ethical professional identity (Reichel, 2014), essential aspects of professional identity (Upton, 2013), and how role ambiguity and role conflict can interface with professional identity (Dodato, 2014).

School Counselor Practice

Ongoing professional development can be an important mechanism for both clinical and professional identity growth (Luke et al., 2011). School counselor practitioners are encouraged to seek out school counseling specific opportunities locally, regionally, and nationally. While district level support for such training is encouraged (Burkard, Gillen, Martinez, & Skytte, 2012), school counselor practitioners can independently partner with counselor education programs for additional coursework and utilize the numerous online resources both in the form of traditional webinars, podcasts, trainings, and also the newer social media platforms such as the professional school counselor forums on Twitter, Google Hangout, Instagram (Luke, 2013).

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the low response rate of ASCA members, with less than 5% of potential participants completing the survey. However, this response rate is consistent with other large on-line surveys of populations, and serves as one of largest national samples of school counselor demographics when compared to other published research. The responses from our participant population suggest that our sample was broadly representative. In addition, this study is one of only a few studies of school counselors that examined ethical behavior and

membership characteristics of ASCA members. An additional limitation of this study is that it is descriptive in nature. Although the results of the study provide a more comprehensive picture of the current membership of ASCA and their professional behaviors related to ethical situations, the descriptive nature of the study does not provide information about any causal conditions or predictive conditions that led participants to be members of professional organizations or behave in any given way when at work. As such, follow-up studies should look at more complex relationships in how ASCA members make professional decisions.

Conclusion

There is broad agreement in the literature about the importance of school counselors' professional identity (Gibson et al., 2010; Luke & Gordon, 2011). However, there has been little agreement as to the markers or manifestations of professional identity (Costello, 2005; Wester & Lewis, 2005), such as one's identified peer group membership affiliation. While the relationship between school counselors' professional identity, peer group affiliation, and professional competence has been implied (Brott & Myers, 1999), this research begins to illuminate how school counselors' professional peer group affiliation is related to the ways in which they consult resources and references when making ethical decisions.

When Values Blur the Lines: Navigating an Ethical Dilemma in School Counseling

School counselors regularly face ethical dilemmas that surround child protection and the navigation of home and school communication. Many of these issues are impacted by the school counselors' abilities to acknowledge their own personal values while balancing ethical obligations and administrative boundaries. The following case highlights an untenured school counselor's inner thought processes as she manages an ethical dilemma involving allegations of child abuse. This article discusses ethical decision-making and recommends advocacy for further discussion in counselor preparation programs around clinical supervision and consultation.

School counselors are trained to be on the front lines of assessment and prevention efforts that enhance the lives of students within the school community. Their work with students, staff, and stakeholders encourages opportunities for strong home, school, and community partnerships. Personal values may influence the emotional lens through which counselors initially define a particular problem. Clinical supervision is therefore important in helping counselors to further identify and process these values and personal triggers (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Unfortunately, research suggests that clinical supervision in the schools is continually lacking (Agnew, Vaught, Getz, & Fortune, 2000; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Luke & Bernard, 2006; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). This may have many consequences, including compromising the welfare of students through poor, autonomous decision-making. Because it is important for school counselors to adhere to the American Counseling Association (ACA) *Code of Ethics* (2014) and the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) *Ethical*

Standards for School Counselors (2010), clinical supervision and consultation represent ways to support accountability for ethical practice.

School counselors are in unique positions to help bridge the gap between the home and school environment, as well as the community of teachers and adminstration. This requires open and continued dialogue among these specific stakeholders. In many cases, school counselors must learn to navigate these relationships as the only school counselor in the building (Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001). Consequently, when faced with ethical dilemmas, decision-making becomes more challenging without access to regular clinical supervision and consultation.

Research continues to suggest the need to advocate for ways to support school counselors in gaining access to peer support and supervision (Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). The following case represents a school counselor's decision-making process in response to an ethical dilemma involving allegations of child abuse. Sections reflect the background of the situation, the school counselor's response to the various facets of the situation, discussion of ethical responsibilities, and reflective analysis. School counselor preparation and supervision recommendations follow.

Case Study Background

Mrs. Kast—a White, middle class, second-year, untenured elementary school counselor in a school comprised of students from an upper-middle class suburban community—faced an ethical dilemma as she struggled to define and advocate for her role in the school setting. Much of this struggle reflected the distinct culture evident in the elementary school. The building principal and many teachers worked there for over twenty years, and much of that time was without a school counselor. As Mrs. Kast was hired, the job description for the elementary school counselor position was not solidified. Moreover, personnel did not engage in shared decision-making and lacked a clear understanding of the role of professional school counselors.

As Mrs. Kast faced challenging decisions, she became charged with independently differentiating between decisions she should make autonomously and those that required principal approval. The following case demonstrates Mrs. Kast's struggle with the dilemma to assert her professional role as a school counselor and her ethical obligations at the expense of a potential confidentiality breach and/or a potential insubordination claim.

The Case

During Mrs. Kast's second year, a nine-year-old student, Jane Smith, was referred to the counseling office because of declining grades, a sullen affect, detached from peers. Jane shared her fears about her father's temper to Mrs. Kast, especially when he was not taking his medication. Mrs. Kast's attempts to clarify these specific behaviors and the father's medical condition were futile, as Jane was limited in her ability to express herself. However, Jane was able to describe situations when she and her siblings would hide from their father until he was able to return to "normal." Jane further mentioned how she would daydream in class instead of participating in discussion. During this conversation, Mrs. Kast wondered if Jane might be struggling with undiagnosed learning or emotional difficulties and planned to discuss her progress in school with both the classroom teacher and her mother later that week. Additionally, Mrs. Kast was concerned about Jane's inability to provide clear details regarding her father's behavior and home life. She was concerned about safety but recognized inconsistencies in Jane's story. Mrs. Kast felt conflicted in making a rash decision that could have significant negative consequences for the home/school relationship, but she knew of her legal and ethical obligation to contact protective services if Jane was not safe.

This uncertainty prompted Mrs. Kast to invite Jane's mother, Mrs. Smith, to her office for a meeting to discuss concerns about Jane's classroom behavior and disclosures about her father.

Mrs. Smith, a white, upper-middle class woman in her 40s, arrived for their meeting with a pleasant and welcoming disposition. Mrs. Smith expressed gratitude to Mrs. Kast for reaching out to Jane and encouraged her continued support of Jane's academic and social development. However, as the conversation progressed, Mrs. Smith began to express sadness and clarified her daughter's disclosures about Mr. Smith. Mrs. Smith tearfully shared incidents of spousal abuse and personal fears for her children's safety when they were solely in the care of her husband. Mrs. Smith clarified her husband's medical condition and discussed details about his behaviors that would occur when he was not consistently taking medications and when his sleeping habits were inconsistent. Mrs. Smith reported instances when she barricaded their bedroom door so her husband would not be able to reach the children. Mrs. Kast was equally sad and angry that Mrs. Smith continued to stay in a relationship that compromised their family's safety. Mrs. Kast's own values were influencing how she heard the conversation. Ethically, she knew of her need to process her feelings to ensure that they did not interfere with her decision-making.

Following Mrs. Smith's disclosures, Mrs. Kast agreed to continue working with Jane on a short-term basis and discussed her role in the school setting (ASCA, 2010). After expressing concern for Mrs. Smith and her children's safety, Mrs. Kast provided referrals to counseling resources that would support Mrs. Smith as well as her children on a longer term basis (ASCA, 2010). Mrs. Smith took the referrals, but from Mrs. Kast's perspective, she continued to make excuses for why she may not use them. Mrs. Kast thanked Mrs. Smith for coming in and requested to touch base the next day.

<center>**Ethical Dilemma**</center>

Immediately following Mrs. Smith's departure, Mrs. Kast reflected on their conversation and continued to realize the multiple issues that would need further attention. She realized she

was concerning herself less with what she could and/or should do to immediately protect Jane (e.g., filing a report with Child Protective Services). Mrs. Kast felt that providing additional resources could put this responsibility in the hands of a more experienced counselor who could provide follow-up support for the family. In this time of reflection, Mrs. Kast felt guilty because she recognized a struggle between her personal values and her ethical and legal responsibilities.

Mrs. Kast also struggled with articulating her range of responsibilities (e.g., short term counseling, counseling referrals) with families and staff, especially considering their limited knowledge of the breadth of school counseling services. It was important to her that families felt supported, but students needing referrals to outpatient counseling can be stigmatized by others who find out about their needs . On occasion, Mrs. Kast found this unfair stigma drove a wedge in the parent/counselor relationship and negatively affected their ability to effectively communicate. Given Mrs. Smith's perceived defensiveness about counseling referrals, Mrs. Kast decided not to discuss Child Protective Services as another resource. Mrs. Kast also never contacted Child Protective Services and felt unsure of how to explain the process to Mrs. Smith in a way that would be productive. Without access to clinical supervision, Mrs. Kast felt uncomfortable and helpless in supporting this family. Her fear of the potential consequences associated with contacting Child Protective Services (e.g. removal of children) and desire to remain in good standing with families and stakeholders complicated her dilemma.

Ethical Decision-Making

Mrs. Kast understood her legal and ethical duties as a mandated reporter of suspected child abuse, however she questioned her instincts. She wanted to consult with another trained professional before making such an important and far-reaching decision that would have implications for the family (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2010). Mrs. Kast was also concerned about

mentioning her desire to contact Child Protective Services to her building principal. Unfortunately, she was the only school counselor in the building and neither of the two other district school counselors, nor the director of counseling services could be reached. All of these considerations amplified her desire to consult with a colleague who was respected by the principal. Mrs. Kast decided to confidentially consult with the school psychologist because she had the principal's respect and Mrs. Kast believed the consultation minimized the chance the principal would react to her independently making this important decision.

The school psychologist expressed concern for the safety of both Mrs. Smith and her children and encouraged Mrs. Kast to redirect her consultation to the principal, as this had been past practice. Mrs. Kast worried the principal would not trust her; the principal's authoritarian leadership style made the anticipation of this conversation very intimidating for Mrs. Kast. These interpersonal and relationship dynamics ironically paralleled Mrs. Smith's presenting issues: both were worried, intimidated, and reluctant to engage in raising sensitive issues with important and influential people.

With trepidation, Mrs. Kast shared detailed concerns about Jane's safety with the principal and her desire to immediately contact Child Protective Services. The principal instructed Mrs. Kast not to report the concerns to Child Protective Services immediately. Instead, the principal instructed Mrs. Kast to call an afterschool meeting where the counselor, school psychologist, classroom teacher, and principal would discuss whether or not this was the appropriate decision. Mrs. Kast now faced two ethical dilemmas: (1) breaching confidentiality by sharing client information with the principal and classroom teacher; and, (2) not calling Child Protective Services regarding Jane's safety.

Mrs. Kast reluctantly scheduled the afterschool meeting; the principal instructed Mrs. Kast to contact Child Protective Services. Mrs. Kast documented the events of that day, feeling satisfied that the correct ethical and legal decision to contact Child Protective Services had been made. At the same time, she felt frustrated that her skills as a counselor were undervalued by administration and that this family's private affairs had ultimately been shared with the principal and classroom teacher (ASCA, 2010). Though the limits of confidentiality were provided to all district families in the counseling brochure at the beginning of the school year, Mrs. Kast realized she had not revisited these topics during her conversations with Jane or Mrs. Smith (ASCA, 2010). As a result, the issue of confidentiality weighed heavily on her mind (ASCA, 2010), especially as she considered how she might have handled this situation if the principal had not given her the directive to call (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2010).

Ethical Obligations

School counselors are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse. By law, Mrs. Kast could have faced jail time and civil penalties had she failed to report suspected child abuse to proper authorities. However, the thought of being potentially reprimanded with insubordination in the future by calling Child Protective Services without the principal's approval further intensified this situation. Mrs. Kast also felt deeply conflicted with whether or not to continue to work in this school district the following year; she knew this would not be the last time a critical decision like this would need to be made. Mrs. Kast knew she could not risk losing her entire career if and when this type of situation happened again, even if school counselors' roles were not entirely understood in her district. Mrs. Kast was aware of her ethical obligation to adhere to both the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) and the ASCA *Ethical Standards for School Counselors* (2010), yet recognized future decision-making could be ambiguous.

Mrs. Kast would have benefited from using an ethical decision-making model to help navigate this situation (Stone, 2010). Having not used such a process, Mrs. Kast's decision-making is arguably questionable throughout this case. School counselors are required to protect clients from serious or foreseeable harm and to consult with others if confidentiality should be breached. Mrs. Kast faced the dilemma whether to share details from her conversation with Mrs. Smith's with the principal and classroom teacher during the afterschool meeting Having chosen to share these details and not revisit informed consent and the limits of confidentiality (ASCA, 2010) highlighted Mrs. Kast's inexperience and her need for ongoing clinical supervision.

Mrs. Kast's consultation with the school psychologist is consistent with her ethical obligations (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2010); however, the specific details addressed during the afterschool meeting could have been called into question (ASCA, 2010). The ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) and ASCA *Ethical Standards for School Counselors* (2010) may have actually deemed the discussion with the principal, school psychologist, and classroom teacher appropriate for consultation purposes. Although the principal and the classroom teacher were not involved in the counselor's discussions with the child or the mother, they were both a part of the consultation team meeting and informed of the family's medical history, previous familial difficulties, and information about other family members that attended the school. According to ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) and ASCA *Ethical for School Counselors* (2010), a case could be made that the disclosure of confidential information violated the counselor's ethical responsibility to honor the student and family's confidentiality. With many follow-up questions from the principal throughout the meeting, Mrs. Kast arguably over-shared information in an effort to ensure the principal supported her desire to call Child Protective Services.

Mrs. Kast's ultimate fears were that the team would decide not to call Child Protective Services and she would need to challenge their decision to ensure the safety of her student. Legally, citizens are immune from being sued when justifiably contacting Child Protective Services; however, Mrs. Kast knew she could be relieved of her duties the following year, which could have implications for future job searches. Additionally, pressure to adhere to administrative culture and past practice compounded this dilemma. Mrs. Kast therefore made a decision to provide specific details to help better inform the team of the need to protect the Smith children, which ultimately resulted in compliance with mandatory reporting laws. These dilemmas demonstrate the importance and value of counselor supervision, consultation, and preparation for ethical decision-making.

The school counselor's decision to provide counseling and domestic violence resources to Mrs. Smith after listening to her needs is consistent with the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) and ASCA *Ethical Standards for School Counselors* (2010), which encourage counselors to provide clients with referrals to appropriate resources. Mrs. Kast also honored the profession's ethical codes associated with competence by discussing her ability and willingness to provide short-term counseling support to Jane and how those services differ from those of clinical mental health

Mrs. Kast did not learn whether her suggested resources were ever used, as Child Protective Services investigated and concluded there was not enough information to substantiate an abuse claim. Mrs. Smith subsequently distanced herself from the school and Jane no longer spoke as freely about her situation to the classroom teacher or Mrs. Kast. In lieu of this situation and other building challenges, Mrs. Kast decided to seek employment elsewhere the following year.

Reflection

The positive rapport Mrs. Kast established with Mrs. Smith ultimately led to the disclosure of important information necessary to help protect the family. Mrs. Kast's consultation and eventual adherance to legal and ethical obligations resulted in a report to Child Protective Services. Yet, Mrs. Kast could have made several different decisions throughout this ordeal.

First, informed consent and the limits of confidentiality were not revisited throughout the dialogue between Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Kast (ASCA, 2010). Despite Mrs. Smith's resistance to the potential involvement of Child Protective Services, it would have been important for Mrs. Kast to continue this discussion. Additionally, Mrs. Kast could have consulted with other non-district school counselors and/or made follow-up attempts to contact the director of school counseling instead of, or in addition to speaking with the school psychologist (ASCA, 2010). This may have resulted in development of a definitive plan to contact Child Protective Services consistent with the counselor's role in the school district and her legal and ethical obligations. This also may have helped the school counselor clearly advocate for her role as a mandated reporter to the building principal, prior to the afterschool meeting. In fact, Mrs. Kast may have chosen to use this opportunity to reference the *Family Education Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA; 1974) that explicitly mandates schools to disclose relevant information when a child's health or safety is of concern (ASCA, 2010). Discussing FERPA at the onset of the conversation might have actually strengthened her advocacy efforts.

Mrs. Kast could have immediately and anonymously contacted Child Protective Services following her conversation with Mrs. Smith. In doing so, she may have been able to approach the principal with direct information that could have eliminated the need for a team meeting. Mrs. Kast's desire to maintain her good standing in the district—and more specifically with an

unpredictable principal—contributed to more fearful and hesitant responses complicating these challenging ethical dilemmas. It is evident from this case that more well-developed relationships with district counselors and supervisors may have supported Mrs. Kast in navigating these dilemmas. As an untenured school counselor, it is also likely that Mrs. Kast's concern about the lack of support from her principal and lack of collaborative decision-making with the director of school counseling likely influenced hesitation and reactive decision-making.

Implications for School Counselors and Counselor Educators

This case was a learning experience for the school counselor in ways related to school counselor responsibilities, expectations, and adherence to ethical standards. It is important that school counselors' role and responsibilities be clearly defined and understood by supervisors, as recommended by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2012). Confidentiality can be addressed with the entire school staff at the beginning of the school year in the event that situations arise when staff may become aware of sensitive information (ASCA, 2010).

As the identity of the school counseling profession continues to develop, counselors are in an important position to advocate for the appropriate roles and responsibilities of the 21st century school counselor (ASCA, 2012; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Counselor training should include a focus on the development of counseling, advocacy, and ethical decision-making skills. This is especially important when allied school personnel may not be aware of school counselors' training and ethical obligations. Graduate programs may consider partnering with local school counselors to provide training opportunities to staff and administrators about the limits of confidentiality and the appropriate roles of school counselors. This additional support may further the professional identity development of school counselors (Dollarhide & Miller,

2006) and lend itself to greater connections between practicing counselors and graduate programs.

Given the lack of available counseling supervision in the schools, one way in which school counselors can ensure they are practicing ethically is by participating in peer consultation (Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). There are a variety of ways school counselors find opportunities to receive peer consultation, many of which occur within in-service district meetings. Unfortunately, these opportunities may be dwindling as the ratio of students to school counselors increases (Akos, Hamm, Mack, & Dunway, 2007; United States Department of Education, 2013) and professional development release time is following suit (Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). Partnerships with graduate programs may increase networking, peer consultation, and even supervision opportunities for practicing school counselors.

Peer consultation, as well as resources through ASCA, state organizations, and local/regional counselor groups are especially important, as school counselors enter the field expected to share community resource referrals for families (ASCA, 2010). While some districts employ school counseling directors or lead counselors to serve as consultants and evaluators, other districts leave the responsibilities of counseling consultation and supervision to non-counseling supervisors (Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). This often results in counselors only receiving administrative supervision (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The challenge new school counselors have with navigating ethical dilemmas (e.g., breaking confidentiality, challenging district policy with ethical mandates) might be made somewhat less daunting with peer mentorship via graduate programs or in the community. Malpractice insurance for school counselors often offers opportunities for legal consultation, and local treatment centers may provide additional community training and consultation. However,

without consistent counseling supervision, school counselors must find opportunities to share resources and consult to ensure that they maintain their professional competence and continue to make informed decisions that adhere to their ethical responsibilities.

The use of technology can be another tool to help facilitate peer consultation and supervision among school counselors (Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). The integration of online counselor consultation groups can help provide school counselors separated by distance with opportunities to share resources, discuss counseling trends, and increase their pool of peer consultants available when ethical dilemmas arise. These dialogues may also present opportunities for members to discuss ways in which counselors use technology in their work and support stakeholders with knowledge about the benefits and limitations of communicating student information. Examples and discussion specific to web-based peer supervision and consultation models for school counselors can be found in recent literature (Lin, 2012); however, the need for continuing research around the efficacy of technology-based supervision and consultation is warranted.

Conclusion

Infusing case examples into coursework that represent value-laden, ethical decision-making dilemmas allows for pre-service school counselors to engage in meaningful dialogue with counselor educators and peers in a supported environment. While counseling students receive ethical decision-making training through introductory courses, continued ethical case conceptualization that highlights the influence of school culture should be integrated. During graduate training school counseling students receive signficant supervision onsite and with university faculty. This level of support facilitates more opportunities to connect and process these issues with a more critical lens while practicing in the school setting. Likewise, practicing

school counselors can use cases and problem-based studies during consultative meetings to assist in the development of ethical decision-making skills, strengthen professional identity, and encourage professional advocacy if school counseling supervision is not readily available.

Meaning-Making in Early Adolescence: Practices and Perspectives of School Counselors

Adolescence is a crucial life stage involving aspects of identity development and decision-making that have potential life-long consequences. A sense of meaning is related to many beneficial factors during adolescence, including psychological health, academic engagement, and overall well-being. This qualitative interview study was designed to investigate middle school counselors' perspectives and practices regarding exploring meaning with their early adolescent students. Analysis of ten individual interviews and a focus group revealed that the school counselor participants did engage in work with middle school students around meaning-making. They primarily helped students to find meaning through identity exploration, specifically focusing on navigating challenging life circumstances, reflecting on behavior, and making meaningful connections. Practical implications for both school counselors and counselor educators are detailed.

What is the meaning of life? This question has been asked countless times within many disciplines throughout history. Viktor Frankl purported, however, that people truly desire not just to know the meaning of life in general, but to know specifically the meaning of their own lives (Langle & Skyes, 2006). He explained how meaning could be discovered in three ways: (1) creating something or accomplishing a task; (2) having an experience or encounter with someone; and, (3) through the inevitable suffering in our lives (Frankl, 1984). More recently, researchers have defined meaning in life "as a sense of coherence or understanding of existence, a sense of purpose in one's life, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment" (Ho, Cheung, & Cheung, 2010, p. 2).

This search for meaning and purpose often begins in adolescence, a period of life between the ages of 12-18, which is widely recognized as confusing, challenging, and difficult to navigate (Erikson, 1968). Adolescents are not only capable of engaging in independent thought related to meaning and purpose (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958), but according to Erikson (1968), the exploration of meaning and purpose during this life stage is an essential task of identity development. Recently, researchers have advocated that adolescence is an optimal time for counselors to explore issues of meaning and purpose with their clients and students (Blair, 2004; Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch, 2009; Burrow, O'Dell, & Hill 2010; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003; Ho et al., 2010; McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010). Developmentally, as suggested by Erikson (1968) and Piaget (1958), adolescents are ready to begin this exploration, and interventions at this vulnerable life stage could be an important measure. Although this life stage is ripe with changes and negative connotations, adolescents possess strengths that can be fostered to promote thriving, rather than just surviving their teenage years (Lerner, von Eye, Lerner, Lewin-Bizan, & Bowers, 2010). The following sections highlight the importance of meaning-making in adolescence; explain gaps between school counselor training and practice; and present results of a study that examined school counselors' preparation, perspectives, and practices regarding their work with adolescent students with meaning-making.

Importance of Meaning-Making in Adolescence

Research has demonstrated that adolescents are capable of engaging in the process of meaning making and engage in searching for meaning and purpose without prompting from others (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; McLean et al., 2010). Numerous studies have documented the relationship between a sense of meaning and purpose and well-being in adolescence (Burrow, et al., 2010; Ho et al., 2010; Kiang & Fuligni, 2010; Lerner et al., 2010;). In their study of sense of

purpose in youth, Burrow et al. (2010) analyzed self-report scales of 318 students and found that adolescents committed to exploring meaning and purpose during their teenage years were also more adaptive, positive, hopeful, and better able to effectively adjust to developmental challenges. Similarly, Ho et al. (2010) used questionnaires to study adolescents' sense of meaning and well being, but sampled a much larger group (n=1807) across 21 different schools in Hong Kong. Results suggested a positive correlation between sense of purpose in adolescence and well-being and life satisfaction, as well as an inverse relationship of a sense of meaning with social issues such as avoidance and rejection. In their study of meaning making, McLean et al. (2010) reported that being able to make meaning of past life events is also positively related to self-esteem and physical and psychological health.

The process of searching for meaning and engaging in exploration of purpose is also related to the task of identity development during adolescence. Several researchers have reported the centrality of identity formation during adolescence and its connection to meaning (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Kiang & Fuligni, 2010; McLean, 2005). McLean (2005) articulated that this focus on forming identity:

> begins to emerge in adolescence because of the onset of formal operations, physiological maturity, and often the demands for establishing oneself in the world through work, school, and family, demands that tend to allow for or even require meaning making (p. 683).

In her study of meaning making using the *Self-Defining Memory Questionnaire* McLean (2005) concluded that making meaning is vital to identity development and can assist adolescents with challenging transitions. Kiang and Fuligni (2010) sampled Latin American, Asian American, and European American adolescents and found that a sense of meaning gained from a strong

sense of ethnic identity was positively related to overall well-being, self-esteem, attitude and motivation toward school. Meaning-making, as it relates to identity development in adolescence, clearly has personal, social, and academic implications.

A meta-analysis of studies investigating purpose and meaning with adolescents confirmed the importance of a sense of meaning in positive self-development and revealed that the benefits extend into adulthood (Damon et al., 2003). These findings suggest that a sense of meaning during adolescence positively impacts people's contributions to society throughout their lives. Researchers studying adolescents, emerging adults, and adults found that life satisfaction was related to a sense of purpose in all age groups, but recommended early adolescence as an ideal time for counselors to facilitate searching for meaning and purpose with clients (Bronk et al., 2009). Introducing this exploration of meaning has the potential to be both preventative and therapeutic as younger adolescents encounter challenging transitions.

It is not surprising with the abundance of positive qualities associated with a sense of meaning in adolescence that there are negative aspects correlated with a lack of meaning or purpose. Frankl (1967) referred to a pervasive sense of meaninglessness as an existential vacuum. Blair (2004) found that a lack of meaning among adolescents was often the underlying cause of depression in teenagers. Sometimes this depression manifests outwardly as aggression or defiance, and other times it is turned inward, resulting in isolation or even suicidal ideation or attempts (Bjerkeset, Nordahl, Romundstad, & Gunnell, 2010; Khan & Mian, 2010; Ozawa-de Silva, 2008). Citing his vast experience as a doctor and psychotherapist, Frankl (1984) reported that "it may well be that an individual's impulse to take his life would have been overcome had he been aware of some meaning and purpose worth living for" (p. 143).

Researchers have highlighted the importance of counselors exploring meaning with teenagers since a lack of meaning in adolescence has been found to result in anxiety or engagement in harmful behaviors such as substance abuse (Blair, 2004; Ruffin, 1984). Some adolescents seeking a greater meaning in life may use drugs as a way to experience and connect with life on what they perceive to be a deeper level (Purvis, 1995). As indicated by the aforementioned studies, a lack of meaning that is not addressed during this pivotal life stage can result in harmful decisions, such as drug abuse, that carry potentially life-altering consequences.

A lack of meaning among adolescents can also influence the educational process. In their study of boredom and meaning, Melton and Schulenberg (2007) found a significant negative correlation between boredom and a sense of meaning or purpose. Boredom resulting from meaninglessness may manifest in adolescents' disengagement from the educational process or in impulsive or inattentive behavior in school (Divjak, 2010). Considering how influential research has documented meaning and purpose in adolescents to be, school counselor educators can leverage these findings to assist in the preparation of school counselors who serve adolescent students.

Preparation of School Counselors

While multiple studies cited in the previous section have demonstrated support for the importance of exploring meaning in adolescence, there is little to no research specifically examining how school counselors are prepared to help their students with this task. More research is needed to address the gap between school counselor practice and school counselor preparation, which has been recognized in school counseling and counselor education literature (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Branthoover, Desmond, & Bruno,

2010; Education Trust, 2012; Hayes & Paisley, 2002; Martin, 2002; Pérusse & Goodnough, 2005; Steen et al., 2008; Steen & Rudd, 2009).

This gap is concerning, as school counselors often begin their careers with limited preparation in key areas necessary to perform their duties successfully. Although the ASCA calls for a unified vision of school counseling, research has highlighted the variation across counselor preparation programs regarding school counseling curriculum and preparatory experiences (Branthoover et al., 2010; Pérusse & Goodnough, 2005; Steen & Rudd, 2009). In fact, in some cases there seems to be little connection between the actual activities of school counselors and the preparation they receive in their graduate programs (Ed. Trust, 2012; Martin, 2002; Steen & Rudd, 2009). Researchers have pointed out the lack of, and need for, an intentionally designed and consistently constructed curriculum for preparing school counselors that is informed by research and practice (Hayes & Paisley, 2002; Pérusse & Goodnough, 2005; Steen et al., 2008).

Purpose of Study

Because adolescence is recognized as an important and, at times, challenging life stage, examining school counselors' preparation, perspectives, and practices to help students with meaning making is important for a number of reasons. It is important because of the reported positive implications of a sense of meaning in adolescence. It is also important because of the potential negative lifelong consequences of leaving these adolescent issues unexamined (D'Amico, Ellickson, Collins, Martino, & Klein, 2005; Hofstra, Van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2002). Although adolescents are able to independently explore these issues of meaning, they often need help navigating the process of making meaning of their lives (Blair, 2004). School counselors can help students to make meaning by assisting them in gaining insight about life

circumstances and exploring what they have learned about themselves through the situations they encounter (McLean, 2005). Unfortunately, there is a lack of research that examines the extent of school counselor preparation for this task and what their practices are, if any, in this area. The aim of this study was to elicit the voices of middle school counselors regarding if and how they explore issues of meaning with adolescents in the school setting, as well as how prepared they feel to do this work.

Methods

A qualitative research design is a natural fit with this research study because of its inquiry about meaning-making and understanding meaning within context (Merriam, 2009). This study employed a phenomenological research design focused on school counselors' experiences and perspectives about meaning-making with early adolescents. Interview questions were analogous to the general questions that form the foundation of phenomenological inquires. Questions were created to elicit voices of school counselors, asking them if and how they incorporate meaning-making techniques in their counseling with students and the extent to which they felt prepared to do so. In phenomenological inquires, perceptions, such as the ones gathered from school counselors in this study, are regarded as a foundational component of knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). The epistemological perspective underlying this study is an interpretive or constructivist philosophy in which the goal is to describe and understand the practices and viewpoints of the participants (i.e., school counselors). The school counselor participants seemed to relate and engage easily with the qualitative style of inquiry, as it shares commonalities with the counseling process including establishing rapport, asking open-ended questions, and giving voice to lived experiences (Berrios & Lucca, 2006).

Participants

Participants included ten (N = 10) certified middle school counselors with two to 23 years experience. All participants, at the time of the study, were working in public schools. Middle school counselors were specifically sampled because they serve with students in early adolescence. Additional demographic information about participants included eight female and two male, between 26 and 65 years old. Eight participants identified as White, one as Black, and one as Biracial (Black/Latina). The participants' spiritual and religious beliefs included Catholic (7), Buddhist (1), Humanist/agnostic (1), and one participant did not identify with any particular religion or spirituality.

Data Collection

The researcher, a human being who is able to analyze and interpret information, is the main instrument of data collection in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). As such, I engaged in the process of epoche, identified as a critical function of any phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas, 1994). This required I recognize, report, and account for personal and professional biases before the start of and during data collection and analysis. Additionally, I utilized reflexive journaling and critical dialogue with peer debriefers.

After obtaining approval from the institutional review board, participants were recruited through specific purposive sampling methods, in order to "discover, understand, and gain insight" from a targeted population (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Specifically, I used convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods. Convenience sampling was used based on the location and availability of the respondents. Snowball sampling, which requires asking participants for references of other potentially eligible participants, was also used. I gathered a diverse sample that included participants of varying ages (i.e., 26-65), years of experience (i.e. 2-

23), and tenure status (i.e., 5 tenured and 5 non-tenured), working in a variety of settings (suburban, urban, rural).

Sampling began by asking several directors of school counseling services and school counselors to recommend counselors to be interviewed. I also contacted presidents of county counseling associations for referrals. Those referrals led to my contacting potential participants by phone or e-mail. Participants also had the opportunity to recommend another school counselor for consideration to participate in the study.

I conducted in-person, one-time individual interviews with each school counselor participant in a private location of her or his choosing. A semi-structured interview protocol was used (see Appendix A) that lasted approximately 60 minutes. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Following individual interviews, participants were invited to participate in an additional focus group interview; five participants attended. The focus group interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and was recorded and transcribed. This additional data collection method provided the opportunity to ask clarifying questions, engage in member checking, and give participants the chance to interact with one another. Composite textural descriptions of emergent themes (Moustakas, 1994) from individual interviews were presented at the focus group interview. Respondents were asked to share their perspectives on the accuracy of the information. This provided for increased clarity and authenticity in reporting the results. I asked participants follow-up questions based on the interview data, and invited them to ask each other and me questions, as well as expound on their thoughts. Participants who did not attend the focus group were also invited to provide clarification or follow-up information after their initial interview.

Data Analysis

Data consisted of word for word transcriptions of the audio recorded individual and focus group interviews. Data were analyzed as it was collected throughout the study, which allowed me to utilize discoveries through analysis of initial interviews to shape subsequent interviews and the focus group. I analyzed the transcriptions through the process of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994), or carefully reading through the interviews multiple times, highlighting significant statements from participants and making notations. As commonalities emerged across the interviews, I grouped these statements from participants to begin identifying meaning and themes across the data and combined them into a textural description (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2013). As a strategy to increase credibility, the data from the focus group served as another layer of information that was triangulated with the data from the individual interviews. Finally, I integrated themes identified across all of the data as well as rich, thick description including specific quotations from participants as applicable in a composite description (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

I employed several methods to enhance the study's trustworthiness. I was intentional about acknowledging my own assumptions and position as a researcher to refrain from unnecessarily biasing the study with my own judgments before engaging in any fieldwork, data collection, or analysis (Moustakas, 1994). I intentionally documented my personal experiences, assumptions, and judgments about adolescent meaning-making and school counseling practice both before and during data gathering and analysis through reflexive journaling (Choudhuri, Glauser, & Peregoy, 2004). To assist me with this process, selected colleagues with doctoral level research training and experience served as peer debriefers (Kline, 2008). I engaged with them during the process of epoche to help me become aware of my own biases. This awareness

and accountability allowed me to be more equipped to truly seek an emic perspective based on the participants' perceptions and experiences.

Efforts to increase the dependability or consistency of this study were taken through use of an audit trail, which required the maintenance of a detailed account of data collection and analysis procedures and decision-making processes (Merriam, 2009). Peer debriefers also had access to the audit trail. They discussed, challenged, and questioned my decisions throughout the process allowing for analysis of the data from a variety of perspectives and further increasing the integrity of the research process.

Efforts to increase transferability were made through the use of rich, thick description and variation within the sample related to demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, and years of experience. As a strategy to increase credibility, the data from the focus group served as another layer of information that was triangulated with the data from the individual interviews. I used member checks, or respondent validation, to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretations and help ensure accurate interpretation, further contributing to the confirmability of the study.

Results

School counselors were probed about their work with adolescents about meaning-making, and data analysis of the individual interviews and focus group revealed the subsequent overarching theme and subthemes shared in the following sections. The overarching emergent theme was one of identity. School counselors were most likely to work with students about meaning-making when engaged in activities that yielded them exploring their identities. The areas in which they did this work with early adolescents was through the suffering or challenging circumstances in their lives, examination of their behavior and choices, and through helping them make connections to others and things they care about.
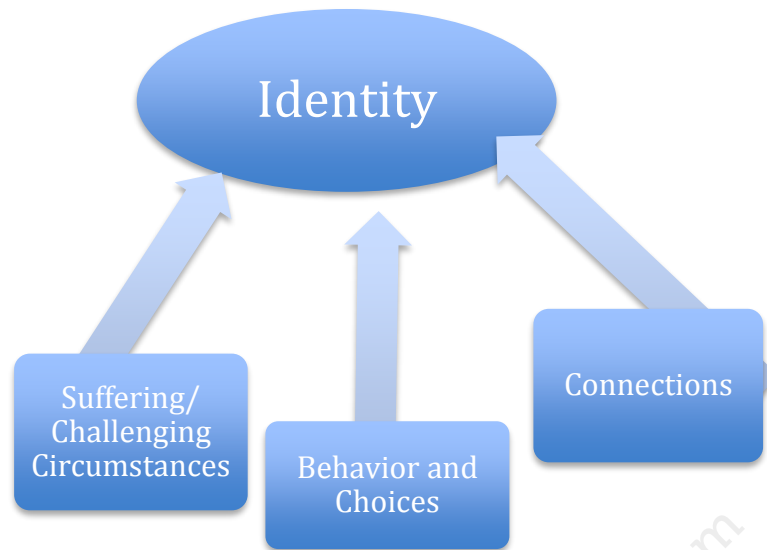
Identity

Suffering/ Challenging Circumstances

Behavior and Choices

Connections

Figure 1. Exploring Meaning with Adolescents: Emergent Themes

Overarching Theme: Identity

As school counselors discussed their work with early adolescents, it became evident the major avenue through which they explore meaning with students is through identity. Participants consistently mentioned the importance of exploring meaning through the development of an individualized identity. They explained how they work with students to help them find their own personal sense of meaning through helping them to reflect on and explore who they are and who they want to be. This overarching theme was evidenced in every interview. The main work in this area of meaning-making involved helping them reflect on their present and future identities. Participants consistently described instances when they asked students reflective questions like, "Is that how you see yourself?" and "Is this who you want to be?" The participants believed that students in this age group were becoming more developmentally capable of this kind of reflection.

The counselors shared many examples of working with students to find their own sense of meaning. Through these examples and the school counselors' descriptions of their work in

these areas, it was apparent they were helping students find meaning through exploration of their identities, specifically related to navigating challenging life circumstances, reflecting on behavior, and making meaningful connections.

Subtheme 1: Suffering and challenging life circumstances. During interviews, the school counselors said they were likely to do deeper meaning work with students in response to difficult life circumstances. They explained that students in a reflective place (e.g., because of challenging life circumstances) were most receptive to doing work about meaning-making. Difficult life circumstances seemed to facilitate student reflection and questioning. Questions such as "Why is this happening to me?" or "What does this mean for my life?" gave counselors opportunities to help students explore meaning in their lives through changing roles and examination of beliefs.

Participants described entering adolescence as a particularly difficult time for many students. One school counselor described her perspective on this age group:

> There is a lot of pain in middle school kids, even the ones who are succeeding. Making meaning is one of the important things in well-being. I think we do have to find ways to make it all seem more meaningful to them. There are a lot of kids out there who just are sitting there going, 'Is this what it's all about?'

Several participants talked about supporting students through suicidal ideation, cutting, and eating disorders by exploring the meaning that triggered these challenges and how that meaning is connected to their identities. Participants described the importance of helping students find some greater meaning to help them persevere. Many middle school students have their first experiences with death and other forms of loss during this stage of life. Participants reported that this often prompts questions about life's meaning. This is evidenced in the example one school

counselor gave about a 13 year-old student dealing with her parents' divorce. The participant reported the student was conflicted and "really struggling with a new identity being the only child in two separate homes."

One participant described two 13 year-old female sexual assault victims. They subsequently questioned aspects of their own identities and the purpose of their own existence. The school counselor described his work with these students to help them "find a reason to go on and live." As one participant explained, "We talk about how change can be difficult. With change there is growth. You can suffer *from* or you can suffer *through* and persevere."

Subtheme 2: Behavior and choices. School counselors reported engaging students in reflection, examination, and meaning-making about their behaviors during this life stage. Exploring ideas about their identity seemed to facilitate how school counselors helped students to consider the meaning of their behavior. A participant explained how she works with students experiencing behavioral issues, "I always try to bring them back to, 'is that who you really want to be? Is that how you see yourself? Would you be proud of this someday?' I try to do that without being judgmental.' " One counselor talked about asking students to think about who they really wanted to be. She explained, "I think it's a good question to put out there for them…they're still young and they have a lot of time to change." Most participants discussed helping students explore the meaning their behavior has in how they identify themselves now, how others see them, and who they want to be in the future. One participant discussed how students often need assistance in making meaning of their behavior for themselves. She talked about trying "to really get them to reflect on their behavior and contribution to issues and problems and how they have an opportunity to contribute positively versus negatively."

The interviewees often referenced their role in helping students discover the impact of their choices on their own present and future identities, defined by themselves and others. Several of the interviewees talked about helping students understand the meaning their behavior has in forming others' perceptions about their identity. One school counselor described how she uses this approach when working with early adolescents on bullying issues:

An example is someone was harassing someone on the bus and publicly humiliating someone. Now, not only are they developing a reputation from the victim, but all of the witnesses that are observing them. Sometimes they don't realize that. I'm like, 'you just defined yourself to 50 something people and you don't realize it. Is that what you want?'

Participants reported working with students on choices and decision making, helping them examine the meaning of their behaviors, and empowering them to choose wisely for themselves. A participant explained, "Strength comes from being in touch with ourselves and being able to make choices from that place." School counselors helped students reflect on who they are and who they want to be, so they could choose behaviors congruent with that desired identity. An interviewee described, "Sometimes we can steer them and empower them so they know they have the control to determine whom they're going to be and the choices they're going to make. That's really powerful."

Early adolescence is a time when interviewees believed students began to have more awareness about a future they might want to influence in the present. School counselors described the importance of assisting middle school students in this process. As one participant stated, "You really need to develop, create a map with them, and try to connect on a smaller scale, meaning and purpose. As far as their academics, but also meaning and purpose on how their behavior will affect them later." Several of the interviewees talked about helping students to

see how difficult experiences now can help them in the future if they make the choice to learn and grow from them.

One participant explained how the class selection process is an opportunity to explore choice and meaning, "I can see it (meaning) being tied to picking your classes for next year and what am I going to do after school is over? How am I going to make meaning for my life and know that I picked the right thing?" Early adolescents have opportunities to make important and influential choices that will potentially affect their lives, and school counselors can be instrumental in helping them make meaning in that process. As one participant explained, "So many of them have completely shut down, so it is a matter of helping them find some greater meaning, you know, as a means to a goal for the future."

Subtheme 3: Connections. Participants also helped students with meaning-making by exploring self-in-context and assisting students in identity development by making connections to others in community and things they care about. They placed primary importance on the student's connection with them in order for there to be enough comfort and safety to engage deeply with issues of meaning. Establishing trust and being nonjudgmental were mentioned repeatedly as important elements in creating a connection conducive to exploration of meaning and identity. In their own words participants explained: "I think a lot of times I have a really decent relationship with my students because I think they know I'm respectful of their position and how they feel and what their beliefs are" and "I think it is valuable to the kids to know that there's somebody they could actually talk to who wouldn't judge them."

Groups were identified as naturally conductive settings to exploring self in relation to others. Several participants shared they are most likely to explore issues of meaning and purpose with students in group settings. One participant described what she says to encourage students in

groups, "You're going through different experiences, but you're kind of all together…you can understand in some way." One counselor described how she helps students feel empowered in groups by "teaching them how to come together, instead of always being pinned against one another, and supporting one another." Connecting students with peers and helping them to explore meaning for themselves in group environments emerged as a commonality across interviews.

Finally, participants discussed working with students on meaning by helping them to make connections to things about which they care. One interviewee explained this is the primary way she addresses issues of meaning and purpose with early adolescents. She asks reported typically asking students, "What's important to them? What makes you happy in life? What is your passion?" Participants shared that knowing what was important to students, what they valued, and what they liked to do was important in getting to know them and helping them to know themselves. As one interviewee shared:

> I'll try to go through whatever their passions are. It's usually one of the first things
> I'll talk about. What do they like to do and kind of connect through that, whether it's
> sports or music. Then I'll build on that. Those are built-in passions, strengths, and some
> different qualities and character traits you need for those things.

School counselors often helped students explore their unique identities through making connections to things they care about as a way to assist them in finding meaning in their academics. Throughout the interviews, making connections to career aspirations emerged as a way for counselors to explore when helping students to discover meaning in relation to their unique selves. Overall, helping students to make connections to people and things they care about was a consistent practice in which participants engaged as they worked with students.

Discussion

When responding to questions about exploring meaning with students, participants were easily able to provide examples of this work in their practice, suggesting this is typical in their roles as school counselors. This is important, as prior research supports the value of exploring meaning with adolescents because of the numerous benefits as well as potential consequences associated with a lack of meaning (Blair, 2004; Bronk, et al., 2009; Burrow et al., 2010; Damon, et al., 2003; Ho, et al., 2010; McLean et al., 2010).

The participants echoed Inhelder and Piaget's (1958) assertion that students at this age are capable of beginning to think about and reflect on issues such as meaning and purpose.

It is also of note that the school counselors' practices to explore meaning with students were centered on identity development, which Erikson (1968) asserted is an essential task of adolescence and Kiang and Fuligni (2010) found was important across groups of ethnically diverse adolescents. Erikson's stage of identity versus role confusion seemed applicable as participants discussed students questioning their roles in their families, with peers, and in the world, especially when dealing with challenging circumstances. The school counselors seemed to work with students primarily on finding meaning in an individualized identity that could hold firm amidst the trials of adolescence and outside pressures.

Similar to Frankl (1984), school counselor participants identified suffering or challenging circumstances as a main catalyst to help students discover meaning for themselves. Interviewees expressed value in helping adolescents to identify a sense of meaning as a way of persevering through difficult life circumstances, much in the way that prior researchers have described (Blair, 2004; Bjerkesetet al., 2010; Khan & Mian, 2010; Ozawa-de Silva, 2008). Participants talked about group work as most conducive to adolescents finding meaning and developing sense of

self. This connection to others in community as a way of exploring meaning is compatible with Purvis' (1995) assertion that adolescents, in particular, can most effectively find meaning through interactions with peers in small group settings. These school counselors seemed to understand how valuable group settings are for adolescents to explore meaning with their peers in safe environments.

The participants in this study often talked about how they help adolescents' academic experiences be more meaningful by making connections with things about which they cared. The counselors reported helping students examine their behavior and choices at a deeper level of meaning instead of solely focusing on providing rewards or threatening consequences. This is congruent with existential, meaning-based approaches to counseling such as logotherapy, which helps people to understand responsibility and choices they have in their lives (Frankl, 1967; Langle & Skyes, 2006). It was evident that the school counselors found value in this work, but did not always know how to most effectively apply it in a school setting. In the subsequent section I offer practical recommendations for school counselors and counselor educators in this area.

Recommendations for School Counselors and School Counselor Educators

School Counselors

The results of this study suggest these school counselors recognized the importance of helping students develop a sense of meaning, as evidenced by their working with students individually and in small groups. There are large group activities that can support this timely work in the lives of middle school students, as well. Classroom lessons are one way school counselors can help students explore meaning through identity development. Developmental guidance lessons could serve as a precursor to smaller groups or a way to teach and discuss these

important concepts to students. School-wide programs such as *Challenge Day*, which helps to connect school community members with one another and provides opportunities to disclose personal experiences in a safe and supportive environment, can also be very meaningful.

Assisting students with meaning-making and identity development can also be fostered through career and community connections**.** Meaningful academic and vocational experiences can add purpose to education and also be helpful in motivating students (Purvis, 1995). As many of the participants mentioned, inquiring about career goals and aspirations were effective in helping students explore meaning and identity. Career counseling activities such as introducing interest inventories resources like the *Young Person's Occupational Outlook Handbook* (2010) can help students become more academically engaged, set future goals, and connect students with their passions, resources, and potential job shadowing opportunities.

Frankl (1984) asserted people could find meaning "by creating a work or doing a deed" (p.115). Community service provides opportunities for discovering meaning. School counselors can be instrumental in providing these opportunities within school, supporting a service learning component of the academic program, or connecting students with meaningful volunteer opportunities. Engaging early adolescents in these types of helping experiences that require they interact with others in acts of service can be extremely impactful during this influential life stage.

One specific form of community service is mentoring. Mentoring provides students opportunities to encounter others and discover meaning. School counselors and students can develop and implement school-based peer-mentoring programs to provide valuable leadership opportunities and meaningful experiences for everyone involved. When students are given the responsibility to be positive role models, it can increase their sense of purpose and connection to the school community (Karcher, Davis, & Powell, 2002).

School Counselor Educators

One question explored in this study was how prepared participants felt to address meaning in their roles as school counselors with students. Overall, participants reported not feeling prepared for this work and reported a general disconnect between preparation and practice as school counselors. It is important for school counselor educators to be intentional in connecting preparation and practice by infusing professional standards into curricula, and improve programs based on counselor education program outcome and evaluation data.

There is still a great deal of transformation necessary within counselor education programs to effectively prepare school counselors for the field, although efforts by the Education Trust, the American School Counselor Association, and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) have brought attention to this issue (Steen & Rudd, 2009). Some programs are basing parts of their curricula on any one or combination of standards from these professional organizations, while others lack a clear foundation for their school counseling curriculum (Pérusse & Goodnough, 2005).

The American School Counselor Association (2012) defines three domains for school counseling services: academic development, career development, and personal /social development. Past research on school counseling preparation has suggested that school counselor preparation programs were inadequately preparing students in two (i.e., academic and career) of these three domains (Martin, 2002). Since these were the two domains in which participants reported exploring meaning with students, it is important that school counselors feel prepared to counsel this population on academic and career issues in developmentally appropriate ways. Previous research and this study suggest that helping students make meaningful connections to their passions and goals supports academic engagement and achievement (Melton &

Schulenberg, 2007), although research has indicated how little school counseling programs prepare its students to directly influence student achievement (Education Trust, 2012; Martin 2002).

These preparation challenges can influence the quality of course instruction, course availability, and faculty with relevant experiences to inform their teaching of school counseling courses. Research in the counselor education field has revealed that as little as 52% of school counseling courses are taught by instructors who have experience as counselors in the schools (Steen & Rudd, 2009. Further, this study revealed many participants' school counseling courses were focused primarily on high school counseling, which inherently limits students' knowledge and skills in effectively supporting younger students.

Limitations

Although this in-depth research inquiry was fitting for a qualitative design, there are inherent limitations. The number of participants is a limitation because it provided little opportunity for a diverse sample. A more diverse sample (e.g., ethnicity, geography, spiritual/religious beliefs) could provide a more representative sample of middle school counselors.

Another limitation was in data collection. Since participants were interviewed face-to-face, they may have been inclined to give socially desirable responses to interview questions. It is worth noting that the less experienced school counselors were less vocal during the focus group interview, so their voices were potentially not represented as strongly in that portion of the data. Additionally, only half of the school counselors participated in the focus group. Despite these limitations, the careful attention to procedural rigor in this qualitative inquiry lends to the

potential for it to expand the dearth of knowledge in this area and provide rationale for future research inquiries.

Future Research Recommendations

While school counselors' perspectives were the focus of this study, researchers of future studies could interview early adolescent students to gain their perspectives on exploring meaning and developing their identities in the school setting. Exploring the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of students themselves can provide important information about how school counselors and counselor educators can better facilitate effective counseling practice in these areas. Researchers can also investigate the experiences and perspectives of school counseling interns about their comfort level in working with adolescents about meaning-making while having their first experiences in the field.

Future studies could include survey research based on these findings that include larger sample sizes and yield potentially more generalizable results. Analyses of counselor education curricula can provide important information about the preparation of school counselors to deliver meaning-based counseling in the school setting. Results from additional qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies can be helpful in providing a more comprehensive account of school counselor preparation and practice and inform effective practice of school counseling for meaning-making with adolescent students.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction to the interview: I am not interested in your specific work place or organization, but rather about your experiences with meaning in your work life. Please do not identify your work site or organization by name when you discuss your work experiences.

Interview Questions:

- Adolescence is seen as a time when youth explore issues of meaning and purpose. I am interested in exploring how school counselors think about and address issues of meaning and purpose when counseling adolescent students.

  o Have these kinds of issues come up in your work with students?

  o Could you give me an example?

- As a school counselor, how do you feel about discussing meaning-making with students?

  o What factors do you think contribute to your viewpoint in this area?

- How prepared do you feel to do this kind of work? Do you consider it a part of the counseling process?

- Are there certain situations or presenting issues where you would be more likely to use a meaning-based approach to counseling students? Less likely?

- Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Professional School Counselor Perceptions of Systemic Barriers Affecting Latino Students: Implications for Socially Just Preparation and Practice

Systemic barriers contribute to academic underachievement and oppression among marginalized students, particularly those from Latino decent. Qualitative survey responses from 158 professional school counselors, working in the six U.S. states with the highest populations of Latinos, were analyzed by the constant comparative method. Three overarching themes resulted. Social justice implications for professional school counselors and counselors-in-training that support the academic, personal/social and career development of Latino students are provided.

Latino youth represent one of the largest growing ethnic populations of all school-aged children in the United States (Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011; Stromquist, 2011). In 2010, Latino students ages 17 and below compromised 17.1 million children, or 23.1% of this age group nationwide (Passel et al., 2011). Despite the U.S. developing into a more pluralistic society, individuals from minority cultures continue to experience barriers, biases, and prejudice based on group membership (Dovidio, Gluszek, Hohn, Ditlmann, & Lagunes, 2010). Systemic barriers affecting Latino students can be conceptualized as inequalities and obstacles that restrict and limit access to educational achievement, such as language and cultural barriers, or citizenship requirements for obtaining federal financial aid for postsecondary education. Many of these systemic barriers may account for the approximately 41% of Latinos aged 20 and over not attaining a high school diploma and only 10% of Latino high school dropouts completing a GED (Fry, 2010).

Academic and school counseling professionals can help advocate for increased educational success for Latinos (Haro, 2004), which constitute a large portion of the U.S. population. Culturally responsive services (Paisley & McMahon, 2001) and comprehensive school counseling programs (Lee, 2001) are needed to meet the diversified needs of traditionally marginalized students, including Latino youth. Additionally, professional school counselors are uniquely positioned to make meaningful changes in their respective schools due to their educational background and training (Griffin & Steen, 2011), and their ability to advocate for systemic change and social justice (Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahon, 2010) in order to enhance student success and academic achievement. Counselors embracing a social justice perspective have an understanding that systemic issues often result in client struggles (Ratts, Toporek, & Lewis, 2010). Yet, to date, little research illuminates professional school counselors' perceptions of the systemic barriers and challenges that Latino students experience in the school context. As such, the purpose of this current study expands the literature on the challenges facing Latino students (Storlie, 2012; Storlie, Moreno, & Portman, 2014), by qualitatively examining school counselor perceptions of these barriers in order to inform socially just school counselor preparation and practice.

Barriers Encountered by Latino Youth in the U.S. Education System

Cultural values (e.g., familism, ethnic identity, collectivist orientation) are especially salient for many Latino youth and adults (Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, Delgado-Romero, & Zapata, 2014; Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallard-Cooper, 2002; Sue & Sue, 1999). Although deemed important to Latino youths' well being (Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012), the cultural practices and beliefs of Latinos are often inconsistent with the dominant practices in U.S. mainstream culture (Stromquist, 2011). This creates challenges and

marginalization for Latino students to successfully navigate the individualistic values and practices within the U.S. education system. Furthermore, levels of acculturation and cultural identity have been shown to predict academic functioning in Latino students, such that Latino youth who are less acculturated to U.S. mainstream values tend to have lower academic success (Guyll, Mado, Prieto & Scherr, 2010). Low levels of academic success among Latino students may originate from a variety of sociocultural and ethnic reasons, many of which are still prominent in our diverse and contemporary society, including language barriers, school-family communication barriers, and oppression and discrimination (Stromquist, 2011).

Language barriers

Poor academic achievement among Latino students has been attributed in part to issues of English language proficiency (Arrendondo et al., 2014). Although it is known that Spanish language is a critical component of many Latinos' ethnic and cultural identities (Guyll et al., 2010; Sox, 2009), 31 U.S. states have passed bills identifying English as the official language (U.S. English, 2016). From a social justice perspective, this may make it increasingly difficult for Spanish-speaking students to succeed in an English-speaking classroom (Ratts et al., 2010). In general, U.S. schools and teachers have not been equipped (i.e., employ bilingual personnel) or trained to manage high numbers of Spanish-speaking students (Arrendondo et al., 2014, Sue & Sue, 1999). Thus, Latino students are often labeled language-impaired and are overrepresented in special education classes (Arredondo et al., 2014). Although 14% of Latinos were high school drop outs (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013), Latinos who speak only English at home or speak English "very well" are found to be more likely to have a GED than Latinos with limited English speaking skills (Fry, 2010).

Issues of English proficiency continue to cloud the perception of the significance of bilingual education and student development (Myhill, 2004). The states of California, Arizona and Massachusetts are using one-year English immersion programs due to the repeal of the *Bilingual Education Act* of 1968 (Myhill, 2004; Sox, 2009). Consequently, students with limited English proficiency continue to fall behind in U.S. schools, further contributing to the large achievement gap between Latino students and other racial or ethnic groups. Poor academic success of some Latinos can also be attributed to the disparity between instruction and curriculum for English language learners (ELLs; Myhill, 2004). As a method to improve equity and social justice interventions within schools, Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, and Indelicato (2006) have called on school districts to recruit and train bicultural and bilingual school counselors and teachers to be a part of the leadership team in order to meet the needs of Latino students.

Influence of Family on Academic Achievement

Low academic performance among Latino students has erroneously been blamed on their parents for their role in motivating their children to do well in school (Arrendondo et al., 2014). Low acculturation of parents may contribute to misunderstandings or negative beliefs about the academic lives of Latino youth (Guyll et al., 2010). In general, Latino parents often have high educational expectations for their children (Henry, Plunkett, & Sands, 2011). Parental involvement and family structure are recognized as important in understanding Latino students' academic motivation and perseverance (Henry et al., 2011). The influence of family unity and collectivism is high among Latinos and the family unit strongly shapes Latino students' perception of education (Arredondo et al., 2014). Latino students view parental support as essential, such as assistance with homework and supporting academic motivation (Henry et al.,

2011). Longitudinal research has also shown that familial support is a contributing factor to higher math grades among Latino students (Azmitia, Cooper, & Brown, 2009). Further, additional work has found that Latino parents' educational expectations are associated with their own children's expectations over the course of high school (Toomey & Storlie, 2015).

Oppression and Discrimination

Approximately 61% of Latinos identify discrimination as a major problem that prevents future educational success (Lopez, Morin & Taylor, 2010) and nearly 25% of Latino students report that they have experienced bias-based bullying in school related to their ethnicity (Lai & Tov, 2004). Biased-based bullying and racially/ethnically-motivated perceived discrimination contribute to poor health and academic outcomes among all youth (Russell, Sinclair, Poteat, & Koenig, 2012). Higher levels of perceived ethnicity-related discrimination have been found to contribute to depression (Edwards & Romero, 2008) and anxiety (Arrendondo et al., 2014) in Latino youth, contributing further to the systemic barriers and social injustice facing this population.

Social and psychological research on the prejudice and discrimination of Latinos has been sporadic in comparison to studies conducted among African Americans (Dovidio et al., 2010). Yet, Latinos experience a lower sense of belonging related to their appearance, accent, and skin color when compared to their Caucasian counterparts (Dovidio et al., 2010). Historically, Latinos have a range of skin colors due to their historical roots (Telzer & Garcia, 2009), yet the darker one's skin color, the higher the incidence of mental health and socioeconomic issues in this population (Hall, 1994). Likewise, Latino youth, in particular, encounter discrimination because of the English proficiency, documentation status, and skin color (Edwards & Romero, 2008).

Social justice efforts are being made to improve issues of prejudice and discrimination among Latinos in U.S. education. For example, K-12 schools are incorporating classes on multicultural education to enhance student respect for diversity within the classroom (Stromquist, 2011). Additionally, counseling professionals are reinforcing protective factors such as self-esteem to combat issues of oppression against Latinos (Edwards & Romero, 2008). More can be done to understand and address the barriers experienced by Latino youth within the school system. Although school counselors perceiving negative school climates are more likely to intervene in discrimination or harassment related to Latino ethnicity (Toomey & Storlie, 2015), research has failed to qualitatively examine school counselor perceptions of systemic barriers facing Latino students to inform socially just school counselor preparation and practice. Hence, exploring issues of discrimination and biased-based bullying from the perspectives of school counselors can inform methods and interventions that can reduce educational inequities.

Professional School Counselors

It is essential to include professional school counselors in studies of Latino students facing systemic barriers, given their prime role in fostering academic, personal/social, and career development among all students (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012). Although school counselors are a valuable and significant part of the academic system, the perceptions and experiences of professional school counselors working with marginalized student populations may be overlooked in social action research. Understanding the systemic barriers facing Latino students through the lens of school counselors has critical implications for social justice and advocacy programming that can support increased retention and graduation rates. For the purposes of this study, we aligned our research aims with the goal of social justice to support the chance for all individuals to achieve academic, personal/social and career potential

(Ratts et al. 2010). Thus, the purpose of this article was to qualitatively examine school counselor perceptions of challenges and barriers facing Latino youth in order to inform socially just school counselor preparation and practice.

Method

Participants

Through use of purposeful sampling, professional school counselors from the six U.S. states with the highest population of Latino individuals (California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, and Arizona) were recruited online from their respective state and professional school counseling associations. These states were chosen to ensure a higher probability that the participants would have experiences with Latino youth facing systemic barriers. Of the 206 original respondents, 158 school counselors (Arizona = 20.3%; California = 22.8%; Florida = 12.7%; Illinois = 14.6%; New York = 21.5%; and Texas = 8.2%) elected to respond to qualitative questions examining their perceptions of systemic barriers facing Latino youth. Based on the results of a demographic questionnaire, the average age of participants was 40.60 years old ($SD = 2.60$; Range: 23 − 72 years). The vast majority of participants identified as female (84.2%). The sample was racially/ethnically diverse: 61.2% identified as White, non-Latino, 18.4% as Latino or Hispanic, 9.5% as Black or African American, 5.1% as Asian, 3.2% as multiethnic-racial, 0.6% as Native American, and 1.9% declined to answer the question.

Participants reported an average of 7.10 years ($SD = 7.59$) of professional school counseling experience, and had completed nearly four courses ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 3.88$; Range: 0 − 30) focused on multicultural issues. Participants mostly worked exclusively in high schools (39.2%), elementary schools (19.6%), or middle schools or junior high schools (21.5%), whereas the remaining professional school counselors worked in a combination of grade levels (19.6%).

Participants were primarily employed in urban districts (58%), followed by suburban (31.8%) and rural (10.2%) districts.

Researchers as Human Instruments

Traditionally within qualitative methodology, researchers are called to provide transparency in their background when initiating research inquiries (Patton, 2002). The first author is a Mexican American assistant professor/counselor educator who has experience researching how counseling influences the educational opportunities and outcomes of undocumented and documented Latino youth. The second author is an assistant professor, of European American descent, who has research expertise in positive youth development of marginalized youth populations in the U.S., including a focus on Latino youth. Through combined personal and professional experience, we felt our respective backgrounds and roles heightened the cultural sensitivity in the data collection process and qualitative data analysis in this study. We acknowledged our biases in our passion in advocating for Latino youth, particularly in the school setting. We further acknowledged past experiences that may shape our perceptions of systemic challenges facing Latino youth in the school setting (e.g., lack of bilingual counselors, language barriers, etc.) for the purposes of transparency.

Data Collection

Upon approval from the institutional review board, participants were directed to a Qualtrics web-hosted survey consisting of both quantitative and qualitative measures. The qualitative measure included 10 open-ended questions that inquired about professional school counselor experiences in dealing with systemic barriers that affect Latino youth at their respective schools. We administered an online survey to collect qualitative data because it increased the likelihood of participant anonymity, allowed for time and cost effectiveness, and

assisted with flexibility in responding (Duffy, Smith, Terhanian, & Bremer, 2005). Due to the academic schedule, the authors chose to leave the survey open during the 2014 spring semester to provide flexibility for participants to respond at a convenient time. The authors offered follow-up interviews to provide an opportunity for participants to expand on their narratives after the completion of the online survey; however, no participant elected to engage in these follow-up interviews.

Data Analysis

We used an ecological systems perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as a framework to understand the perceptions of professional school counselors working with Latino youth facing systemic barriers. Ecological frameworks are helpful in comprehending the impact of the social environment and its subsystems (Schriver, 2011), in this case from the lens of the professional school counselor. We chose a modified grounded theory approach, with an ecological framework, to analyze the data. Our purpose in using a modified grounded theory was to use a systematic and rigorous methodology to analyze the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory methodology centers on uncovering relevant conditions and how individuals actively respond to those conditions and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, researchers used open coding to identify properties and dimensions discovered within the data collected from the open-ended questions. Next, we explored the relationship of categories to subcategories by axial coding, coming to consensus before confirming the axial code. Selective coding was then used to determine overarching themes. In addition, authors examined and analyzed supplementary data using the constant comparative method in which each incident may be challenged by other data to ensure increased precision (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Trustworthiness. To enhance credibility of the data, authors met every two weeks during data collection to discuss the progress of the study and to engage in long-term connection to the data. During these meetings, authors discussed and reviewed samples of the qualitative responses throughout the 2014 spring semester. Despite our focus on confirmability and objectivity (Patton, 2002), we acknowledge that personal biases may have influenced coding procedures due to our own supportive actions and advocacy for Latino youth. Hence, an audit trail was used in order to ensure transparency of data analysis and ensure dependability that other researchers would make similar observations of the data. In addition, transferability (Patton, 2002) was addressed by providing sufficient detail about the academic settings in which participants encountered Latino youth. An outside peer debriefer (Patton, 2002) trained in qualitative research methods was also utilized during data collection and analysis to enrich objectivity.

Results

Results of this qualitative analysis produced three overarching categories based on professional school counselors' perceptions of Latino student facing systemic barriers: *Perceived Within and Between Culture Conflict, Home and School Roadblocks,* and *Advocacy and Taking Initiative*. Furthermore, each overarching category contained two subthemes that helped to clarify and support the collective experiences of this sample of professional school counselors.

Theme 1: Perceived Within and Between Culture Conflict

Most of the qualitative data categorized under this theme included participants' perceptions of conflict experienced by Latino students. Professional school counselors observed that Latino students not only experienced conflict with students from other racial/ethnic groups and from interactions with different cultural attitudes and beliefs (i.e., *inter*cultural conflict), but

also experienced conflict from within the Latino student community (i.e., *intra*cultural conflict). Many participants reported perceived conflict within and between cultures with many reflections focused on biased-based bullying, harassment, or discrimination at their respective schools. Others participants discussed experiences with conflict that occurred between traditional collectivistic practices and the U.S. individualistic system.

Subtheme 1: Intracultural conflict and bias. According to these participants, Latino students experienced intracultural conflict and, in some instances, this conflict was also directed toward Latino school personnel. One participant reflected on her own experience as a Latina counselor. She reported, "I am not fluent in Spanish, and have experienced prejudice from Hispanic students/families because they view me as *not Mexican enough*, despite my ethnicity." This sentiment of biased-based bullying, harassment, and discrimination (i.e., defined as the victim of bias that is related to one's ethnic or racial identity) was also evident in the responses of other participants. One individual related, "I see Latino students insulting other Latino students for not being *Latin* enough, particularly if the student isn't fluent in Spanish and/or *too White- guero/a and gringo/a*." Participants further disclosed their perceptions of intracultural conflict by revealing, "I have also seen students who have some Latino heritage not claim their Latino heritage, but rather their White roots." Another participant further explained their perception of Latino students not achieving academically because: "Trying hard is *acting White*."

Multiple participants disclosed that intracultural conflict among their Latino students was readily apparent among different Latino subgroups. One individual disclosed, "Latino students have their own hierarchy as to acceptance amongst their own group." One respondent reported perceived conflict at her school between "Mexican students vs. Central American students." Moreover, one participant shared her experience, "The new immigrant students and beginner-

level ELL students have the most difficulty adjusting to the school setting. Because their behavior often goes unaddressed by teachers that cannot communicate with them, their mal-adaptations have progressed into aggression toward one another." The majority of professional school counselor respondents perceived biased-based bullying in their respective schools. One participant described her perception that Latino immigrant students were often bullied by second-generation students within her school.

Subtheme 2: Intercultural conflict and bias. In addition to perceived intracultural conflict, the majority of participants reported biased-based bullying and conflict that occurred between Latino students and students from other racial/ethnic groups. One participant reported, "We see bullying between different ethnicities that mostly involves name-calling and derogatory comments about their homeland. There is relational aggression and a supposition by Black students that Latinas won't stand up for themselves." This was also evident to one participant when she described that non-Latino students perceived Latino students as "dumb" due to differences in language.

Several participants discussed their experiences of Latino students directing their bullying behaviors toward other races and cultures. One participant disclosed, "My school is predominately Latino. Typically the bullying that occurs is aimed at Caucasian students." Similarly, another school counselor reported, "More often than not, Latino students bully Anglos. However, racism does occur the other way too. The theme would be stereotyping Latinos based on past negative experiences." Likewise, additional participants disclosed witnessing Latino students using derogatory slurs toward students from other ethnic backgrounds. Professional school counselor participants further discussed their experiences of witnessing biased based bullying within and between cultures at their respective schools. In

addition, these participants observed the academic and familial barriers facing Latino students that also influence student success.

Theme 2: School and Home Roadblocks

Professional school counselor participants discussed roadblocks they perceived within the home, school, and communities of Latino youth. One participant elaborated, "The students feel that teachers and counselors do not understand their lives at home, and how it impacts them when they are in class." Another participant reported the barriers at her school when asking, "Will teachers be biased against them?" The roadblocks perceived by these professional school counselors appeared to center on a lack of cultural sensitivity within their schools and perceived familial and cultural values that conflict with the educational goals of Latino youth.

Subtheme 1: School Climate. Participants were open about their perceptions of school safety and climate with regards to students from the Latino culture. In particular, there was a strong subtheme across the majority of participants that centered on teachers and school climate. One participant disclosed, "I feel that classroom teachers need more understanding of the culture." Another school counselor commented, "Students want to see more of their culture in the curriculum in schools." An additional participant elaborated further about barriers within their school, "I think many teachers assume their issues cannot be helped because of perceived language barriers, which results in Latino/a students not being given the same level of academic support or interventions as students from other races/ethnicities." Additional participants disclosed that their Latino students did not feel respected in class and that "teachers and other staff members talk down to them." For this sample of participants, school climate and safety was perceived to greatly involve teachers.

Subtheme 2: Familial and cultural barriers. According to the majority of participants, family relationships and cultural values play a significant role in the academic achievement of Latino students, yet stepping outside of family norms were major obstacles. One participant commented that the biggest hurdle facing their Latino youth was: "Family relationships, getting along with parents, feeling loved and accepted by parents." Similarly, another participant reported, "My school is nearly 100% Latino. Many of my students' concerns are related to relationships with family, friends, and how they feel about themselves."

In order to address some of the familial and cultural barriers that impede Latino student success, some school counselors reported implementing formal and informal mentoring programs, conducting career genograms, and connecting Latino students to Latino adults they admire. Several disclosed that they make efforts to bring in Latino community leaders that are unrelated to their Latino students to provide hope. In addition to the familial and cultural barriers identified by participants, many disclosed how they embedded their own initiatives to enhance Latino student success.

Theme 3: Advocacy and Taking Initiative

Participants in this study reported having advocated for Latino students in their respective schools. With respect to language differences, one participant reported, "The school's stance is that we should *not* wait for someone to ask for a translator, wait until they do not understand, to ask for help." Through advocacy, school counselors participating in this study provided detail in how they provided socially just counseling services by engaging in and accessing salient resources for Latino youth.

Subtheme 1: Social action via engaging resources. The majority of participants reported that they ensure Latino students receive culturally sensitive resources from their school

counseling department, the school system/district, and from within their respective communities. One participant reported, "Common concerns are economic issues. Some want to help their parents while in school. I do many referrals to community agencies if I contact a family that is struggling from emotional, interpersonal or economic issues." Another respondent shared, "[My] Biggest concern in counseling has been parent deportation and supporting family with loss." This participant went on to disclose their actions in connecting this family with legal aide to assist with immigration and documentation issues.

Several participants reported their actions in helping Latino students and their families access resources to assist with communication. One individual recounted, "Our school offers a bilingual program that extends beyond the classroom. This program provides support to parents and families, in addition to students who join. Parents have the option of opting their children out of the bilingual program, even if they qualify."

Several participants discussed the social justice and advocacy programming already in place in their schools and communities to foster the healthy development of Latino students. According to one professional school counselor,

> We have [two college/career readiness programs] both of which focus on getting minority students ready for the rigors of college, while providing intensive on campus support. The [X] program requires commitment from parents and heavily involves the parents in the academic success of their students. We also have clubs, such as *folkloria,* which help them embrace more of their culture through dance.

School counselors in this study also reported engaging resources for undocumented Latino youth. "We have many community based organization[s] (CBOs) that support many of our students who are undocumented. These CBOs support our undocumented Latino community

by presenting workshops, providing mental health services, [and] after school tutoring." Multiple participants identified their involvement in advocating for undocumented Latino students on both community and state levels. One participant reported,

> I have spoken on their [undocumented Latino students] behalf at a [X] Community College Governing Board meeting expressing my support for granting in-state tuition for DACA-mented, helped research scholarships that accept applications from students regardless of immigration status, and helped organize the first [State] DREAM Conference.

In addition to this social justice advocacy on individual, community, state and federal levels, professional school counselors in this study further disclosed information about their training which prepared them for working with Latino students.

Subtheme 2: Taking initiative for training and experience. Most participants in this study discussed the ways in which their graduate programs required a class on multiculturalism and its influence in currently working with Latino students. One participant related, "Working with such a high population of Latino students has been a big culture change. My multicultural class gave me the tools to become culturally sensitive and aware of differences." Another participant shared,

> Officially, my graduate program had a strong emphasis on social justice and multiculturalism, which were integrated into every course. However, I do not feel that all of these experiences were genuine, and I'm not sure they did impact my practice.

Similarly, some participants divulged that their school counselor preparation programs did not provide enough training in how to effectively work with Latino students. One participant reported, "I was educated at a mostly White institution, and was aware that cultural sensitivity is

important and is an issue - but there was no drill down. I am aware that I am not as well trained as I should be, especially as I work in a highly diverse area."

The majority of participants in this study reported that their own "on the job" experiences in working Latino students were the best preparation practices. One participant reported, "Nothing can teach us more than the daily work and experiences on the job." Likewise, another participant disclosed, "The actual experience helps you find your style and teaches you how to adapt to different cultures, values, and family systems in order to support student success." Moreover, personal experiences of participants appeared to readily influence their advocacy and action as a school counselor. Being a part of the Latino culture impacted one school counselor when she divulged, "In my opinion being an immigrant (Latina) myself has been my biggest training."

Professional school counselor participants identified multiple resources in which language barriers were addressed through ELL teachers, translators, and other Spanish-speaking students. These participants also took initiative to seek out knowledge about the Latino culture in order to provide counseling services in culturally sensitive and clear ways. "I have also learned Spanish as a second language so I will communicate with the students to provide information or instructions in Spanish that allow them to begin to successfully integrate into the English-speaking school." Yet, another participant reported a lack of resources available to support school counselors to better communicate with their Latino students. She reported her quest in professional advocacy by stating, "I have been searching for ways to obtain grants or funding for education in Spanish. I think it would be important to have this opportunity so that I may better serve my students and their families (parents)."

While the majority of professional school counselors identified ways in which their advocacy efforts helped to break down the systemic barriers facing Latino students, two participants did not acknowledge the inequities or systemic barriers experienced by Latino students. One participant reported, "I understand that 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." When questioned specifically about the citizenship of Latino students in their respective school, one participant disclosed, "I believe it is demeaning and disrespectful to call our students by labels. If you want a label, try 'American.'" Although few school counselors appeared to be unaware that not all Latino students have U.S. citizenship, there was clear evidence that the majority of participants embed social justice advocacy for Latino students in their daily work.

Discussion

Our analyses revealed that these professional school counselor participants, located in the most highly Latino populated U.S. states, keenly perceive the multiple levels of systemic barriers that Latino students experience in the school context. Consistent with prior literature (Stromquist, 2011), these systematic barriers ranged from conflict (both intra- and intercultural) to school-family communications and attitudes to issues of language barriers and documentation status. It is important to note that two school counselors demonstrated a significant lack of understanding of the systemic barriers facing Latino youth. One shared, "This issue needs to be reframed. What barriers are the Latino/Hispanic students *bringing* to the classroom? How can *they* more fully embrace studying, preparing assignments, engaging in educational activities, reading etc.? Educators already provide a fertile place to learn." Yet, the majority of participants discussed the home and school roadblocks that continue to surface as systemic barriers in the

academic success for Latino students. Importantly, the participants in the current study recounted several advocacy strategies that they engage in to reduce educational inequities for Latino students, including obtaining more multicultural competence training, learning Spanish as a second language, and building connections and referrals between culturally-competent community providers and Latino students and their families. These interventions parallel recommendations from experts in counseling Latinos (Arrendondo, et al., 2014; Villalba, 2007).

A recurring theme that emerged from participants in this study was that their prior schooling/training was critical to fostering the skills needed to effectively work with Latino students and families. As noted by several participants, hands-on experience was especially beneficial to their current work with Latino students. Yet, counselor educators, charged with cultivating the development of culturally competent professional school counselors, may encounter challenges when educating counseling students. Exposure to ethnically diverse groups, especially during counseling practicum and internship experiences, may be limited in certain areas of the country (i.e., those with low proportions of non-White populations). As population projections and future socio-demographic changes continue to impact the profession of school counseling (Paisley & McMahon, 2001), it is essential that professional school counselors receive professional development opportunities to enhance their multicultural awareness and sensitivity. Findings from this study also have several social justice implications in which school counselors and counselors-in-training can enhance their advocacy for Latino students within comprehensive and culturally responsive school counseling programs.

Social Justice Implications and Suggestions for School Counselor Preparation and Practice

By identifying and comprehensively understanding the perceptions of systemic barriers, professional school counselors can take an active role in social justice programming that supports

the academic, personal/social, and career development of Latino students. Despite challenges, scholars have identified multiple interventions that support professional school counselors' social justice movements within the school setting (Dixon, Thicker, & Clark, 2010; Chen, Budianto, & Wong, 2010) and those targeting Latino academic success (Villalba, Akos, Keeter, & Ames, 2007). Based on our findings, professional school counselors and counselors-in-training must continue to "learn a variety of components (e.g. values, history, beliefs) of other cultural groups representing the students and their families with whom they work" (Griffin & Steen, 2011, p. 76). Social justice implications and suggestions for school counselor preparation and practice that support the academic, personal/social and career development of Latino students are outlined below.

Academic Development

Villalba (2007) encouraged counselors to reframe the challenges and barriers experienced by Latinos and focus on the strengths of bilingualism, biculturalism, and strong family ties as a manner in which to foster resiliency and academic achievement. Based on our findings centered on familial and cultural barriers, we further encourage strengths-based approaches to connect with Latino students and their parents/families on a variety of academic issues.

Professional school counselors may also consider developing formal or informal mentoring programs (Storlie & Jach, 2012) to extend current findings on advocacy and initiatives with Latino youth at their schools. Moreover, counselor educators must help prepare future school counselors to identify relationships between individual academic challenges and systemic barriers (Ratts et al., 2014) to assist Latino students with evident academic inequalities. Professional school counselors working with Latino students may consider tutoring or study

programs outside of the regular school day or school setting (Storlie & Jach, 2012) as necessary outreach to this marginalized population.

Personal/Social Development

Working with Latino students can create numerous tasks for professional school counselors when considering issues of acculturation, immigration, language, religion and other sociocultural components (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Professional school counselors must look at this as an opportunity to work with Latino youth on personal/social issues because of the familiarity students may have in seeing the school counselor at school every day. Professional school counselors need to be sensitive to both verbal and nonverbal communication among Latinos (Delgado-Romero, 2001) to address issues of intra/intercultural conflict as found within this study.

Through the lens of social justice, racial and ethnic identity models (Delgado-Romero, 2001) may be of assistance when educating school counselors-in-training in how to provide school counseling services to Latino youth to support their personal/social development. The use of an ethnic identity model such as Ruiz (1990) may continue to support the correlation of cultural heritage and positive mental health (Sue & Sue, 1999), helping to break down some of the systemic barriers facing Latino youth. Strong ethnic identities are protective factors for Latinos, particularly as they feel more positive about their ethnicity (Telzer & Garcia, 2009; Toomey & Storlie, 2015). Given participant perspectives about the systemic challenges faced by Latino students involving race/ethnicity, it is imperative that counselor educators prepare future school counselors to conduct needs assessments within their own schools to understand the barriers and strengths of various subpopulations of students. For instance, biased-based bullying and harassment among Latino students may be particularly problematic in some schools,

whereas this may be a non-issue in other contexts. The development of anti-bullying crusades and support groups within and outside of the school setting may be of considerable benefit to Latino students on multiple levels (Storlie & Jach, 2012).

Career Development

Although career counseling in the school setting has gone through sporadic influxes of emphasis and importance through the history of school counseling (Schenck, Anctil, Smith, & Dahir, 2012), professional school counselors can advocate for a healthy career development trajectory for Latino students by addressing external barriers. Professional school counselors have consistently taken a leadership role in promoting career development of each student, despite multiple demands for their time. Career development recommendations for Latinos have included an emphasis on understanding the cultural context of Latinos, being flexible in the career counseling process, choosing appropriate assessment instruments, and providing Latinos with a variety of career information (Fouad, 1995). These recommendations parallel our findings in that school counselors continue to take initiatives and seek out ways in which to connect with Latino youth facing systemic barriers (e.g. use of career genograms). School counselors and counselors-in-training interested in continually supporting and advocating for the healthy career development of Latino students must be willing to explore occupational experiences outside of the office (Storlie & Jach, 2012), in the community and public domain. Collaborating with vested stakeholders within the school and community to develop career fairs that bring in successfully employed Latinos is just one intervention through which systemic change can begin.

<div align="center">

Limitations and Conclusions

</div>

Although findings of this study contribute to the knowledge base by illuminating the perspectives of school counselors, limitations are present in all research designs. Open ended,

self-report questionnaires are subject to issues of social desirability. The use of online data collection presents a limitation in that nonverbal communication was not obtained, which may have provided greater depth and breadth among participant responses. Professional school counselors have the power to reduce the number of negative experiences that marginalize the experiences of Latino youth by advocating for opportunities that support academic, personal/social, and career equality. Future research is needed to reduce the roadblocks and barriers that Latino students encounter in schools, and for effective cultural competence training of professional school counselors so that they can be effective advocates for social justice in schools for all students.
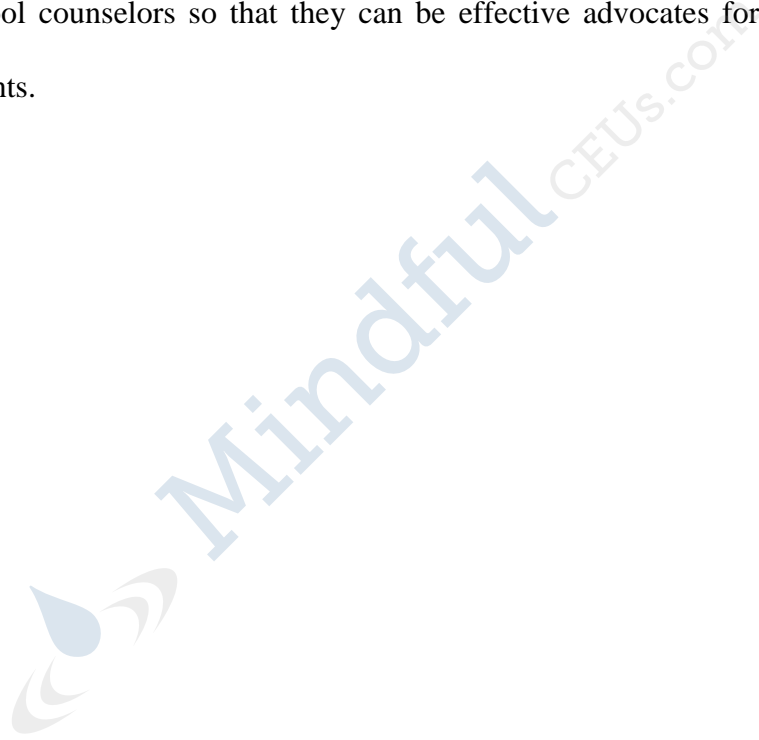
Professional Development Needs of Urban School Counselors: A Review of the Literature

Current research on urban school counseling is reviewed and critiqued as a rationale for more scholarly inquiry about the professional development and supervision needs of urban school counselors. Research recommendations are provided.

The practice of urban school counseling is influenced by the larger landscape of urban education, inherent with opportunities and challenges. Urban education is characterized by unique contextual and demographic characteristics. The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) defines an urban area as one that is densely populated or clustered with a core block of at least 1,000 people per square mile and surrounding blocks with at least 500 people per square mile. Wilczenski, Cook, and Hayden (2011) further described qualities of urban communities as having a high degree of economic and social interaction, which frames urban living within a cultural context. Lee (2005) discussed urban communities as uniquely characterized with significant population density, high concentrations of people of color and recent immigrants, complex transportation patterns, high rates of reported crimes, strong cultural stimulation, diverse range in property values, and inequitable access to healthcare. The diversity within urban communities (e.g., economic, racial, ethnic, political, lingual, familial) can be a catalyst for significant learning among students living in such environments. Equally, the challenges (e.g., potentially concentrated poverty, higher crime rates, inequitable access to health care) can function as

barriers to student educational success. These characteristics specific to urban communities can influence how school counselors serve students in urban schools.

Urban communities are disproportionately affected by phenomena such as poverty, family challenges, and violence (Holcomb-McCoy, 1998; 2005), which can have a detrimental influence on the educational experience of urban students. These influences can include lower attendance rates, higher attrition rates, and lower academic performance (e.g., grade performance, grade promotion). Urban school counselors, through direct and indirect services, address these unique needs to help close opportunity and outcome disparities between students. Researchers have investigated the preparation of urban school counselors in the last 20 years (Evans, & Carter, 1997; Green, Conley, & Barnett, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 1998; Lee, 2005; Mitcham, Portman, & Dean, 2009; Wilczenski, et al., 2011). However, comparatively little research has identified the ongoing supervision and professional development needs of practicing urban school counselors (Owens, Pernice-Duca, & Thomas, 2009). What follows is a synthesis and critical review of urban school counseling research over the last 20 years, highlighting what the literature has identified as the unique challenges of urban school counseling, counseling service delivery models in urban schools, and the professional development needs of urban school counselors. Recommendations for further research in this area will be provided, in hopes that school counselor educators may continue this work.

Challenges of Urban School Counseling

School counseling researchers have developed consistent language about how urban school counseling can differ from school counseling in rural and suburban settings (Holcomb-McCoy, 1998; Lee, 2005; Owens, et al., 2009; Wilczenski, et al., 2011). Common themes from the literature suggest that urban school counseling practice is inclusive of several characteristics.

One characteristic is delivering counseling services that confront serious impediments to student development as a consequence of the aforementioned contextual challenges (e.g., significant population density, complex transportation patterns, inequitable access to healthcare) (Lee, 2005). Another characteristic unique to urban school counseling is acknowledging and supporting students' multiple intelligences (e.g., developing skills to communicate with diverse community members, accurately navigating relationships with authority figures) that develop as a consequence of living and learning in such environments (Forbes, 2004). A third characteristic of urban school counseling practice includes an involved ability to collaborate with families and community agencies to support and advance student and family wellness (Holcomb-McCoy, 1998).

The unique challenges confronted by urban students can yield both opportunity and achievement gaps as compared to suburban or rural peers. Opportunity gaps are the unequal and/or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities between students within the same school community or between students from different communities (Thompson, 2012). Examples of these gaps include differences in course availability (e.g., honors/AP courses, foreign language offerings) and after-school support, compared to schools with access to more resources. Achievement gaps are differences in educational outcomes between student populations (Thompson, 2012). Research continues to cite examples of how achievement gaps persist between students in urban districts, compared to peers in more resourced districts in domains such as graduation rates (Stetsar & Stillwell, 2014) and college enrollment and completion rates (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp, & Tahan, 2011) providing school counselors and school counselor educators a rationale for a closer look at these phenomena. School counseling services aimed at closing these gaps align with scope of effective practice, as

evidenced in the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2010), the ASCA National Model (2012), and the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success (2014).

The ASCA School Counselor Competencies (2012) delineate counselor knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes that support students' academic achievement, career exploration, and personal/social development. These competencies apply across school setting types (e.g., urban, rural, suburban), however, research suggests that the application of knowledge, abilities and skills are more urgent in urban settings than in other school settings. For example, the need for cultural competence and responsiveness among school counselors (Henfield, 2013; Lee, 2005) in multilingual, urban schools may be stronger than in schools not as linguistically diverse. Likewise, school counselors working in under-resourced urban districts may practice from a systemic or ecological approach because of some urban schools' need to leverage community-based resources unavailable in schools. These considerations provide a framework that has helped urban school counselors and counselor educators develop contextually appropriate and culturally-responsive school counseling models for practice.

Urban School Counseling Service Delivery

School counselors in general, urban school counselors specifically, are encouraged to be intentional in identifying an appropriate service delivery model for comprehensive school counseling services (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2008). School counseling literature has identified several delivery models that include, but are not limited to the: Strategic Comprehensive Model (Brown & Trusty, 2005); Results-Based Program Delivery Model (Johnson & Johnson, 2003); Domains/Activities/Partners Model (Dollarhide & Saginak 2003); and, the Developmental Guidance and Counseling Model (Myrick, 2003), on which the ASCA National Model was

developed. These models differ in their implementation, based on factors such as focus on outcomes, level of engagement with stakeholders, and the extent to which the models are prescriptive or non-prescriptive (i.e., models that have pre-designated roles, functions and assignments versus models that are more flexible in nature and practice).

The Strategic Comprehensive Model (Brown & Trusty, 2005) is a non-prescriptive program that emphasizes flexibility to deliver services based on factors including availability of resources, characteristics of the student body and broader community. A focus in this model is academic achievement and closing opportunity and achievement gaps. The model's core components are facilitating life-skill development, serving at-risk students, and fostering school citizenship.

The Results-Based Program Delivery Model (Johnson & Johnson, 2003) is a non-prescriptive model that emphasizes the use of data to determine how students are different as a result of the school counseling program. Through consistent summative and formative feedback, programs using this model emphasize the flexibility to determine how to best meet students needs, particularly students identified as most at risk for underperforming. The Domains/Activities/Partners (D/A/P) Model (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2008) is a non-prescriptive program model that emphasizes the development of student competencies through intentional collaboration between school counselors and students, parents/guardians, school colleagues, community colleagues, and other stakeholders.

The Developmental Guidance and Counseling Model (Myrick, 2003) is a prescriptive model that comprises six functions: individual counseling, small group counseling, classroom guidance, consultation, coordination, and peer facilitation. While the Developmental Guidance and Counseling Model (Myrick, 2003) is among the most popular delivery models, the work of

urban school counseling has a particular social justice framework that influences service delivery. Holcomb-McCoy (2007) asserts that inequity, oppression, and socio-cultural barriers continue to create access, opportunity and achievement gaps for students from diverse groups—many of whom are from urban communities. Furthermore, the author states urban school counselors that intentionally subscribe to a social justice framework incorporate six elements (Six Cs) in their comprehensive school counseling programs (CSCPs): counseling and intervention planning; consultation; connecting schools, families, and communities; collecting and utilizing data; challenging biases; and coordinating student services and support (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

In practice, the literature suggests urban school counselors are using developmental, prescriptive delivery models reflective of the Developmental Guidance and Counseling Model (Myrick, 2003). Holcomb-McCoy and Mitchell (2005) found over 100 urban school counselors from six urban centers in the northeastern and mid-Atlantic regions of the United States (n = 102) largely adhered to comprehensive school counseling models such as those developed by Gysbers and Henderson (2001) and Myrick (2003) (i.e., Developmental Guidance and Counseling Model) and participants reported low family functioning, academic underachievement, and poverty as pervasive issues among the students served in the urban schools represented in the study. What the literature has not suggested is the potential need for service delivery models that are non-prescriptive and offer opportunities to cater interventions to address the unique needs of students in urban schools (e.g., Domains/Activities/Partners Model). The ASCA National Model (2012) makes recommendations for the amount of time school counselors should spend delivering direct and indirect services (i.e., 80%/20%). However, a

significant portion of the extant literature on urban school counseling has addressed direct services for students.

Direct Counseling Services in Urban Schools

In the last 15-20 years, urban school counseling scholarship has focused on specific modalities of service delivery. The modalities most frequently highlighted include: individual counseling provided by school counselors, counseling provided by mental health professionals other than school counselors, (e.g., clinical mental health counselors, social workers, school psychologists), and the critical need for coordination and collaboration (Bryan, 2005; Eschenhauer & Chen-Hayes, 2005; Evans & Carter, 1997; West-Olatunji, Frazier, & Kelly, 2011). Within the domain of individual counseling, Eschenhauer and Chen-Hayes (2005) suggested individual counseling provided by urban school counselors be re-conceptualized as an act of advocacy and accountability to help eliminate barriers, such as access, opportunity and achievement gaps. This reconceptualization is reflective of a social justice school counseling framework (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). The authors recommended urban school counselors implement the Transformative Individual School Counseling (TISC) model, which requires a functional behavioral assessment approach to define problems; systemic, solution-focused, and narrative counseling approaches to address problems; and single-case study designs to document the effectiveness of interventions. The importance of the TISC model is how its implementation aligns with and meets two overall goals: (1) to increase student wellness through individual counseling; and, (2) to support the educational mission of schools in advancing academic achievement in an era of school counselor accountability. Implementation of the TISC is particularly important considering how the ASCA National Model (2012)

recommends school counseling programs directly aligning their scope of services with school and district level mission statements to reflect congruence within the school system.

Another consistent theme in urban school counseling literature is the increased reliance on other counseling and allied mental health professionals delivering individual, group, and/or family counseling services in the school setting (Bryan, 2005; Evans & Carter, 1997; West-Olatunji et al., 2011). The role of urban school counselors is not always explicitly stated within the literature, although several comprehensive school counseling programs models articulate the role of school counselors to include collaboration and coordination (ASCA, 2012; Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012; Lee, 2005) to support student and family wellbeing. This multidisciplinary team approach is designed to support student wellness and offers proximal resources to students who may not otherwise access such services outside of school. One limitation emerges, however, when various school personnel (e.g., teaching faculty, administrators) and the allied mental health professionals (e.g., clinical mental health counselors, social workers) overlook or misunderstand the clinical competencies school counselors possess (e.g., providing individual and group counseling), in addition to their ability to collaborate with stakeholders to coordinate services.

West-Olatunji et al. (2011) discussed the importance of wrap-around counseling services for students in urban schools to mitigate challenges they confront. However, the authors leave out how school counselors can be involved in the development, implementation, and/or evaluation of this intervention. They briefly presented a potentially expanded role of urban school counselors by providing more holistic counseling services. Similarly, Evans and Carter (1997) highlighted the need for family counseling within urban schools to provide ongoing support for students and their families. Citing the influence of family systems on students'

educational experiences and learning, the authors developed the School-Based Family Counseling Model (Evans & Carter, 1997) to help teachers and parents engender academic success within students. The school-based family counselor (SBFC) develops interventions to facilitate teacher-parent collaboration to address problematic classroom behaviors and assumes a central role in facilitating family-school-community partnerships. In their recommendations, however, the authors discuss how the identification of a SBFC can come from the current school counseling staff or the development of a new position. While this proposal is relevant, it is limited considering budgetary challenges and sometimes-competing priorities within urban school districts.

Bryan (2005) and Taylor and Adelman (2000) reiterated the importance of urban school counselors' capacity for effective coordination and collaboration skills in creating school-family-community partnerships. Research studies have suggested that school-family-community partnership involvement is considered a central aspect of the school counselor's role (ASCA, 2012; Bemak, 2000; Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004), school counselors are in an ideal position to provide leadership for partnerships between school, families, and communities (Colbert, 1996), and that school counselors agree that their roles in school-family-community partnerships are important (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). One conclusion to be drawn from this research is that effective urban school counseling (e.g., support of student academic, personal, and career development) can largely depend on the depth and sophistication of their collaborations with a wide variety of stakeholders. These deep collaborations, while important in other settings (i.e., rural, suburban), are critical in urban schools that often experience economic resource deficits germane to urban communities.

Preparation and Professional Development of Urban School Counselors

There exists a gap in the literature when comparing scholarship about urban school counselor preparation (i.e., pre-service) and professional development (i.e., in-service or practicing). The literature is rich with recommendations for urban school counselor preparation. Holcomb-McCoy (1998) offered some of the earliest recommendations for urban school counselor education, encouraging programs integrate learning experiences for students that introduce them to urban education issues and challenges, study multicultural issues extensively, and support urban teachers' professional development and retention in the profession. Green, Conley, and Barnett (2005) suggested embracing an ecological clinical orientation that is aware of and responsive to the dynamic interplay between counselors, students, schools, and communities, which can enhance urban school counselor education. Wilczenski et al. (2011) offered comprehensive recommendations for urban school counselor education curricula, citing the critical need for students to learn through an intentional curriculum, community engagement activities in urban communities, and student reflection.

Unfortunately, researchers have not captured the ongoing professional development needs of urban school counselors as readily. Dahir, Burnham, and Stone (2009) sampled the professional development needs of Alabama school counselors (n = 1,244) in their implementation of the ASCA National Model. Elementary school counselors reported needing professional development in academic and career development interventions, while high school counselors reported needing professional development in classroom guidance, group counseling, and personal/social development. While this study makes an important contribution, disaggregated information about respondents' districts (e.g., rural, suburban, urban) would help distinguish if differences exist between the counselors' districts and their professional development needs.

The challenges of urban education provide evidence of what urban school counselors' professional development and supervision needs might include (e.g., closing the gap interventions, family counseling support, advocacy training), but these speculations are not data-driven. In one study, Owens et al. (2009) found urban school counselors (n = 55) self-reported their most significant professional development needs included training in dropout prevention programs, violence prevention programs, counseling interventions for underperforming and unmotivated students, and developing and executing needs assessments. This is a valuable study that validates the ongoing challenges in urban school counseling and the range of support urban school counselors need. However, this study was limited to counselors in one state. One resulting question that emerges from the literature is: *What do urban school counselors report to be their most salient supervision and professional development needs?* Counselor educators can use this question to empirically identify these needs, assist counselor education programs, and be a support to urban school districts in meeting the needs of their school counselors.

Despite important contributions to the urban school counseling knowledge base, current scholarship on urban school counselors' supervision and professional development needs is lacking. Research continues to inform school counselor educators about the range of effective learning experiences for pre-service urban school counselors. Immersion experiences, case studies, and the embracing of a deep commitment to social justice advocacy for disenfranchised members of urban communities are vital for pre-service urban school counselors. Extending important research on factors that contribute to academic success of urban students is equally important. The work of Henfield (2013), Henfield, Washington, and Byrd (2014), Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013), and Harper and Associates (2014) have all investigated what students from urban communities identify as important supports for their academic and personal success.

The literature further suggests urban school counselors (i.e., pre-service and practicing) develop the ability to engage a wide-range of stakeholders to support overall student and family well being in and out of school. Although school counseling frameworks (e.g., social justice) and counseling modalities are suggested in the literature, additional research is needed to provide a more holistic perspective on the professional development needs of urban school counselors.

Research Recommendations

Research that extends the work of Owens et al. (2009) is critical for urban school counselors. Qualitative and quantitative research on the supervision and professional development needs of urban school counselors are useful ways to deepen the knowledge base in this area. Qualitative studies that seek to better understand urban school counselor professional development needs in specific contexts are important. Specifically, research questions addressing their successes, challenges, and opportunities related to professional development are warranted. These studies can use a range of qualitative methodological traditions that include, but are not limited to phenomenology, narrative inquiry, and grounded theory.

Quantitative studies investigating urban school counselor supervision and professional development needs are needed as well. Studies using inferential statistics (e.g., correlational, regression) that sample urban school counselors to measure the relationship between professional development and self-efficacy in counseling practice is one example of how the gap in school counseling scholarship can be filled. Studies that investigate mediating and moderating factors that influence urban school counselors' practice or student educational outcomes would also be helpful. Regression studies that assess if specific variables in urban school contexts predict specific professional development needs will inform the knowledge base. Lastly, research that investigates the perspectives and experiences of urban school students to document their school

counseling needs is needed. Moving forward, the school counseling profession has much to learn about the practice of urban school counseling and how to effectively support and prepare school counselors working in urban settings providing critical services to students in urban communities.

Appendix A

About the Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision

The Journal is a service of the North Atlantic Regional Association for Counselors and Supervisors. The mission of the Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision is to provide a comprehensive platform for research, theory and practices of counselor educators, counselor supervisors and professional counselors. The journal chronicles current issues, concerns and potential solutions that enable counselors to continue to grow and develop as practitioners, educators and human beings. The journal publishes high-quality articles that have undergone a thorough and extensive double blind peer-review twice a year.

Aims & Scope of the Journal

JCPS provides manuscripts that enhance the practice of counselor education, counseling and supervision. There are six general categories that help focus the content of the journal.

Research. These articles focus on research (qualitative, quantitative, mixed) in counselor preparation, professional development, supervision, and professional practice.

Techniques. These articles focus on professional models for teaching empirically grounded techniques used by professional counselors, as well as teaching and supervision techniques used in professional preparation programs.

Counselor Development. These articles include insightful commentary on means by which professional counselors can continue to develop professionally. Effective teaching strategies for counseling students as well as continuing education for experienced counselors will be highlighted.

Supervision. These articles specifically target ideas, research, and practice related to counselor supervision. These articles should investigate and discuss supervisory issues from a perspective applicable to site supervisors, counselor educators and/or clinical supervisors (e.g., supervising professionals working toward a professional counseling license).

Issues, Concerns and Potential Solutions. These articles identify and discuss significant issues facing the field of professional counseling with particular focus on issues in counselor preparation, professional development, and supervision. Exploration of these topics should include elaboration of the concerns as well as an examination of potential remedies or effective responses to the issues.

Clinical Supervisors Stories. These articles describe current issues in counselor preparation and supervision from the perspective of site supervisors. The emphasis on these articles should focus on the story of the issue, potential solutions and the uniqueness of the message. Authors are encouraged to forgo significant literature review and attend directly to the intended message to the field.