An Exploration of the Social Justice Identity Development of Professional School Counselors
Who Advocate for Undocumented Students

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ABSTRACT

Research related to the school counselor's journey to social justice advocacy is minimal. An exploration of the school counselor's journey to social justice advocacy and the impact it has on the counselor's work with students is needed. Furthermore, research related to the needs and challenges of undocumented students have not been explored.

The purpose of this study was to explore the social justice identity development of professional school counselors who identify as advocates for undocumented students through critical incidents. The study is grounded in Bobbie Harro's *Cycle of Liberation* and Relational Cultural Theory to answer the following research questions: (**1**) What do school counselors who identify as social justice advocates describe as critical incidents in their social justice identity development when working with undocumented students? (**2**) How have these critical incidents impacted the social justice identity development of professional school counselors? I enlisted a qualitative approach utilizing the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) to address the research questions.

Six secondary school counselors participated in this study. Five were female, two were white, two were Hispanic, one was African-American, and one was bi-racial. Four were citizens, one was a naturalized citizen and one was a DACA recipient. One had been a school counselor for 1 − 3 years, two for 3-5 years, and 3 had been school counselors for more than 7 years. The critical incidents identified by the participants related to personal experiences such as parental

influence, family experiences, and influence of educators; formal learning such as experiential learning and academic learning; past work experiences; and student impact on the counselor.

The school counselor's relationship with an undocumented student or immigrant played a role in the participants social justice identity development. The school counselors' identity development mirrored Harro's (2000) *Cycle of Liberation*. As a result of the critical incidents provided by the participants, connection and introspection emerged. The connection and introspection liberated the counselor and served as the process towards the counselors' social justice identity development.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Research related to the school counselor's journey to social justice advocacy is minimal. There is also little research that discusses working with and on behalf of undocumented students. This study explored the critical incidents (meaningful experiences) that led school counselors to better serve the needs of undocumented students in a secondary school setting. Six school counselors were interviewed with varied years of experience and citizenship status.

The findings showed that (a) the students in their setting had a significant impact on the school counselor's social justice identity, (b) the meaningful experience led to the school counselor's self-reflection, and as a result (c) led the school counselor to use a more relational approach to advocacy. School counselors are encouraged to participate in professional development to increase their awareness of undocumented students. Counselor educators are encouraged to develop assignments and activities that allow for student reflection of their social justice identity. Lastly, all counselors are encouraged to be reflective of their experiences that lead them to advocacy.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my best friend and favorite DREAMER, Ana. You deserve the

world. Your tireless efforts of overcoming the odds is something to be admired. You inspire me.

Acknowledgments

I credit my faith to carrying me through this process, and reminding me that I could not do this alone. "Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me." Psalm 54:4.

I also want to thank my mom. For my entire life you have been my greatest support, you have always believed in me and I am thankful to you for that. This degree is as much yours as it is mine, you were there every step of the way.

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Thank you to my participants, you are my heroes and thank you for being fierce advocates.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The first time one of my students, Ana, disclosed her undocumented status was during her junior year. She entered my office unsure about her next steps; she was frustrated and fearful that her hard work would be in vain. As she began her senior year I reflected on how I could help her. I felt unprepared and unqualified, so I did my research. Over time my knowledge grew and through that growth I made a decision to advocate. For the remainder of that year, I, Ana, and three other students traveled the state of Virginia raising awareness of the challenges experienced by undocumented students. Together, they brought awareness to their community members who were unaware of their plight. These young women spoke with conviction and determination, with an expectation that despite the barriers placed before them they will succeed. I believe that Ana making me aware of her undocumented status and the impact it had on her future served as the critical incident that moved me to a place of advocacy for undocumented students and immigrants.

The Professional School Counselor has multiple roles and wears many hats. As a professional school counselor, I have experienced the complexity of this career. Often times we become a pseudo parent, a confidante and an encourager. As our professional identity expands and we experience the personal growth of our students, we are further awakened to their academic, personal, social, and career needs. Undocumented students' needs are minimally met, often because the school counselor is unsure of who those students are in that school. This creates disconnection between the student and counselor, hindering the relationship. Relational Cultural Theory, which embraces a humanistic and multicultural view allows for counselors to grow in connection with their students through empathy, empowerment and fostering

relationships with the awareness of culture. Undocumented students will continue to be disadvantaged in schools if school counselor's awareness and advocacy efforts of this population remains unexplored. This study explored the nature of influence through critical incidents and the notion that we are impacted by our students in such a way that we move towards an identity of a social justice advocate.

Problem Statement

Today, approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants reside in the United States, 2.5 million are children (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), every year 80,000 undocumented students turn 18, and 65,000 graduate high school. The 2.5 million undocumented youth in United States schools prompts an exploration of the professional school counselor's knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes of this population.

School counselors are expected to be aware of student needs and to be knowledgeable of and have the skills to work with culturally diverse groups (ASCA, 2012). School counselors are encouraged to be agents of change, to advocate and address achievement and opportunity gaps. Multiculturalism has been woven into school counselors' ethical standards, competencies, and position statements.

Most texts, courses, and articles on multicultural education for counselors focus on a variety of aspects of diversity, but few texts include the immigrant population (Sue & Sue 2012; Casas, Suzuki, Alexander & Jackson, 2016; Smith, 2004). Thus, the problem for undocumented students is that their school counselors are not educated about their concerns and unique situations. The school counselor is also tasked with working with this population without sufficient literature to increase their knowledge of the needs of this population. The sparse

research on this population further disadvantages undocumented students due to the lack of awareness and advocacy on their behalf.

School counselors are also encouraged to be advocates without context of how that process may unfold. This study will address those two gaps in the literature, the social justice identity development of school counselors and their work with undocumented students. The research will explore this by answering the following research questions: **(1)** What do school counselors who identify as social justice advocates describe as critical incidents in their social justice identity development when working with undocumented students? **(2)** How have these critical incidents impacted the social justice identity development of professional school counselors?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the social justice identity development of professional school counselors (PSC) who identify as advocates for undocumented students through critical incidents. An incident is defined as an occurrence that can interrupt a normal procedure (Merriam-Webster, 2016). The critical incident should hold significance, prompt an individual to revisit assumptions, and/or impact personal and professional growth (Serrat, 2010). The researcher explored how mutual empathy, empowerment, and growth fostering relationships as discussed in Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan, 2010) might contribute to the school counselor's liberation.

Research Design

This qualitative research study utilized a modified version of Flanagan's (1954) Critical Incident Technique. The foundation of the Critical Incident Technique explores what helps or hinders a particular experience. Secondary school counselors who identify as social justice

advocates for undocumented students were invited to participate. Participants were asked to provide a meaningful experience of their work with undocumented students. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews that allowed for further exploration of the participants' experiences. During the analysis of the study the researcher compared the emerging categories and themes to Harro's *Cycle of Liberation* (2000) and Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan, 2010) to answer the research questions.

Definitions of Terms

Condemned Isolation: The feeling of isolation or being left out from the human community, results in the individual feeling responsible for their inability to reconnect (Jordan, 2010).

Connection: An empathetic encounter of mutual respect and authentic engagement. The result of connection is Miller's "five good things" (zest, worth, productivity, clarity, and desire for more connection) (Duffey & Somody, 2007).

Critical incident: A critical incident should hold significance, prompt an individual to revisit assumptions, and/or impact personal/professional growth (Serrat, 2010)**.**

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA): DACA was passed June 15, 2012 by Executive Order of President Barack Obama. Individuals who were no older than 31, and at least 15 years old were eligible to apply. "DACAmented" immigrants are protected from deportation for two years with the eligibility to renew. DACA recipients are eligible for a work permit, driver's license (state-by-state) and social security number (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Disconnection: Disconnection occurs when an individual or group does not feel heard or understood. Disconnection can lead to an inability to express aspects of self, thus developing an inauthentic self (Jordan, 2010).

Growth fostering relationships: Promotes the development and growth of each person's awareness of the other's feelings and experiences in the relationship (Jordan, 2010).

Incident: An occurrence that can interrupt a normal procedure (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

Liberation: The act or process of freeing someone or something (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

Mutuality: Through a fostered relationship, an establishment of mutual empathy, and mutual empowerment, the individual moves out of isolation and towards connectedness (Jordan, 2010).

Mutual empathy: Fosters a connection that moves the student out of a place of isolation and hopelessness through the comfort of feeling heard and understood by the counselor (Jordan, 2010).

Mutual empowerment: Mutual empowerment is a direct result of mutual empathy and growth fostering relationships; a two-way process that strengthens both the person and the community (Jordan, 2010).

Power over: A concept in which the dominant group exercises power over marginalized groups leading to disconnection (Jordan, 2010).

Power with: A concept that utilizes a collaborative approach to empower others and oppose the idea of "power over" (Jordan, 2010).

The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (The Dream Act): The Dream Act was a proposed legislation for high school students to be eligible to enter the U.S. Military or pursue higher education with the possibility of gaining legal status (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Undocumented Immigrant: An undocumented immigrant is an individual who entered the United States without legal documentation or overstayed their visa (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

While others might reference unauthorized immigrants or illegal aliens, in this study the researcher chooses to use inclusive language.

Summary

This chapter introduced you to the research study that explored the critical incidents of professional school counselors who identify as social justice advocates. Chapter two is an extensive review of the literature including the American Counseling Association Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, the ACA Advocacy Framework, social justice counselor identity development, the professional school counselor, undocumented immigrants and the theoretical frameworks (*Cycle of Liberation* and Relational Cultural Theory). Chapter three, the methodology, includes the purpose of the study, the researcher's worldview, background of the critical incident technique, the research design, participant selection, data collection and analysis. Chapter four includes the findings of the study. Chapter five includes a discussion of the findings, implications for school counselors and counselor educators, limitations and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

In this chapter the revised ACA Multicultural and Social Justice Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2016) are reviewed followed by the ACA Advocacy Framework (Ratts et al., 2007). Social justice in counseling, social justice identity development and counselor identity development is explored. The American School Counseling Association's (ASCA) ethical standards, position statements, and competencies are discussed in detail as evidence for the expectation of multicultural competency and advocacy for change. A brief history of immigration and an overview of recent legislation, definitions, and current statistics of undocumented students are provided. Additionally, political/institutional, mental health and educational barriers of undocumented students are offered. Empirical studies of undocumented students' experiences with institutional agents (i.e. principals, school counselors and teachers) are also discussed. As discussed in Chapter 1, the theoretical framework for this study is Harro's (2000) *Cycle of Liberation* and Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), as they relate to the social justice identity development of school counselors.

ACA Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies

The Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) (Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992) have served as a foundation for the development of both the American Counseling Association's (ACA) *Code of Ethics* and the ethical codes for the Association for Specialists in Group Work and Counselors for Social Justice (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler & McCullough, 2016).

The original conceptual framework developed was a three characteristic/three-dimension matrix. The three characteristics emphasize: (a) counselor's awareness of his or her assumptions,

biases, and values; (b) understanding the worldview of culturally different clients; and (c)

developing appropriate interventions and strategies. The three dimensions include: (a) beliefs and

attitudes; (b) knowledge; and (c) skills. This conceptual model was found to be too simplistic, as

researchers began to address the intersections of multiple identities and the influence of those

identities on mental health outcomes and disparities. Counselors also recognize the value in

utilizing a contextual approach, understanding that their clients are situated within a larger

system. Recognizing the impact of intersecting identities on the mental health of clients/students

led to a reevaluation of the multicultural counseling competencies.

Over time, research has begun to address the intersection of these factors and their

individual and collective influence on mental health outcomes and disparities. As a result,

counselors are increasingly recognizing the value of understanding how their clients are situated

within a larger system. This trend is being reinforced by modifications in various practice

policies and guidelines. For example, in 2014 the Association for Multicultural Counseling and

Development (AMCD) appointed a committee to revise the MCC in order to (a) provide a more

inclusive understanding of culture and diversity encompassing intersectionality, and (b) address

the expanding role of professional counselors. With the specific inclusion of guidelines stressing

social justice in counseling, the ACA adopted the revised MCC in July 2015.

As shown in Figure 1 the core of the MSJCC is a multicultural and social justice praxis.

Multiculturalism increases the counselor's awareness of the inequities their clients/students of

marginalized groups face, as well as the privilege given to privileged groups. Through that

increased awareness, counselors engage in social justice initiatives at the individual and systemic

level. The quadrants of the MSJCC illustrate how power, privilege, and oppression manifest and

influence the counseling relationship based on the counselor's or client's privileged or

marginalized status. Specifically, the four developmental domains—within which are situated attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills and action—indicate that multiculturalism and social justice begin with counselor self-awareness. "This internal awareness then extends to counselors' understanding of clients' worldviews and, subsequently, the ways in which culture, power, privilege, and oppression influence the counseling relationship" (Ratts et al., 2016 p. 37). The counselor's self-awareness is extended to the client, the counseling relationship, and the counseling and advocacy interventions and strategies.

Figure 1. Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies
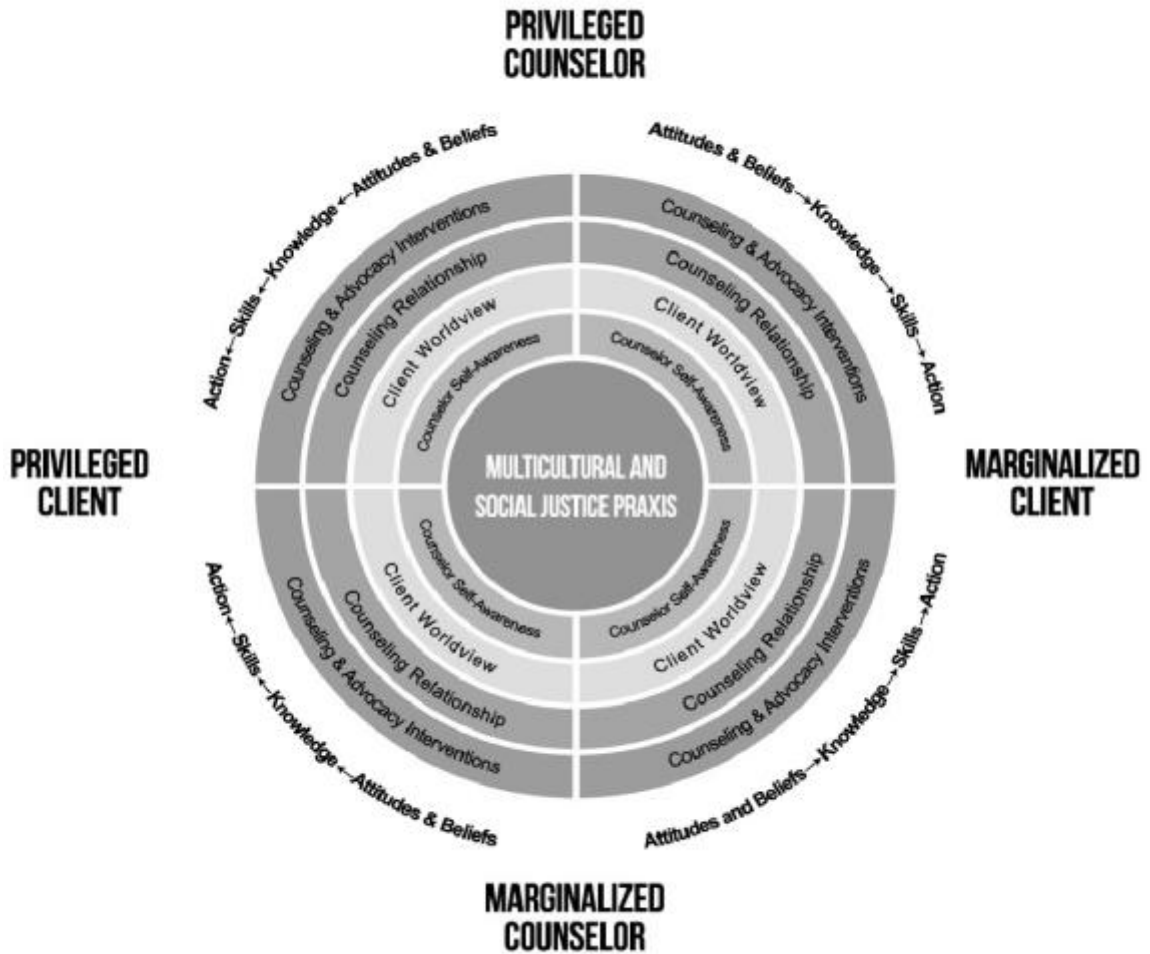
Figure 1 is partitioned into four quadrants: (1) Privileged counselor/marginalized client quadrant; (2) Privileged counselor/privileged client quadrant; (3) Marginalized counselor/privileged client quadrant; and (4) Marginalized counselor/marginalized client quadrant. The first quadrant reflects clients from marginalized groups receiving counseling from a counselor who is a member of a privilege group. In this relationship, the counselor possesses social power and privilege that the client does not (ex. A white counselor working with a client of color). The second quadrant reflects a counselor and client with a shared privilege. In this

relationship between the counselor and client there is a shared power and privilege (ex. A male counselor working with another male client). The third quadrant reflects a counselor from a marginalized group and a client who is a member of a privileged group (ex. A female counselor working with a male client). In this relationship the client holds the social power and privilege in the counseling relationship. The fourth quadrant reflects the relationship of a counselor and client who share the same marginalized group (ex. A counselor of color working with a client of color). Counselors and clients can hold multiple identities of both a privileged and marginalized identity (ex. A black male). The illustration reflects a "snapshot" of the quadrants the client or counselor may be situated in (Ratts et al., 2016). The counselor's or client's most salient identity may change based on who he or she is working with; however, the client or counselor may also identify predominately with a quadrant. There is also potential for identifying with more than one quadrant. It should also be noted that within each quadrant are four domains: (a) counselor self-awareness, (b) client worldview, (c) the counseling relationship, and (d) counseling and advocacy intervention. Embedded within the domains are the competencies retained from the original Multicultural Counseling Competencies (attitudes & beliefs, knowledge and skills) with the addition of a fourth competency, "action" (AKSA).

Counselor Self-Awareness. Counselor self-awareness is a continual process in which knowing oneself influences and encourages a reevaluation of one's beliefs and biases. The counselors' increase in knowledge impacts their awareness of how values, biases and assumptions impact their worldviews and experiences. An increase in self-awareness allows counselors to understand the influence of social power and privilege they do or do not hold in society. Culturally competent counselors reflect and think critically about their position in society as people who are part of a privileged or marginalized group. Counselors who are

proactive in learning about their assumptions, biases, beliefs and values embrace professional development and immerse themselves into the communities they serve (Ratts et al., 2016).

Client worldview. As previously discussed, counselors who are aware of their own values, beliefs and biases are more attuned to the worldviews and experiences of their clients. The AKSA highlights the ways in which marginalized and privileged counselors understand the client's worldviews. The counselor understands how power and privilege can hinder the growth and development of a client, and the connection between client concerns and their intersecting identities. A counselor's curiosity to learn the worldviews and experiences of his or her clients is a life-long process. The counselor's self-awareness along with the client's worldview impacts the counseling relationship (Ratts et al., 2016).

The counseling relationship. In the counseling relationship, the counselor is both self-aware and cognizant of the client's worldview, which allows for a better understanding of the influence of privilege and marginalization. Self-aware counselors recognize when a privileged or marginalized status is present in the counseling relationship and how those dynamics impact the therapeutic alliance. The counselor's knowledge of issues concerning culture, power, oppression and identity can strengthen or hinder the counseling relationship. Counselors should work to establish a welcoming and culturally appropriate environment, initiating difficult dialogues, addressing issues of power and privilege in the community, partnering and collaborating with community allies, and understanding how privilege and oppression may manifest in the counseling relationship. Within the counseling relationship are interventions developed by the counselor and client (Ratts et al., 2016).

Counseling and advocacy interventions. Counselors who are attuned and sensitive gain insight into multicultural and social justice approaches using culturally relevant interventions and

strategies addressing individual and community change. Social justice advocacy is foregrounded in the empowerment of the client (Ratts et al., 2016). As an advocacy intervention, the counselor should facilitate discussions with the client on the following: internalized oppression, relationships with family members or systemic policies; how they influence the client and the client's families and friends. Counselor's should also explore ways in which ethnicity, country or region of origin impact their circumstances and their actions (Ratts et al., 2016).

The MSJCC provides a comprehensive framework for counselors to move towards a place of multicultural and social justice competency. The absence in the framework is the exploration of the process that not only moves a counselor into a place of competence but beyond competence to liberation and an identity as a social justice advocate. Empirical studies that explore multicultural competence often focus on counselors' knowledge and awareness of culturally diverse populations. Studies related to multicultural competency specifically with marginalized populations fail to address the process that occurs in the development of a culturally competent counselor.

Multicultural competence and the research related to it is imperative; however, further study is necessary to provide a perspective of the process counselors experience that moves the counselor from competency to advocacy. The MSJCC discusses four competencies: attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action. Advocacy serves as the action. The ACA advocacy framework discussed below was developed to "help counselors recognize how societal oppression negatively impacts human development and would encourage counselors to use both micro level and macro level counseling interventions when working with clients/students" (Ratts, Dekruyf, Chen-Hayes, 2007 p. 91).

ACA Advocacy Framework

The ACA advocacy competencies as shown in Figure 2 were developed by a task force in 2001 and endorsed by the ACA governing council in 2003. The ACA Advocacy framework encourages counselors to challenge the norm and belief that clients and students from culturally diverse groups may not be as academically successful as their privileged peers (Ratts et al., 2007). The ACA Advocacy Framework complements the ASCA National Model encompassing relevant themes of leadership, collaboration and teaming, systemic change and advocacy (Ratts et al., 2007). The competencies developed encouraged counselors to acknowledge the impact of oppression on student development and the promotion of counseling interventions at the client/student level, school/community level, and public arena level (Ratts et al., 2007). At the *client/student level* (micro) the counselors work with and on behalf of the student. At the *school/community level*, the school counselor provides professional development to increase his or her awareness of social issues impacting their students. Lastly, at the *public arena level* (macro), counselors educate the public on issues that impact the students they serve.

Figure 2. ACA Advocacy Framework
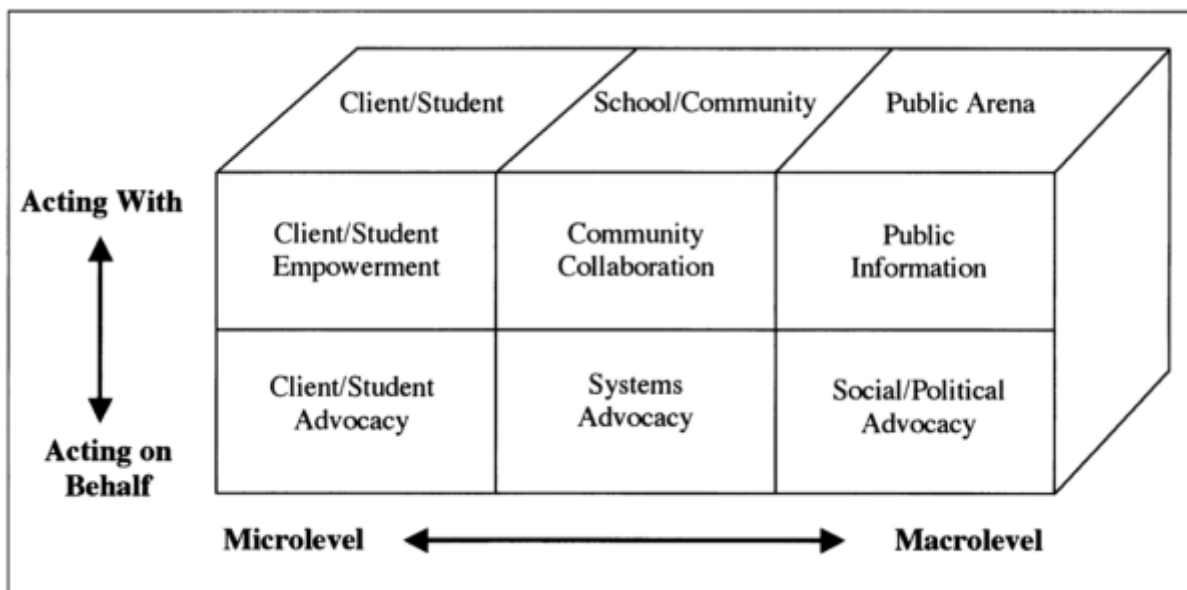
The ACA Advocacy framework discusses the actions of the counselor who is advocating for his/her client or student. Social justice represents the issues that impact the client/students counselor's serve. Social justice is discussed broadly and in the context of school counseling. There is a growing body of literature on social justice as a critical component of multicultural competencies in counseling (Vera & Speight, 2003) and its integration into the daily work of professional school counselors.

Social Justice

Social Justice can be defined as an internal sense of conscience, a moral duty, and a sense of righteousness to the world (Hunsaker, 2011). "A social justice focus acknowledges issues of unearned power, privilege, and oppression and how these link with psychological stress and disorders" (Locke & Bailey, 2013 p. 277). Social justice counseling is a multifaceted approach that empowers the individual and confronts injustices and inequalities that impact the populations counselors serve. The aim of social justice is the opportunity for all groups to exist in a mutually shaped society that meets the needs of all individuals. Social justice envisions an equitable society that is physically and psychologically safe for all members (Bell, 1997). Social justice counselors work towards this goal through advocacy. The focus of social justice counselors is on the individual needs of their clients guided by four critical principles: equity, access, participation and harmony (Counselors for Social Justice, 2016). Equity is the fair distribution of resources; access provides individuals resources, power, information and understanding that promotes self-determination; participation is the right to be a part of and consulted on the decisions that impact their lives and the lives of others; and harmony is that the actions of an individual result in the best outcome for the entire community (Crethar and Ratts, 2008).

Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi and Bryant (2007) developed social justice competencies from the multicultural counseling competencies. The nine social justice competencies were birthed out of a movement of counselors whose roles have gone beyond the office or classroom. The social justice competencies encourage counselors to: (1) increase knowledge of how social injustices are experienced at the individual, cultural and societal levels; (2) actively self-reflect on issues of race, ethnicity, oppression, power and privilege; (3) remain self-aware of how their power and privilege parallel experiences with oppression and injustice; (4) challenge exploitive interventions that hinder the well-being of individuals and groups; (5) increase knowledge of indigenous models of health and healing to promote culturally relevant and holistic interventions; (6) increase awareness of global issues and injustices; (7) develop and implement preventive interventions therapeutically; (8) collaborate with community stakeholders to provide culturally relevant services; and, (9) refine systemic and advocacy skills to promote social change in institutions and communities (Constantine et al., 2007).

Advocacy became a means to systemic change to lessen the achievement and opportunity gap of students of color and low socioeconomic students (Bemak & Chung, 2005). Social justice counseling has become integral to the field of counseling. Social justice counselors are committed to dismantling systems, confronting oppression and advocating for change for the clients/students they serve. School counselors, as discussed in the ACA Advocacy framework, can work with and on behalf of their students at the micro and macro levels. The following studies discuss the role, attributes, and actions of school counselors who identify as social justice advocates.

Professional School Counselors as Social Justice Advocates

Professional school counselors have a "moral and ethical responsibility to advocate for students and serve as agents for social and political change" (Ratts, Dekruyf, L. & Chen-Hayes, 2007 p. 90). Students who are a part of a culturally devalued group benefit from social justice (Ratts et al., 2007). The counselor identifies barriers, establishes conditions necessary for success, and uses empowerment as a means of self-reflection, action, awareness and skill development (Stone & Dahir, 2015). The studies discussed below explore the qualities, attributes and skills of school counselors who identify as social justice advocates.

Related Research

Singh, Urbano, Haston and McMahan (2010) conducted a qualitative grounded theory study that examined how sixteen school counselors who identify as social justice change agents advocate for systemic change within their school communities. Of the 16 participants there were 12 females and 4 males; 11 identified as White, 4 African-American and 1 Asian. All of the participants worked in a public or private school setting at the primary and secondary level with an average of 8.6 years of experience. The results of the study led to the development of the social justice strategies model. According to the model, political savviness and consciousness-raising are continuous processes. The remaining aspects of the models are implemented when appropriate. Initiating dialogues and broaching topics were critical and assisted in creating change within the school. Building intentional relationships with parents, students, administrators, faculty and staff also served as a necessary component. Furthermore, students' self-advocacy as a part of their personal liberation emerged as a theme. Data, such as grades or test scores, were used as evidence for showing the academic or opportunity gaps of marginalized student populations. Educating administrators, faculty, and staff, about the role of school

counselors was imperative when assigned non-counseling tasks. Participants stressed the importance of declining tasks not related to advocacy work (Singh et al., 2010).

The article reviewed resulted in a number of themes that should be taken into consideration with this study. Participants noted in the theme "initiating dialogues" that there was a need to discern when it was appropriate to speak. Singh et al. (2010) acknowledges that it may be culturally insensitive to think a student is able to self-advocate. However, this is contradictory to the ACA Advocacy Framework that encourages counselors to empower their clients/students to advocate for themselves. The research produced strategies that are beneficial in the context of working with individuals whose identities might be visible. While this study contributes to the literature, there is no reference made to the school counselor's journey to advocacy but rather a discussion of what works.

McMahan, Singh, Urbano, and Haston, (2010) conducted a qualitative study based on the data that emerged from Singh et al.'s (2010) study of school counselors who identify as social justice advocates. This study focused on the aspects of self that were important to their advocacy. Three elements emerged in their study: racial identity, self-reflection, and a feminist style of work. Four categories of personhood also developed: personality, experiences, beliefs, and emotions. The participants discussed an awareness of power related to their racial majority or minority identity both personally and professionally. Other identities referenced included: sexual orientation, religion, gender, and disability. Self-reflection of personhood, racial identity, and advocacy work were recurring themes amongst participants. Moreover, participants' style of advocacy reflected a feminist approach through collaboration, empowerment, giving a voice, continuous self-examination, and raising consciousness. Some of the personality traits mentioned by the participants were patience, tenacity, curiosity, resourcefulness, and courage.

Participants found that they utilized their personality traits to raise awareness and build

relationships. The use of self was acknowledged as an important tool in social justice and

advocacy. Prior familial or mentor experience was discussed along with the religious and moral

beliefs that helped form their advocacy identity. Participants also expressed their excitement for

changing systems, fighting inequities, and empowering students to self-advocate. The

limitations of this analysis were a homogenous sample size of white, middle class women. The

researchers' recommendation was for future research to have a more diverse sample size and to

contribute to the development of an advocacy identity model (McMahan et al., 2010).

In a similar study, Field and Baker's (2004) qualitative study explored in two focus

groups the advocacy behaviors of high school counselors. Focus group 1 had five participants

who were female, three African-American and two White. All of the participants in focus group

1 were employed at the same moderately large high school (approximately 1,700 students) with

grades 9-12. Focus group 2 had four participants, four White, three females and one male.

Participants in focus group 2 worked in the same county but at different high schools. Each of

the four participants were the sole counselor for the small rural school (400-600 students) with

grades 9-12.

Participants defined advocacy as "going above and beyond" or "taking extra steps"

(Field & Baker, 2004). Examples of advocating included: writing letters, consulting

stakeholders, or taking a stand. Participants make meaning of advocacy by focusing on the

individual, supporting colleagues and viewing advocacy as an ethical responsibility. Participants

also supported advocacy for the profession. Individuals who advocate are flexible and have

numerous skills. They are authentically accepting, self-aware, realistic about what they can

accomplish, and they have a voice for the student and maintain a sense of humor. Participants

felt valued when receiving positive feedback from administration, peers, students, parents and the community. When asked about how they learned to advocate, participants not only cited their counselor education programs, conferences and workshops, informal training or role models, but also noted that being an advocate was a part of an individual's innate personality. Participants were also asked what negatively impacted their advocacy work. Participants cited a vague job description, being assigned non-counseling duties, feeling undervalued, and a lack of clarity about the role of a school counselor.

When discussing the limitations of the study, Field & Baker (2004) state that "Other than appealing to people in power, none of these behaviors focus on changing the systems that may be creating or contributing to students' academic, personal, or social problems" (p. 62). The researchers' indicate that there was little discussion addressing issues, which may have been a result of vague interview questions. The results of this study prompts the following questions: Would the participants have addressed systemic change and culturally diverse groups if it was incorporated into the questions? Do counselors need that prompting?

A limitation not mentioned in the study is that one group was from the same school, which could impact the results of the study. Another limitation was the follow up questions discussed by researchers and the results were not stated explicitly in the article. For future research the recommendation would be to have individual interviews followed by a focus group. The results of the study could have been enriched with specific examples of advocacy from the participants.

It is worth noting that 8 out of 9 participants needed validation from others to show advocacy work. Though the question related to validation could have been misconstrued, participants did not cite internal motivation as being related to advocacy. Finally, the authors

noticed that participants' responses reflected advocacy for the profession despite answering that advocacy should be student-focused and student-first. Participants appeared to have limitations that were self-imposed and lacked boldness in comparison to Singh et al.'s (2010) social justice advocacy study. The participants of Field & Baker's (2004) study indicated that their workload inhibited them from acting as an advocate, but social justice advocates requested tasks be given to others (Singh et al., 2010; McMahon, et al., 2010). Do social justice advocates have a different position on advocacy from those who discuss it generally?

Individuals who identify as social justice advocates discussed personal and professional attributes as they relate to their work as advocates. The process to social justice advocacy is not widely researched. More specifically, research related to school counselors' advocacy for vulnerable populations such as undocumented students are minimal. There has been a significant contribution to the research regarding social justice and advocacy. Future research of the identity development of social justice counselors is needed.

Social Justice Identity Development

Counselors should attend to, be aware of, and be sensitive to biases, discrimination and oppression (Ratts et al., 2016). Counselors are expected to verbalize and analyze privileges and experiences (Vera & Speight, 2003), and to acquire knowledge of how cultural heritage, oppression, racism and discrimination affect the counselor personally and professionally (Arredondo, 1999). Counselors for social justice counseling are engaging in socially critical thinking, critical consciousness, and the continuum from oppressive thinking to anti-oppressive thought (McAuliffe, Danner, Grothaus & Doyle, 2008). Socially critical thinking is the intense analysis of how social structures impact others, particularly marginalized populations. Critical consciousness, which McAuliffe et al. (2008) cites as difficult to achieve, is the individual's re-

evaluation of their own culture and sociopolitical world. The counselor's movement to an anti-oppressive thought begins with self-exploration. Bobbie Harro (2000) provides a similar suggestion, encouraging individuals to make inventory of their social identities and their relationship to issues of oppression. The following articles discuss the social justice identity development of counseling psychologists and counselor educators.

Related Research

Caldwell and Vera (2010) explore the critical incidents that helped form counseling psychologists' social justice orientation development. Thirty-six counseling psychology doctoral students and professionals with a commitment to social justice through scholarship and clinical practice participated in the study. Fifty percent of participants were doctoral students and 47.2% were professionals. Eighty-three percent of the participants were female ($n = 30$), 16.7% were male ($n = 6$). Fifty-six percent of participants were White Americans ($n = 20$) and 41.7% were persons of color ($n = 15$).

The researchers conducted a mixed-methods study utilizing the critical incident technique. The result of the study indicated that 56% of participants ($n = 20$) indicated a high level of commitment to social justice work, and 44% ($n = 16$) indicated a moderately high level of commitment to social justice work. One hundred and sixty-nine critical incidents were generated with an average of 4.7 incidents per participant. Five categories of critical incidents were developed from the responses of what changed the lives of the participants: (a) Influence of Significant Persons (mentors, parents/family, peer support), (b) Exposure to Injustice (personal experience or witnessing/observing injustices), (c) Education/Learning (coursework, readings, and scholarship), (d) Work Experiences (clinical/community or research), (e) Religion/Spirituality and "Other" (ex. "Oppressing others," "Desire to learn," "International

travels." Caldwell and Vera (2010) participants ranked their critical incidents which were later placed into the five categories with the following results: Exposure to Injustice ranked #1 and Influence of Significant Persons and Religion/Spirituality are both ranked #2. In response to how critical incidents impacted the development of the participants' social justice orientation, five themes emerged: *Increased Awareness* (awareness of injustice/oppression, self-reflection, self-awareness, and awareness of others' experiences of injustice); *Facilitated Commitment to Social Justice* (influenced decision to commit to social justice, empowered, motivated, and a belief in social change); *Increased Understanding of Social Justice* (increased theoretical understanding, increased learning of practical application, changed vocabulary, increased critical thinking); *Identity Changes* (shaped their worldview, personal and professional identity, and instilled values); and *Behavioral Changes* (initiating more learning, engaged in activism, changed relationships) (Caldwell & Vera, 2010).

A limitation of the study was the participant selection. The researchers offered the notion that individuals who were not publicly recognized social justice advocates may have different experiences. Another limitation was the open-ended design enabling participants to write as much or as little as they wished, prompting vague answers that could have impacted the results of the study. Additionally, a weakness of a web-based design study is the assumption that the participants fully understand the question presented to them (Caldwell and Vera, 2010).

There are a number of similarities to Caldwell and Vera's (2010) critical incidents study and Singh et al.'s (2010) The Personal is Political. The participants in both studies discuss the following: exposure to culturally diverse groups, witnessing and experiencing injustices, having significant experiences in childhood of witnessing racism or oppression, having significant relational influences, being exposed to role models who were advocates, continual learning and

growth, and moral reasoning or religion/spirituality. Self-advocacy discussed in Singh et al.'s (2010) study was related to the participants' excitement to see their students empowered and advocating for themselves.

Dollarhide, Clevenger, Dogan & Edwards (2016) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study on the social justice identity of 10 counselor educators (6 faculty members and 4 doctoral students) who identify as social justice workers in counseling, and counselor educators who were perceived as role models. Of the 10 participants, the mean age was 42 years, with an average of 12 years in counseling and 7 years in counselor education. The participants were 80% female and 20% male. The racial/ethnic makeup of the participants was 80% White, 10% Hispanic, and 10% biracial (Asian/White). The participants were asked to provide their self-described diversity ranging from bicultural, female, older, sexual identity, religion, poverty, and none.

Four themes emerged from this study: Origins of Social Justice Awareness; Holistic Changes in Affect, Behavior, Cognition, and Context Around Social Justice Identity; Social Justice Identity; and Feedback Loop. In the first theme, participants shared early experiences of injustices and oppression and the influence of family values. While some individuals' families encouraged social justice work, others opposed it. The participants also expressed the impact of witnessing and experiencing discrimination.

The holistic changes participants referred to in the second theme included their purpose in life. Participants also saw a change in how they made meaning of their activities. Most participants noted a change in their overall behavior and a change from general awareness of oppressed individuals to focusing activities on behalf of oppressed individuals as a result of their contact with marginalized groups. Some of the participants cited their social justice work as

broad in impact (becoming a regional leader, attending or organizing marches or rallies), while others focused on social justice work one-on-one (Dollarhide et al., 2016).

The third theme, social justice identity, included participants' reports of their identity as "who they are" and not just "what they do." One participant noted that he had a personal responsibility and commitment even at "great personal cost and sacrifice (p. 14)." All of the participants acknowledged a responsibility for oppressed individuals even if there were personal/professional risks involved, speaking to a need for courage when doing this work. Lastly, the feedback loop is the impact of the three themes on the social justice awakening of the participants.   "For these respondents, the experience of *challenge* brought more growth in the four domains, as challenge triggered a 'fighting response' and increased commitment; respondents became 'scrappier,' 'more radical,' 'more assertive,' 'more daring,' and 'took more risks.' But this fighting response was not 'rabid' liberationism; it was tempered with self-reflection and self-questioning (delicacy, grace, sophistication, and compassion) in an effort to facilitate lasting change in the oppressive system" (Dollarhide et al., 2016, p. 15).

The limitations of this study included a small sample size and a homogenous group. While the researchers did not believe that racial/ethnic background dictate the development of a social justice identity, they do recognize the impact a less diverse group can have on the results of the study. One other limitation is self-report bias. In comparison to the previously discussed literature, there was a significant number of participants indicating their willingness to take risks to help those who are oppressed. There was little discussion on the recognition of systemic oppression and how those realizations have impacted their work as social justice advocates. Participants also indicated that there would be personal/professional risks. How would they define risks? Does their awareness of what they may risk or sacrifice negate the experiences of

the oppressed individuals? There is an absence of client/student focus, the impact of the people which counselors serve, and the personal attributes as discussed by Singh et al. (2010). However, a theme that has emerged throughout the literature reviewed is the individual's personal experiences with oppression. The importance of values is addressed throughout, as well as a change in one's thinking throughout the social justice literature (Dollarhide et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2010; Field & Baker 2004; & McMahan et al., 2010). Similarities in the research include exposure to culturally diverse groups, witnessing and experiencing injustices, having significant experiences in childhood of witnessing racism or oppression, having significant relational influences, being exposed to role models who were advocates, continual learning and growth, and moral reasoning or religion/spirituality.

Professional Identity Development

Research shows that professional identity development is a cyclical process (Auxier et al., 2003; Brott & Meyers, 1999). The conceptual and experiential learning was a cyclical process assisting in the development of a clear professional identity development (Auxier et al., 2003). Counselor identity development is a cyclical growth process that leads to a counselor's identity. While no research has explored the social justice identity development of counselors, it is reasonable to assume that this would also be a cyclical process.

The development of a social justice advocate is possibly a more intimate process heavily influenced by the experiences encountered by the counselor that results in the development of a social justice identity. Theoretically, the process of identity development as a counselor and social justice advocate is initially internally focused and through the individual's development their identity leads to an external focus. Cyclical in nature, counselors are always self-reflecting to better serve their clients/students. Previously discussed research suggests that there are innate

traits coupled with experiences that propel them to advocacy (Field & Baker, 2004; Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Singh et al, 2010; McMahan, 2010).

Participants in Singh et al. (2010), McMahan et.al (2010), and Caldwell & Vera's (2010) studies all discussed personal and professional experiences that impacted their work as social justice advocates. Participants also discussed the influence of mentors who serve as role models, which is similar to the position of evaluator and supervisor in the counselor identity development process (McMahan, 2010; Caldwell & Vera, 2010). Gibson et al. (2010) proposes that to advocate for clients one must be confident in their professional identity. The social justice identity development of the counselor is an aspect of professional development that has not been thoroughly explored but is expected. The identity of the school counselor is often shaped by the expectations discussed by ASCA in the national model, code of ethics, competencies, and position statements related to diversity and equity.

This study proposes to address the gap in literature to the social justice identity development of school counselors and the exploration of the critical incident that sparked one's movement towards liberation. By uncovering the process, counselor educators can further analyze how to incorporate social justice pedagogy in the classroom. Practitioners will be empowered to self-reflect on their process towards liberation and how to implement the *Cycle of Liberation* into their work through a relational lens. It is important to discuss literature related to the counselor's identity as a framework for social justice identity development.

Counselor Identity Development

Professional development spans the lifetime of a counselor's career, a marrying of the professional and personal for the counselor (Auxier, Hughes and Kline, 2003; Brott & Myers,

1999; Gibson, Dollarhide & Moss, 2010; Solomon, 2007). The professional development of all counselors is a cyclical and lifelong process (Brott & Myers, 1999).

Counselors in Training

Similar themes have emerged in the literature related to the professional identity development of counselors in training. The developmental process is intrapersonal and interpersonal, varying from novice to advanced counselors in training and counselors in different specialty areas (Auxier et al., 2003; Brott & Myers, 1999). The intrapersonal aspect is a cyclical process of autonomy and dependence as counselors in training obtain counseling skills (Brott & Myers, 1999). The interpersonal is the shaping of the new counselor by the professional community (Auxier et al., 2003). Counselors-in-training rely heavily on expert advice and validation early in their graduate training. As the counselor-in-training progresses to internship and graduation a process of self-evaluation and validation begins (Gibson, Dooley, Kelchner, Moss, & Vacchio, 2012; Auxier, 2003; Brott & Meyer, 1999). The independence of the counselor-in-training is correlated with the increase in confidence. Similar research indicates a difference in beginning and advanced counselors-in-training (Prosek and Hurt, 2014). Counselors-in-training often navigate three stages: (1) identifying with a counseling philosophy prior to incorporating it into practice; (2) applying counseling into practice through internship or clinical experiences; and (3) congruence with professional and personal identity. Advanced counselors-in-training often identify with stages 2 and 3 supporting previously discussed research on professional identity as a developmental process of self-evaluation and validation (Prosek and Hurt, 2014). The literature speaks to the influence of others in the professional community on the professional identity development of counselors (Auxier et al., 2003).

Auxier et al.'s (2003) qualitative grounded theory study found a recycling identity formation process including three processes: (1) conceptual learning, (2) experiential learning and (3) external evaluation. Conceptual learning was the students' traditional academic experiences (i.e. lectures, writing papers), while experiential learning included counseling technique courses, practicum or internship, and group counseling. Students transitioning to experiential learning expressed emotional reactions that led to the development of behavioral and emotional awareness. Finally, external evaluation is defined as a time in which students receive feedback from supervisors, peers, clients and professors. The participants cited anxiety through the evaluative process and were challenged through the process. Participants engaged in self-reflection, enabling them to decide the feedback they would or would not accept. The identity development of a school counselor is heavily influenced by the changes that have occurred over time in the field. The background of school counseling is explored to provide context for the emerging professional identity and how it relates to their role as a social justice advocate.

History of School Counseling

Historically, vocational guidance was established to work with individuals seeking vocational placement and training with most of the work performed by teachers. During the early 1900s vocational guidance was introduced in middle and high schools. The services offered in schools served as separate entities for many years until the establishment of pupil personnel services in the 1960s, including school psychologists, guidance counselors and nurses (Shear, 1965).

The rapid growth of the field resulted in contention of how to perform the role of a vocational guidance counselor. Similar to the complaints of school counselors today, individuals working in vocational guidance were often presented with numerous tasks unrelated to their

position (Cinotti, 2014). In the 1960s and 1970s the profession focused on counseling services despite existing concerns of the administrative roles and responsibilities of the counselor. In the 1970s there was a movement towards the development of comprehensive counseling programs despite the decrease in counselor positions. The decrease in counselor positions resulted in school counselors taking on administrative duties; counseling duties were lost and the idea of the school counselor as an educator emerged (Cinotti, 2014). "Based on this historical narrative, school counseling roles have been vast and ever-changing, making it understandable that many school counselors struggle with role ambiguity and incongruence while feeling overwhelmed" (Lambie and Williamson, 2004, p. 127).

In an attempt to solidify the role of a school counselor, Gysbers (1990) provided five foundational ideas that school counseling is based on: (1) a program that helped students meet standards; (2) a professional certification; (3) a developmentally comprehensive program; (4) a team approach; and (5) a program developed through planning, implementing and evaluation and established leadership. With the establishment of a comprehensive school counseling program, the ASCA national model emerged in 2001. The ASCA national model is composed of four quadrants: (1) foundation; (2) delivery system; (3) management; and (4) accountability. First, the foundation is the philosophy or mission of the school counseling program. Second, the delivery system is the responsive service provided by the school counselors such as individual counseling. Third, management is the utilization of resources. Finally, accountability is data and intervention outcomes (ASCA, 2012).

The evolution of school counseling has provided foundational principles of the school counseling profession, but the competing ideas of what the profession and professional should look like hinder the growth of the professional school counselor's identity. While our field is

ever evolving, school counselors continue to be impacted by the school system and the

expectations of administrators, parents, teachers, and students.

The Professional School Counselor

Professional school counselors serve the academic, personal/social, and career needs of

all students. Multicultural competence and social justice are integral parts of all three areas.

School counselors serve as safe havens and gatekeepers; they are students' fiercest advocates and

confidants. The school counselor assists in the facilitation of growth, cultivates passion, and

empowers all students. School counselors are trained to be culturally competent utilizing the

ASCA national model as a guide, adhering to ethical standards and position statements that serve

as accountable expectations for school counselors (ASCA, 2012; ASCA, 2016).

ASCA National Model

The ASCA national model (2012) competencies related to multiculturalism indicate that

school counselors should articulate and demonstrate an understanding of the following:

barriers to student success, equitable access, educational equity, and closing the

achievement/opportunity gap. School counselors should have an increased knowledge of theories

related to the development of social justice and multiculturalism. Counselors must also

demonstrate said theories in a comprehensive school counseling program, and counselors should

demonstrate his or her ability to work with diverse student populations (ex. race/ethnicity, sexual

orientation, religion) (ASCA, 2012).

ASCA Competencies

The ASCA competencies recognize six areas specifically related to advocacy: (a) student

success, (b) the role of advocacy in comprehensive school counseling programs, (c) attesting to

the benefits of advocacy with the school and community, (d) the ability to articulate the

advocacy competencies of the school counselor, (e) having an established advocacy plan developed from reviewing advocacy models, and (f) serving as a change agent to create an environment ready for success (ASCA, 2012).

ASCA Ethical standards

The preamble addressed in the 2016 revised ethical standards for professional school counselors states "All students have the right to: be respected, be treated with dignity, and have access to a comprehensive school counseling program that advocates for and affirms all students from diverse populations, including but not limited to: ethnic/racial identity, nationality, age, social class, economic status, abilities/disabilities, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression, family type, religious/spiritual identity, emancipated minors, wards of the state, homeless youth and incarcerated youth. School counselors as social justice advocates support students from all backgrounds and circumstances and consult when their competence level requires additional support" (ASCA, 2016, para. 3). School counselors are also encouraged in section A.4.d. to identify and address gaps in college and career access (ASCA, 2016).

ASCA Position statements

ASCA's position statement on Equity in Schools and Cultural Diversity provide expectations for school counselors to address the needs of all students, particularly marginalized populations (ASCA, 2005). School counselors are encouraged to advocate for equitable treatment of all students and to value students and culturally diverse groups equally (ASCA, 2005). One of the populations school counselors are expected to serve are undocumented students, an invisible and vulnerable population within the school system.

Undocumented Immigrants

Undocumented immigrants come to the United States with hopes and dreams for a better future. The policies that further separate them from society and limit their opportunities take an emotional toll. After immigrating to the United States, undocumented students face several political/institutional, mental health, and educational barriers. Over time legislation has been proposed in an effort to remedy these barriers. However, legislation has been limited to specific undocumented immigrant groups. Immigration historically has been vast, legislation to correct the broken immigration system has been limiting, and undocumented immigrants have faced numerous challenges and barriers. The following section will provide a history of immigration, current and past legislation and the political/institutional, mental health and educational barriers that undocumented students face.

History of Immigration

Historically, the largest mass immigration was about 50 million Europeans to North America between 1845 and 1924. Prior to this was the forced migration of 40 million Africans brought to the West. Following these two large migrations were individuals from East Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and South Asia (Alvarez, 1999).

Currently, 42.4 million immigrants reside in the U.S., 13.3% of the total population (318.9 million). Of those 42 million, 20 million (47%) are naturalized US citizens, 22.4 million (53%) are lawful permanent residents (green card holders) or unauthorized immigrants and legal residents on temporary visas (students or temporary workers). Eleven million of the immigrant population are undocumented, totaling 4% of the immigrant population (Zong & Batalova, 2016). Of the 11 million undocumented immigrants, 2.5 million are children (U.S. Department of

Education, 2015). Undocumented immigrants are individuals who came to the United States without legal documentation or remained in the United States with an expired visa (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012). Each year 80,000 undocumented youth turn 18 and 65,000 undocumented students graduate high school. Of the 65,000, only 5 to 10 percent pursue post-secondary education and only 1 to 3 percent of undocumented students earn a college degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Plyler v. Doe

The State of Texas revised the education law in 1975 to withhold district state funds from local schools for children of undocumented immigrants. Schools were allowed to deny enrollment of children who did not enter the U.S. legally (Baczynski, 2013; Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-Hajbi & Wilkerson, 2010). A lawsuit was filed against the Texas Education code (457 U.S. 202) in violation of the *Fourteenth Amendment* and Equal Protection Clause of the *U.S. Constitution*. The law was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1982, prohibiting states from denying a free K-12 education to undocumented students (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Gonzales, Heredia, Negron-Gonzales, 2015; Harmon et al., 2010). School districts and personnel are no longer allowed to deny immigrant children access to education, nor may they request documentation of immigrant status. Denying undocumented students' access to education takes an "inestimable toll on the social, economic, intellectual and psychological well-being of the individual" (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982 para. 3). *Plyler v. Doe* addressed access to K-12 education while immigration reform and access to post-secondary education remained a concern. In recent years, legislation has been proposed to provide a pathway to citizenship or permanent residency through The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (The Dream Act) and upon that failure an executive order was enacted in 2012 to provide temporary relief for

undocumented immigrants/students in the form of Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

The Dream Act and DACA

The Dream Act was proposed in legislation in 2010. Had the bill been passed into law, undocumented immigrants brought to the United States before the age of 15 would have been eligible to enter the United States Military or pursue post-secondary education with the possibility of gaining permanent legal status (National Immigration Law Center, 2010). A response to the failure of The Dream Act being enacted was DACA. Enacted in 2012, DACA provides a temporary solution to undocumented immigrants who entered the United States as a child. Individuals who were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012 and are at least 15 years old are eligible to apply for DACA (NILC, 2010). DACA recipients are protected from deportation for two years, with the eligibility to renew. Recipients are eligible for a work permit, driver's license (state by state policy), and a social security number (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2016). In 2014, the Texas Supreme Court blocked President Obama's executive order that would allow DACA recipients to renew every three years (DACA plus) citing the order as unconstitutional. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled on DACA plus in June of 2016, but the ruling was a deadlock (4 to 4) leaving 5.2 million immigrants vulnerable (Barnes, 2016). Over 700,000 undocumented immigrants have benefited from DACA (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2016). Undocumented immigrations face a number of political/institutional barriers, mental health and educational barriers.

Political and Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers are "systematic, organizational, and governmental policies and practices that discriminate against and invalidate people in racial/ethnic/cultural groups through

unequal allocation of resources and lack of opportunity and access" (Chung, Bemak, Ortiz, and Sandoval-Perez, 2008 p. 313). There are several challenges to adjusting to the demands of a "highly individualistic, competitive culture that characterizes the dominant cultural group in the United States" (Chung et al., 2008 p. 311). Barriers to employment and advancement and discrimination in housing or health care are a few of these challenges. Anti-immigration laws further perpetuate the individual and institutional racism that impacts the psychological well-being of immigrants (Chung et al., 2008). Similarly, Ratts and Pedersen (2014) discuss oppression as harmful to the well-being of individuals; oppression at the individual level, and dehumanizing interpersonal interactions. At the systemic level, policies, laws and institutions further perpetuate the marginalization of culturally diverse groups.

The principle of symbolic politics, similar to institutional barriers, is "that cultural objects such as language, race, religion, and socioeconomic status are embedded in the social system and solidify the concept of a unique 'American' identity by giving citizens a reference for their identity" (Palmer & Davidson, 2011 p. 3). Political/institutional barriers prevent the academic success of undocumented students. For educational equity to be achieved for undocumented students, immigration reform is required. "Undocumented students are being systematically purged from the higher education system." (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011 p. 17). Immigration reform remains in flux, anti-immigration sentiments are rampant, and state level legislation is limited. The socialization of cultural attitudes and definitions and how they shape our perception of individuals different from us impact the counseling relationship (Critin, Reingold and Green, 1990). The political barriers experienced by undocumented students following the impact of migration can have a significant impact on the mental health of the individual.

Mental Health Barriers

Undocumented immigrants and their families flee their home country for several reasons, such as: civic unrest in their home country, family residing in the United States, or access to opportunities. Immigrants who migrate to a new country often experience many stressors that "heighten acculturative stress and precipitate feelings of helplessness, disorientation, and hopelessness" (Chung et al., 2008 p. 312). Acculturation refers to the changes individuals, such as immigrants or refugees, undergo in response to the influence of dominant culture (Casas & Pytluk, 1995). Immigrants often experience trauma during three phases of migration: (1) pre-migration; (2) the transition; and (3) the resettlement process. Pre-migration trauma relates to events experienced prior to migration that serve as the chief determinant for relocation (Perez Foster, 2001). Traumatic events related to pre-migration may be the loss and death of family members or suffering violence (Chung et al., 2008). The immigrant's family may experience traumatic events during their transition to a new country. During the resettlement process in a new country there can be a continuance of traumatogenic experiences. Some have trouble in obtaining and maintaining work or families may live in substandard conditions (Perez Foster, 2001). Stressors may include a change in socioeconomic status, language barriers, loss or lack of social support or racism and discrimination (Alvarez, 1999; Chung et al., 2008).

The impact of pre and post migration trauma and acculturative stress can lead to depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, anxiety, and family violence (Bemak & Chung, 2003; Chung & Bemak, 2007). Similarly, the loss of traditions, culture, and family also have a negative impact. During migration, immigrants may experience relational losses. Preserving relational images of the migration can hinder the individual's adaption to their new life. Children specifically have a difficult time letting go of powerful emotional and cultural

connections. Undocumented students often miss out on the rites of passages that their U.S. peers experience: applying for their first job, obtaining a driver's license, or experiencing the college choice process. Undocumented immigrants are often fearful of disclosing their status for fear of deportation, judgment, or bias. The fear of disclosing leaves undocumented students and their families navigating the school system with minimal help (Alvarez, 1999).

Educational Barriers

Educational barriers encountered by undocumented students are academic achievement, academic preparedness, lack of college cultural awareness, financial aid and restricted access to higher education. Undocumented students and DACA recipients are not eligible for federal financial aid (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). Some states require undocumented students to pay out of state tuition and there are limited scholarships and state aid available to undocumented students. "Educational equity for undocumented students ensures that resources, access, attainment, and outcomes are the same as documented students regardless of individual needs or circumstances" (Harmon et al., 2010 p.68). While undocumented students are afforded the right to a K-12 education, there is minimal research addressing the K-12 experience of undocumented students with the focus of research on post-secondary education (Chavez, Soriano, & Oliverez, 2007; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Harmon et al., 2010; Nguyen, Hoy, Zelideh, 2015; Palmer & Davidson, 2011). The absence of research potentially hinders professional school counselors' ability to be competent in the area of undocumented students. Furthermore, the recognition of the psychological impact of the student's immigration status should be addressed and further explored to provide implications for the professional school counselor.

Related Research

Constantine & Gushue (2003) present a quantitative quasi-experimental design. "The primary purpose of this study was to examine school counselors' ethnic tolerance attitudes and racism attitudes as predictors of their multicultural case conceptualization of an immigrant student" (Constantine & Gushue, 2003 p.186).

Two hundred school counselors were randomly selected from the American School Counseling Association mailing list requesting participants for an anonymous study related to attitudes about culturally diverse students. One-hundred and thirty-nine school counselors participated in the study, a 70% response rate. Of the 139 participants, 75% were women, 25% were men. The racial /ethnic makeup of the participants was 71% White, 14% Black, 18% Latino/a, 4% Asian-Americans, and 2.2% biracial individuals. Counselors had an average of 17 years of counseling experience, and 75% of participants had taken a multicultural counseling course.

Participants completed a case conceptualization exercise, a case vignette of a recently immigrated female student from Ghana. Following the case conceptualization, participants completed Sutter & McCaul's (1993) The Tolerance Measure and Jacobson's (1985) New Racism Scale (NRS). The Tolerance Measure (TM) is a 24-item, 5-point unifactor scale (1 = yes, absolutely, 5 = no, absolutely not) that measures individuals' tolerance of ethnic groups, specifically immigrants and the participant's awareness of their own biases and values. TM reports content and construct validity, with a coefficient alpha of .80 and .71 in this study. The NRS is a seven item scale that measures individuals' attitudes towards Blacks. The scores ranged from 7-25, the higher the score the more likely the participant endorsed racist attitudes. The results of the analysis did not show a significant demographic difference of the Tolerance

Measure and New Racism Scale. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was utilized with the multicultural case conceptualization ability index as the criterion variable analysis. The multicultural case conceptualization ability index was the combined scores of etiology and treatment ratings as there was a strong correlation between the two (.77). The results indicated that prior multicultural training indicated a significant amount of variance (F $(1, 137) = 6.77$, p < .05, R2 = .05 (adjusted $R^2 = .04$) in multicultural case conceptualization ability; higher case conceptualization scores were a result of previous multicultural training. Prior training accounted for a significant amount of variance in the participants' multicultural case conceptualization ability. Collectively the TM and NRS scores contributed to an increase in variance (R2 change = .30, F $(3, 135)$ change = 30.79, p < .001, $R^2 = .35$ (adjusted $R^2 = .33$).

Moreover, a higher ethnic tolerance score was positively correlated with the multicultural case conceptualization ability. In contrast, higher racism scores were associated with lower multicultural case conceptualization ability. Overall, the full regression model that included previous multicultural training, TM and NRS scores accounted for 35% of the variance. The Tolerance Measure proved to be a positive predictor for multicultural case conceptualization ability as opposed to NRS scores that were associated with low multicultural case conceptualization ability. School counselors with a high ethnic tolerance attitude may be able to better integrate the context of culture in conceptualizing and addressing the concerns of immigrant students. On the contrary, school counselors with higher NRS scores may continue to harbor racist attitudes and/or biases (Constantine & Gushue, 2003).

Considering this research, this study utilized qualitative methods to further explore the beliefs of school counselors who identify as advocates for a specific immigrant population (i.e.

undocumented students). While the research related to school counselors and their work with undocumented students is sparse, a few studies provide context for the role the school counselors have or should have when working with undocumented students.

Professional School Counselors and Undocumented Students

DeVries' (2014) qualitative dissertation on the knowledge of high school counselors in Missouri who assisted undocumented students in the college choice process found that there was a lack of awareness, knowledge, and training. The studies discussed here provide evidentiary support of the negative impact this has on students and how students benefit from counselors who are knowledgeable and aware.

Nienhusser (2013) conducted a study on the efforts of seven high schools to educate undocumented students about the educational benefits of attending college during the college choice process. A multiple case study research design was used to investigate a complex phenomenon. Twenty-nine individuals were interviewed including interest group representatives of organizations that represent racial/ethnic or undocumented immigrant population interests, community-based representatives, and school officials. The review of this study focuses on the responses of school counselors. Of the 22 school officials, four were "guidance counselors."

Five categories were developed by institutional agents to address college choice needs of undocumented students including: one-on-one counseling, presentation, outreach, scholarship and curriculum. One-on-one counseling was the most common activity. High school staff would meet individually with undocumented students and/or parents to discuss the college choice process, this being the preferred activity for the high school staff. The response of school counselors was similar, maintaining that individual meetings created a safe place for students to share and to speak openly about their concerns. Counselors also expressed the opportunity to

provide step-by-step instructions to the student and his or her family, as well as instructions specific to the needs of the family.

Three of the four counselors were intentional about initiating contact with their undocumented students; the counselor recognized that the undocumented students were not seeking out their counselors. The presentations that counselors gave in the classroom discussed the eligibility of in-state tuition and included slides related to undocumented student eligibility. By providing information during a presentation, students were more inclined to discuss the college choice process with their counselors. Two of the four counselors conducted outreach for undocumented students by contacting the universities on their behalf to inquire about post-secondary options. Two counselors also discussed advocacy efforts of connecting students to community workshops, and one counselor attended the workshop with his or her students. While not directly related to school counselors, four schools raised funds to provide an undocumented student who was salutatorian of her school a scholarship. All four schools now have private scholarships for which undocumented students are eligible (Nienhusser, 2013).

Unfortunately, the demographics of the schools did have an impact on the amount of resources and college choice assistance undocumented students received. The research showed that the higher the population of undocumented students the more services they received. Per Nienhusser (2013), in schools with a higher population of undocumented students an average of eight activities took place; in schools with a lower population of undocumented students an average of five activities took place. A school counselor who worked in a school with a higher population of undocumented students was intentional about including information for those students during the college choice process. The school counselor who had a lower population of undocumented students was hesitant to initiate conversations with undocumented students, and

did not provide information generally but only when the student disclosed their status. A similar study that used college choice and institutional agents as a framework is a study exploring undocumented students' experiences with microaggressions and the college choice process.

Nienhusser, Vega and Saavedra Carquin (2016) conducted a phenomenological study on the microaggressions of undocumented students' college choice process. Fifteen undocumented immigrants who graduated from New York City schools participated in the study. Ten of the participants identified as females and 5 as male; twelve identified as Latina/o and 3 as Asian. Of the fifteen participants 12 enrolled in New York state public institutions, one in an out-of-state institution, and two did not attend college. Nine originally attended a four-year institution, and four originally enrolled in a two-year institution. Nine themes emerged from this study grouped into three overarching categories: *microassaults* (discriminatory financial aid policies, restricted college choice information, constrained life opportunities, and denial of college opportunities); *microinsults* (insensitive behaviors); and *microinvalidations* (insensitive college choice processes, narrowed college expectations, fear of coming out as undocumented, and undocumented immigrant blindness).

The students provided numerous accounts of the treatment they received from institutional agents. The participants felt that their counselors were not knowledgeable of their situation nor did they seek out information for the student. One participant stated, "My counselors asked me what my Social Security number was, and I said that I don't have one. They were like 'How do you plan on applying?' And it was as if I had to educate them, instead of them helping me" (p.15). Other institutional agents would say to undocumented students, "You're undocumented, I'm sorry, but you can't go to college," "You need a Social Security Number to apply to college," or "How do you plan on going to college"? (p. 16). The

misinformation provided to undocumented students had a significant impact on students'

motivation to pursue post-secondary education. Two participants shared their encounters of

inappropriate jokes from a teacher, "You must be a good swimmer," or "Did you run across the

border"? (p.19). A participant also made the following statement as an undocumented student

that they "don't have that confidence to go walk into their counselor's office and tell them about

their situation" (Nienhusser, 2016 p. 23).

The unfortunate experiences mentioned in both articles are evidence that further research

and advocacy work is necessary. PSCs have a responsibility to increase their knowledge and

skills to serve this population. Immigration and the legal status of students is a social justice

issue that counselors must advocate with and on behalf of the students they serve.

A significant gap exists in the literature regarding social justice identity development, and

school counselors' work with undocumented students. The exploration of critical incidents

serves as in-depth examination of the lived experiences of the school counselor's journey to

social justice advocacy grounded in Bobbie Harro's *Cycle of Liberation* and Relational Cultural

Theory.

Theoretical Framework

Cycle of Socialization

This study is grounded in Bobbie Harro's (2000) *Cycle of Liberation*, however, it is

important to provide context of both the cycle of socialization and liberation. Individuals are

born into a set of social identities that are categorized by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status,

gender, age, ability status, sexual orientation, first language and religion. These identities have

been socially constructed to either promote unearned privilege or oppress individuals.

Individuals are socialized to play the roles taught to them in their early life. Harro (2000)

describes the socialization process as "pervasive (coming from all sides and sources), consistent (patterned and predictable), circular (self-supporting), self-perpetuating (intradependent), and often invisible (unconscious and unnamed)" (p. 15). Individuals are taught on a personal level by people they love and trust; expectations, norms, values, or traditional gender roles. The socialized ideals are then reinforced or bombarded with messages from institutions (i.e. churches, schools, television, the legal system) and cultures (i.e. practices, media, thought patterns, language, or song lyrics). Over time these messages are enforced through stigmatization, privilege, discrimination, empowerment, persecution and privilege. These enforced messages result in dissonance, dehumanization, guilt, ignorance, stress, self-hatred, inconsistency, and an internalization of power patterns (Harro, 2000). Individuals ultimately come to a crossroads, choosing to change or to not change. If the individual chooses to change then he or she has the opportunity to raise consciousness, educate, take a stand, and interrupt the system (Harro, 2000). Should the person choose not to act then he or she will do nothing, promoting the status quo, which begins the cycle of socialization again. At the core of the cycle of socialization, as shown in Figure 3, are fear, ignorance, confusion, and insecurity (Harro, 2000).

Figure 3. The Cycle of Socialization

The Cycle of Socialization

First Socialization

Socialized
Taught on a Personal Level
by Parents, Relatives, Teachers,
People We Love and Trust:
Shapers of Expectations, Norms,
Values, Roles, Rules, Models of Ways to Be,
Sources of Dreams

The Beginning

Born into World with
Mechanics in Place

No Blame, No Consciousness,
No Guilt, No Choice

Limited Information
No Information
Misinformation

Biases
Stereotypes
Prejudices
History
Habit
Tradition

Institutional and Cultural Socialization

Reinforced/
Bombarded with
Messages from

Institutions
Churches
Schools
Television
Legal System
Mental Health
Medicine
Business

Culture
Practices
Song Lyrics
Language
Media
Patterns of
Thought

On Conscious and
Unconscious Levels

Core
Fear
Ignorance
Confusion
Insecurity

Enforced

Sanctioned

Stigmatized

Rewards and
Punishments

Privilege

Persecution

Discrimination

Empowerment

Enforcements

Actions

Do Nothing

Don't Make
Waves

Promote
Status Quo

Direction for Change

Change
Raise Consciousness
Interrupt
Educate
Take a Stand
Question
Reframe

Resulting in

Dissonance, Silence,
Anger, Dehumanization,
Guilt, Collusion, Ignorance,
Self-Hatred, Stress, Lack of Reality,
Horizontal Violence,
Inconsistency, Violence, Crime,
Internalization of Patterns
of Power

Results

Cycle of Liberation

In contrast to The Cycle of Socialization is *The Cycle of Liberation*, which serves as one of the frameworks for this study. *The Cycle of Liberation* as shown in Figure 4 is a cyclical process that encompasses theory, analysis and practice (Harro, 2000). While there is no specified beginning or ending point, there is an expectation that the individual will experience events at all levels (intrapersonal, interpersonal and systemic) repeatedly; thus, addressing oppression is a continuous cycle (Harro, 2000). The intrapersonal is the change within the core of a person and what they presently believe about themselves. The interpersonal is a change in how the individual values others and views the world. The systemic is a change in philosophy or structures (Harro, 2000).

The *Cycle of Liberation* often begins with a "waking up," a time in which a critical incident creates cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is a change within the core of a person about what they believe about themselves (Festinger, 1957). Gorski (2009) describes it as "grappling with new information in light of old understandings" (p. 2). Kincheloe (2005) describes these moments in *Critical Pedagogy* as, untidiness, constructing new relationships in interaction of cultural understanding and making meaning. Our reactions to the psychological stimuli of cognitive dissonance fall along a continuum. The individual either accepts the new idea or framework or refuses to consider the possibility, thus the individual is liberated.

The Cycle of Liberation moves the person to the empowerment of self (introspection and education), gaining (inspiration and authenticity), dismantling (privilege, collusion, internalized oppression), and developing (analysis and tools) (Harro, 2000). The individual then "reaches out" moving out of self towards others, seeking experience and speaking out. Through interpersonal exploration the individual changes how he or she values others and sees the world.

The individual "builds community" and begins to work with other people similar to themselves and different from themselves by building coalitions, questioning assumptions, roles, and structures of systems (Harro, 2000). Community building allows for coalescing, organizing, action planning, educating, refusing to collude, being a role model and ally, and moving into action, hence creating systemic change, creating new culture, and influencing policy, assumptions, structures, guiding change, and "power shared" (Harro, 2000). Ultimately the individual "maintains," and he or she integrates, spreads hope and inspiration, models authenticity, integrity and wholeness, taking care of self and others (Harro, 2000). At the core of the individual are self-love, self-esteem, balance, joy, support, security, and a spiritual base. These characteristics might already be present in the individual and mature over time, or they are characteristics that are newly formed as a result of an individual's liberation. *The Cycle of Liberation* reveals the significance of the formation of relationships as it relates to the individual's liberation. The following study provides evidence of the impact a critical incident has on an individual's movement towards liberation.

Figure 4. *The Cycle of Liberation*

Intrapersonal
Change within the Core of
People about What They
Believe about Themselves

Waking Up
Critical
Incident
That
Creates
Cognitive
Dissonance

Reaching Out
Movement Out of Self Toward Others
Seeking Experience and Exposure
Speaking Out and Naming Injustices
Taking Stands,   Using Tools
Exploring and Experimenting

Interpersonal
Change in How
We Value Others
and See the World

Getting Ready
Empowerment of Self
Introspection
Education
Consciousness Raising

Gaining   **Dismantling**
Inspiration   Collusion
Authenticity   Privilege
                         Internalized
                         Oppression
Developing
Analysis and Tools

Building Community
Working With Others
A. People "Like Us" for Support
B. People "Different from Us"
   for Building Coalitions,
   Questioning Assumptions,
   Rules, Roles, and Structures
   of Systems

Core
Self-Love
Self-Esteem
Balance
Joy
Support
Security
Spiritual Base

Coalescing
Organizing,
Action Planning,
Lobbying,
Fund Raising
Educating,
Renaming Reality
Refusing to Collude
or Take Privilege
Being a Role Model,
an Ally
Transforming Anger
Moving Into Action

Maintaining
Integrating
Spreading Hope
and Inspiration
Living Our Dreams
Modeling Authenticity,
Integrity and Wholeness
Taking Care of Self
and Others

Creating Change
**Critically Transforming
Institutions and
Creating New Culture**
Influencing: Policy
Assumptions
Structures
Definitions, Rules
Taking Leadership
Risks
Guiding Change
Healing
"Power Shared"

Systemic
Change in Structures, Assumptions,
Philosophy, Rules, Roles

Related Research

Summer's (2014) article on her racialized awakening as a white, middle class kindergarten teacher at an urban Title I school in the southeast provides a detailed account of her critical incident and transition into advocacy for the racially diverse populations she serves. The story is told in four parts: (1) the incident, (2) the climax, (3) the falling action, and (4) the resolution (Summer, 2014). Placing this study in the context of Harro's (2000) *Cycle of Liberation*, the incident results in "waking up," the climax "reaching out," the falling action "building community," and the resolution "maintaining." Summer (2014) describes this article as, "a painful story of my awakening to the reality of a racist framework that I did not create but that I inadvertently supported every day of my life" (p. 193).

Summer's (2014) incident involves a parent meeting with the mother of an African-American girl who was having behavioral issues with other students in the classroom. Upon meeting with the child's mother, Summer discussed the steps she had taken to work with the young girl in the classroom. The girl's mother vehemently disagreed and accused Summer of singling out Black children's behavior. Summer assured the mother that White children in the class have been reprimanded as well. The girl's mother made a statement that sparked Summer's (2014) self-exploration, "The reason why you don't like my child is because you are a racist" (p. 194). Summer began to question her actions in the classroom, thus beginning her state of cognitive dissonance.

Summer's (2014) prolific statement begins her journey into liberation, "I was White; most of my students were Black. I have never been forced to name my Whiteness before. My racialized awakening led me to question myself and the structure of the school" (p. 195). Summer continues her process through the naming and reflection of racism. She reflected on

what she was actually doing in the classroom and read extensive literature on racism in the classroom. Through continued reflection Summer came to the realization that she had been an active participant in racial conversations that further oppressed students of color. She provided four of her colleagues' statements, "Have you ever seen skin so black"? "I wish I could take him home with me"! "They can't___." and "We don't see the color of their skin. We love them all the same" (Summer, 2014 p. 195). In hindsight Summer recognized the oppressive nature of these comments and her participatory role in them. Stating that, "The climax of my story not only reflects the manifestation of racism living and thriving in my own school but also points to the realization of the existence of white privilege within me and in school" (p. 197). Summer's recognition of her white privilege further awakened her to the racism and White privilege that existed in her elementary school.

After two years of reflection Summer (2014) felt competent to act, "In following my 'discomfort,' I have discovered the need to unzip individuals and school cultures; to interrupt deficit-based perspectives; and, most importantly, to talk about race with my students" (p. 197). Summer's action included unzipping her own culture and encouraging her students and families to do the same through the incorporation of culturally diverse readings, activities, and traditions discussed by her students' families. Summer continues to "maintain" change through continuous critical reflection, inviting the voices of those silenced to speak, and to begin to have difficult dialogues with her colleagues. Summer ends her auto-ethnographic account with this, "I will use my racialized awakening as a focal point in my journey toward taking action to transform my classroom into a place of liberation" (p. 199). Summer's relationship with her students played a pivotal role in her "awakening" providing a rationale for the second theoretical framework, Relational Cultural Theory.

Relational Cultural Theory

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) is a theoretical counseling approach that encourages counselor self-reflection and recognition of culture and systemic barriers for the client/student. Relational Cultural Theory developed from the work of Jean Baker Miller beginning in 1976, was further developed by a group of scholars in the late 1970s. RCT is a humanistic counseling theory rooted in feminist thought and multiculturalism, grounded in social change. Relational Cultural Theory values respect, trustworthiness and authenticity. "RCT therapy is largely based on a change in attitude and understanding rather than a set of techniques" (Jordan, 2010, pg. 5). RCT has not only contributed to the practice of a more relational and contextually sensitive therapy but also stressed the importance of social change and social justice bringing about more mutuality and connection in the lives of others; "to place culture, alongside connection, at the center of the theory is to break a critical silence" (The Development of Relational-Cultural Theory, 2016, para. 10).

Tenets of Relational Cultural Theory. Relational Cultural Theory's three tenets are mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and growth fostering relationships. These three tenets challenge the hyper-individualistic status quo in psychology, psychotherapy, and social political organization. Empathy is defined as a respect for the experiences of the individual and an understanding of those experiences that resonate with the counselor (Jordan, 2010). RCT expands empathy into mutual empathy, allowing the client/student to see how the counselor is impacted by his or her experiences, thus moving the student into a position of connection (Duffey & Somody, 2011). Ideally, *mutual empathy* fosters a connection that moves the client/student out of a place of isolation and hopelessness to the comfort of feeling heard and understood by the counselor. *Mutual empowerment* is a direct result of mutual empathy and

growth fostering relationships. The relationship formed between the counselor and client/student allow for a care and consideration that ultimately impacts the larger community. From a social justice perspective, the individuals within the relationship are empowered, thus increasing the potential for advocacy. *Growth fostering relationships* promote the development and growth of each person's awareness of the others' feelings and experiences in the relationship that is fostered over a lifespan. Individuals move toward mutuality and have the ability to contribute and grow and/or benefit from relationships. The idea that RCT proposes is that through a fostered relationship, mutual empathy, and mutual empowerment, the client/student moves out of isolation and towards connectedness. The result of the connection is Miller's "Five Good Things":

1. An increased feeling of zest or vitality

2. A willingness to act or acting in this world

3. Greater awareness of self

4. Increased sense of worth

5. Increased connection to others and a motivation to connect

(Duffey & Somody, 2011, p. 227).

Relational and Controlling Images. Another component of RCT is the idea of relational and controlling images. Relational images are past experiences with former school counselors, administrators, teachers or fellow classmates that can impact the current counseling relationship. The student may enter the counseling relationship with preconceived ideas or relational images (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons, Salazar, 2008). Similar to the cycle of socialization, counselors enter the counseling relationship with "controlling images" (Collins, 2000) that have disaffirmed or further marginalized minority groups. The process of

marginalization is "images constructed by the dominant group that represent distortions of the non-dominant cultural group being depicted, with the intent of disempowering them" (Walker, 1999, p. 3). The development of fear through a cultural lens is fostered by individuals in power to disempower and maintain control of the marginalized (Jordan, 2008). Learned behaviors, values, and roles that individuals have been socialized to think, enforce "power over" ideals that are structured by systems and institutions. "The psychological concept of the 'separate self' has been constructed largely in a white, middle-class, heterosexual, capitalistic culture; identified as a model of 'power over'" (Jordan, 2010 p. 240), it can potentially enter the counseling relationship through controlling images. RCT's controlling images and Harro's cycle of socialization suggest that perceptions are shaped over time, which assist in the development of conscious and unconscious biases Counselors are encouraged to reassess those bias and how it impacts the counseling relationship. As reflected in the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies, counselors are encouraged to examine assumptions and biases while increasing their self-awareness.

Relational Cultural Theory offers the idea of "mattering" as a way for counselors to shift their perceptions created by controlling images. The counselor gives the client/student who is less empowered the opportunity to express his or her disconnection or pain to a more powerful person. The more powerful person, the counselor, responds with interest and concern acknowledging the effect the less powerful individual has on them (Jordan, 2010). Having one good relationship with an adult is the best protection factor for adolescents against adverse behaviors of violence, suicidality, or substance abuse (Resnick et al., 1997). Chung et. al (2008), discusses political countertransference, encouraging mental health professionals to be cognizant

of the negative media messages about immigrants and the resulting conscious or unconscious bias that can develop.

Relational Cultural Theory and School Counseling. Tucker, Smith-Adcock, and Trepal's (2011) conceptual article, *Relational-Cultural Theory for Middle School Counselors* suggests the "five E's" for putting RCT into practice: encourage self-empathy or self-acceptance; explore the relational images of students; educate students on power; explain (disconnections); and expand students' capacity for relationships. The authors also offer that RCT can best be used in the foundation and delivery system of the ASCA National Model.

Relational Cultural Theory as a Theoretical Framework. Research that utilized relational cultural theory as a theoretical framework provides evidence to support the relevance of this theory and its contribution to the literature. The following studies show the impact of relationship on mentorship, relational quality and complexity, and youth and adults.

Liang, Tracy, Taylor and Williams' (2002) study found that with college women authentic, engaging and empowering mentor relationships were indicators of high self-esteem and less loneliness. Frey's (2004) study on relational cultural assumptions and relational quality found that distress decreases as relationship quality increases. Again in 2006, Frey examines relational cultural theoretical assumptions and relational complexity. The findings of the study showed ongoing experiences of relational connection can diminish negative feelings towards attachment and a lack of parental support.

Spencer, Jordan and Sazama (2004) studied the relationships of racially and ethnically diverse youth with important adults. The results of this study found that mutuality, authenticity, engagement, and respect were important factors in a positive relationship. Mutuality was noted

as a significant contributing factor in balancing the power differential that exists between youth and adults.

This study addressed that gap more directly, exploring the critical incident that sparked one's movement towards liberation. By uncovering the process, counselor educators can further analyze how to incorporate social justice pedagogy in the classroom. Practitioners will be empowered to self-reflect on their process towards liberation and how to implement *The Cycle of Liberation* into their work through a relational lens. It is important to discuss literature related to the counselor's identity as a framework for social justice identity development.

Chapter three will provide the methodological approach that will be used to explore the critical incidents of professional school counselors' process towards advocacy through relationship and liberation. This qualitative study will analyze the critical incidents of participants who identify as social justice advocates for undocumented students.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the social justice identity development of professional school counselors who identify as advocates for undocumented students through critical incidents. The critical incident should hold significance, prompt an individual to revisit assumptions, and/or impact personal/professional growth (Serrat, 2010). The following research question guides this study: **(1)** What do school counselors who identify as social justice advocates describe as critical incidents in their social justice identity development when working with undocumented students? **(2)** How have these critical incidents impacted the social justice identity development of professional school counselors?

This chapter discusses the research method, Critical Incident Technique (CIT), and a rationale supporting its appropriateness for this study. The design is discussed as well as ethical considerations, the role of the researcher, participant selection, recruitment procedures, data collection and analysis.

Transformative Worldview

For this study the researcher holds a transformative worldview. Developed in the 1980s and 1990s, a group of researchers believed that post-positivist ideals did not fit individuals on the margins who experience discrimination and oppression (Creswell, 2014). Critical theorists who identify as Marxists, feminists, and researchers who focus on minority populations (racial and ethnic minorities, members of the LGBTQ community, indigenous populations or individuals with disabilities) ascribe to this worldview. A transformative worldview connects research inquiry to political change while confronting oppression, focusing on the needs of marginalized

individuals with a social issue at the center of the study (Creswell, 2014). Similar to Bobbie

Harro's *Cycle of Liberation* (2000), "Transformative research provides a voice for these

participants, raising their consciousness or advancing an agenda for change to improve their

lives. It becomes a united voice for reform and change" (Creswell, 2014 p. 10). The idea that the

individual's raised consciousness furthers their efforts towards reform confirms the

appropriateness of the transformative worldview for this study.

Role of the Researcher

As a former high school counselor and current advocate for undocumented immigrants

and students, my research is heavily influenced by my personal and professional experiences. I

am an advocate for comprehensive immigration reform that provides a pathway to citizenship for

the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. I am aware that my advocacy work impacts

the expectations I have of school counselors. I have advocated at the local, state and national

level, further solidifying my commitment to this issue. I have close friends who are immigrants

and some that are undocumented. I am aware that I do take a position regarding immigration,

which impacts how I view my research. Methods to mitigate the biases and assumptions are

outlined later.

During my time as a school counselor, I believed that every school counselor should be

knowledgeable of the issues undocumented students face and I continue to hold that belief. My

development as a social justice advocate for undocumented students was influenced by the

relationships I fostered with students. As a U.S. citizen, I recognize the privilege of traveling

freely in my country and the ability to travel outside of my country with ease. I recognize that I

do not live in fear based on my citizenship status. I am also aware of the identities I carry and

the expectations I have of school counselors to be inclusive. As a black woman, I understand

that being a part of a minority group can potentially impact how I interpret my research. I hold the assumption that racial and ethnic minority individuals are more likely to be advocates and can easily empathize with the barriers undocumented students face. During the course of this study I plan to utilize a reflexive journal to document any biases that may arise and to address those biases with my committee chair. I will also enlist bracketing in my research to hold any assumptions to increase the rigor of my study (Creswell, 2013). My worldviews may impact my interpretation of the study; however, I believe that impact will be minimal. The participants in this study also identify as social justice advocates for undocumented students, hence a greater chance of similarity.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to explore a phenomenon as described by the personal experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is a multimethod interpretive and naturalistic approach. It is a collection of observations, personal experiences, or interviews. Qualitative researchers make sense of the phenomenon through studying a phenomenon in their natural setting and allowing participants to make meaning of their experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

This qualitative study enlists a modified version of Flanagan's (1954) Critical Incident Technique (CIT). Flanagan (1954) developed CIT to examine critical incidents in industrial/organizational psychology. Flanagan's (1954) Critical Incident Technique is exploratory, taking place in a natural setting examining what helps or hinders a particular experience. The researcher serves as the key instrument and the participants' responses are the data. Flanagan discusses five stages of CIT: (1) Establishing the general aim (the objective or expected outcome), (2) Establishing plans (the relevance to the general aim), (3) Understanding

the effect the incident has on the general aim, (4) Data collection, and (5) Data analysis. The researcher will describe the data analysis in three stages: (1) Determining the frame of reference (how the results will be used); (2) Formulating the categories; and (3) Determining the level of specificity or generality (Flanagan, 1954; Butterfield, et al., 2009).

One strength of the CIT is the richness of data as participants choose incidents most salient to them (Gabbott & Hogg, 1996). The stories of the participants can provide powerful insight to the phenomenon (Zeithaml & Butner, 2003). CIT produces concrete information that is inductive in nature (Edvardsson, 1992) and useful when research on the related topic is sparse (Grove & Fisk, 1997). CIT is flexible and can be modified (Burns, Williams and Maxham, 2000; Neuheus, 1996) providing an empirical starting point for developing new research (Kolbe & Burnette, 1991). CIT allows participants to share their perceptions freely, as opposed to perceptions generated by the researcher's questions (Ruyter, Perkins, Wells, 2005).

 Some limitations of CIT are the criticisms of its reliability and validity (Chell, 2004). CIT focuses on the participants' recollection of events, so there is a possibility that the reported account could be misinterpreted (Edvardsson, 1992; Gabbott & Hogg, 1996). There can also be an issue of recall bias in using a retrospective method such as CIT (Michel, 2001), and inconsistencies and memory lapse could also be limitations (Singh & Wilkes, 1996).

CIT researchers have developed nine credibility checks that can be used and modified by the researcher to reduce the number of limitations: (1) Audiotaping interviews, (2) Interview fidelity, (3) Independent extraction of critical incidents, (4) Exhaustiveness, (5) Participation rates, (6) Placing incidents into categories by an independent judge, (7) Cross-checking, (8) Expert opinions, and (9) Theoretical agreement. The addition of these nine steps by Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio & Amundson (2005) became known as the Enhanced Critical Incident

Technique. The Enhanced Critical Incident Technique allows the researcher to "explore a particular phenomenon at a specific point in the participant's life" (Britten, 2014, p. 8). The addition of contextual questions is unique to this enhanced technique. The enhanced critical incident technique enlists oral semi-structured interviews as a method of collecting data. The interviews last 1-2 hours, and the researcher develops an interview guide for the study.

To increase soundness, rigor, and credibility I utilized the nine credibility checks. For interview fidelity, I followed the Critical Incident Technique research method as described, as well as the developed interview guide. After the interview, the participants received a follow up email to review the critical incidents provided during the interview and to review the transcript for accuracy.

During the development of the categories I indicated how many participants provided items for that category to establish participant rates. I enlisted a peer reviewer to place the critical incidents into the categories I developed to calculate a match rate. I then compared those to the critical incidents I placed into cateogries and discussed any disagreements of incidents. The peer reviewer and myself discussed the placement of critical incidents in the categories until we came to an agreement to calculate a match rate of 80% or better (Butterfield et al., 2009). After the category scheme was finalized I utilized an expert who had knowledge of the area I studied to review my categories for usefulness and to determine if anything was missing. Finally, I reported assumptions and compared the categories and themes to relevant literature.

Ethical Considerations

I received approval from the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Tech to conduct the study. The Informed Consent covered the purpose of the study, risks, and benefits, confidentiality, compensation, freedom to withdraw, research procedures and participant

responsibility. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any time. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information was removed and participants provided a pseudonym for the study. To further ensure confidentiality, the researcher kept all interviews and printed material in a locked cabinet or safe and all electronic materials were password protected. There was minimal risk to the participants who participated in the study. Participants did not receive compensation for their participation. The only individuals who reviewed the participants' transcripts were the committee, peer reviewer(s), and critical incident technique faculty expert.

Participants

I recruited nationally for secondary school counselors who self-identify as a social justice advocate for undocumented students. Participants were recruited electronically from state and national school counseling organizations, as well as university programs, county schools, The Dream Project (an activist group) and Educators for Fair Consideration. The invitation letter can be found in Appendix A. Snowball sampling was also used in this study. Snowball sampling allowed invited participants to contact others who they felt could contribute to the study (Schwandt, 2007). Elementary school counselors were not selected due to the difference in circumstances that elementary school-aged children face, such as issues of parent deportation. The college choice process and concerns about finding employment after high school are not pertinent issues at the elementary level. While there is no rule on how many incidents are sufficient, the average number of incidents for saturation is 100 (Flanagan, 1954). Therefore, for this study I interviewed participants until saturation was reached. The interview can result in multiple incidents, or occurrences that have a significant impact on the interviewees' social justice identity development.

Data Collection

Data Collection occurred in three phases. In the first phase participants completed a demographic and inclusion criteria questionnaire as shown in Appendix B prior to the interview. The inclusion questions established whether they identify as a social justice advocate for undocumented students. Volunteers who indicated "no" were not eligible to participate in the study. The demographic questionnaire was developed through a Qualtrics survey. Volunteers received a link to the questionnaire upon invitation to participate in the study. The volunteers answered a series of demographic questions related to race/ethnicity, citizenship status, gender, and years of experience. Individuals selected for the study were informed of the procedures and provided the informed consent (Appendix C). The researcher contacted the participants to schedule the location, time, and date for the interview.

The second phase of the data collection consisted of a virtual interview. The interview lasted 30:00 to 75:00 minutes. The researcher and participant decided on an agreed time for the interview. At the time of the interview the researcher built rapport, discussed the purpose of the study, the informed consent, and asked the participant to provide a pseudonym for confidentiality.

Participants were then instructed to share their experiences of how they became a social justice advocate for undocumented students. During the interview the researcher provided non-verbal affirmation and did not interrupt participants as they shared their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Following the participant's stories, the researcher asked semi-structured questions as described in the interview guide, Appendix D. The follow-up questions expanded on the participant's critical incidents for clarification and to further explore the process of social justice identity development. Participants provided an average of four critical incidents.

The interviews were audio-recorded. Descriptive validity is increased through the use of recording to provide an accurate account of the participants' experiences (Blustein, 2001). Following the recording, the interviews were transcribed through a third-party transcription service, rev.com. The files were securely stored and transmitted using 128-bit SSL encryption. The files were visible only to the transcriptionist. I requested for the files to be deleted once the transcription was complete. All recordings and materials obtained electronically were secured in a password protected file.

The final phase of the data collection included electronic correspondence with the participant to increase credibility through cross-checking. The researcher thanked the participant and provide them the opportunity to review the critical incidents they provided and their transcripts for accuracy (Appendix E). Participants responded with no changes needed. Interviews were conducted until no new categories emerged.

Data Analysis

During the analysis, I examined the nature of relationship through connection, mutuality, empowerment and engagement in the professional school counselor's social justice identity development through Relational Cultural Theory. I also examined the professional school counselor's identity development through *The Cycle of Liberation*, examining whether the process is cyclical and if the school counselor's critical incident resulted in a process towards liberation.

The analysis suggested by Flanagan (1954) is similar to Corbin and Strauss's (1990) category development in grounded theory. A category is defined as a piece of information that is analyzed, composed of instances, and events related to the phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Following data collection, I conducted open coding, reviewing the transcribed data line-

by-line or by paragraph assigning codes. I then placed those codes into categories. Following

open coding, I utilized axial coding to identify causal conditions or categories that influence the

central phenomenon, a paradigm that is most addressed by participants (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

The constant comparative method allowed me to use the provided critical incidents to compare

them to the emergent categories. Finally, I enlisted selective coding to relate categories to the

central phenomenon and validate emerging themes.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the social justice identity development of

professional school counselors who identify as advocates for undocumented students through

critical incidents. Chapter three included the qualitative approach and transformative worldview

of the study and its appropriateness. The method of the study and the Critical Incident Technique

were discussed in detail. A discussion of the ethical considerations and the role of the researcher

were provided. The participants' selection and recruitment procedures were addressed along with

the process of data collection and analysis. The rationale for using CIT is based upon the

assumption that social justice advocates go through a process similar to Harro's (2000) *Cycle of

Liberation* sparked by a critical incident. Chapter four will include a discussion of the findings.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the social justice identity development of professional school counselors who identify as advocates for undocumented students through critical incidents. The participants met the following criteria: a secondary school counselor and advocate for undocumented students. Participants were recruited from state and national counseling organizations, university programs, county schools and activist groups. Snowball sampling was also used to identify potential participants.

The study sought to answer two research questions: **(1)** What do school counselors who identify as social justice advocates describe as critical incidents in their social justice identity development when working with undocumented students? **(2)** How have these critical incidents impacted the social justice identity development of professional school counselors? The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of this study. The demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were analyzed to answer the above-mentioned research questions. This chapter includes: participants, data analysis, and findings. The findings of this study are organized by research question.

Participants

The demographic questionnaire inquired about the following: race, gender, citizenship status, level of education earned, number of years working as a school counselor, number of years advocating for undocumented students, percentage of undocumented in the school, size of school, and level of school. The information garnered from the question is summarized in Table 2. Eleven participants completed the demographic questionnaire, six participants responded to the interview request. Data saturation was met after six participants; therefore, no new data was

collected. Of the six participants three have been school counselors for 7 or more years, two for 3-5 years and one for 1-3 years. Similarly, three school counselors have been advocating for 7 or more years, one for 3-5 years, one for 1-3 years, and another for less than a year. The sample size was comprised of a diverse group, allowing for a richness of data. Of the six participants, two were White, two were Hispanic, one was Black and one was Biracial. Five women and one man participated in the interview. Four of the participants were U.S. citizens, one was a DACA recipient, and another was a naturalized citizen. Five of the six participants have a Master's degree and one participant has a doctoral degree. All the participants were school counselors at a small, medium, or large high school with an average of 5 – 15 percent of undocumented students in their school. Notably, participants lived in geographic regions that had high levels of immigration. Participants cited poultry plants and factories hiring temporary workers as the increase in immigrant population in their area.

Data Analysis

Individuals interested in participating in the study completed a demographic questionnaire first to determine eligibility to participate in the study. After completing the demographic questionnaire, participants who met the recruitment criteria were contacted to participate in a virtual interview. Participants who agreed to participate received the informed consent and confirmation of the interview day and time. Participants provided verbal consent to participate at the start of the interview. The interviews ranged from 30:00 – 75:00 minutes. None of the six secondary school counselors who responded to the request for an interview, lived near enough for a face-to-face interview. Interviews were video/audiotaped with participant permission.

The researcher followed an interview guide for each interview. Participants were asked to provide critical incidents that directly impacted their social justice identity development. During the interview the researcher reviewed the critical incidents with the participants. Participants were asked several follow-up questions related to the critical incidents provided. After each interview the recording was sent to a third-party transcription service.

The researcher immersed herself in the data by reviewing the transcripts for accuracy while simultaneously listening to the audio recording. To increase credibility through cross-checking, the transcripts, as well as critical incidents described by the participants, were emailed to the participants for accuracy. Data analysis began at the completion of the first interview. The researcher began with open coding, reviewing the transcripts line-by-line assigning codes. After coding the second transcript the researcher conducted axial coding comparing the transcripts for emergent categories. The remaining transcripts were coded and the constant comparative method allowed the researcher to compare emergent categories. Finally, through selective coding the transcripts were coded again for central themes and categories.

CIT encourages researchers to use an independent judge to match critical incidents. The critical incidents that emerged from the six interviews were given to a peer reviewer to place incidents into categories. The original match rate was around 67%. The peer reviewer and researcher discussed the differences to reach a match rate of 80% (Butterfield, et al., 2009). Based on the recommendations of the peer reviewer, the researcher clarified the categories allowing for a better fit of the critical incidents, thus increasing the match rate to 100% with a targeted goal of 80%.

Findings

Research question 1 explored the critical incidents of participants, while research question 2 explored the impact of those critical incidents on the social justice identity development of the participants. It is important to note that to avoid bias, each participant was asked to provide his or her story of becoming a social justice advocate by highlighting critical incidents. The researcher did not interpret the data for critical incidents.

Research Question 1: **What do school counselors who identify as social justice advocates describe as critical incidents in their social justice identity development when working with undocumented students?**

The critical incidents provided by participants were described as meaningful experiences in their development with an average of 4 incidents per participant. Four categories emerged: personal experiences, formal education/learning, personal work experiences, and students' impact on the counselor.

Personal Experiences

Four out of six participants noted that the influence of their parent(s) growing up and their personal experiences navigating the immigration process were critical incidents in their social justice identity development. Participants also cited the influence of educators in their childhood as a meaningful experience to their social justice identity development. Three subcategories emerged from the participants' personal experiences: parental influence, family immigration experience, and the influence of educators.

Parental influence

Participants shared the influence their parents had on their social justice development citing their parents' advice, which encouraged them to be inclusive and of service to others. Janie

discussed the influence of her upbringing. "So, I do think I was protected from some of that early on, so as I was forming who I was, I wasn't hearing all the terrible things that I think some kids hear right away, early on". Orange shared a similar experience, "Growing up my mom always told me you've got to be a better person, you're better than that".

Family Immigration Experience

Participants shared experiences of their family immigrating to the United States as undocumented immigrants. The experience of their parents working towards their citizenship and the help of one participant's family in assisting others' immigration into the United States impacted the participants' social justice identity development. Participants shared how their own experiences motivated them to advocate for undocumented students.
The Academic Counselor shared,

> Well, it's definitely evolved, because I had an immigrant parent. I will say that going through the immigration process myself, knowing what I had to go through. It took me 12 years and I have [a] U.S. born, American citizen parent advocate for me, and it still took me 12 years to get my citizenship. That's what I remember as a school counselor.
>
> ...I'm different because I experienced it. It was my own personal journey that crafted who I've become and how I provide resources because I want it to be ... Not only do I want it to be comprehensive, but understand, I want it to be dignified.

Similarly, John provided an account of his own experience and its influence on his role as an advocate,

> Throughout my time that I was growing up in the United States, when we came to the United States, we came as an undocumented family. That's one of the big reasons why it

became a passion for me because it's something that I went through personally, and my family goes through personally.

Influence of Educators

Participants cited their experiences with K-12 educators as meaningful to their development. Participants shared their experiences of having teachers who believed in their potential. Participants also credited their educators for post-secondary opportunities and for being apart of their decision to go into education.

John shared,

Having that experience in the public schools and having teachers that didn't give up on me was the biggest reason why I wanted to go into education.

Similarly, another participant discussed the value in having an educator believe in her potential. The Academic Counselor shared,

If I didn't have someone who cared about me, and it wasn't even my parents. It was someone who saw and believed in me in school that said, "You know what, you can do better, why don't you try this? If I didn't have that person, I wouldn't be where I was, or where I am."

Formal Education/Learning

Four out of six participants cited early childhood experiences of learning and forging friendships with individuals of diverse backgrounds, and one noted her master's level course. The participants reported that these experiences were impactful in their social justice identity development. Two sub-categories emerged: experiential learning and academic learning.

Experiential learning

Experiential learning in the context of this study is defined as learning through experience and reflection. Participants shared their growing interest in social justice and their experiences with diverse populations personally and professionally. One participant who was the only racial/ethnic minority in her high school reflected on her undergraduate experiences and the opportunities provided for her to embrace her culture.

The Academic Counselor shared,

> ...When I got to college and then I saw how diverse a college campus [was] and they even had an international student club. I was like, "What is that?" I never even knew [what] the other cultures and ethnicities were, like it was an okay thing to do. I felt like ... What I was taught all along was assimilate, assimilate. "Forget your heritage language." Forget that. You don't need that. I grew up in the '70s. Now being a teacher, an educator now, I believe heritage language is beautiful. Keep it. Preserve it. I don't want you to lose that. I'm an advocate for preservation of heritage and heritage language.

Janie discussed her growth when she attended graduate school in a diverse environment,

> That was a very good experience for me because I was out of my comfort zone. I was in a whole different environment, all by myself. It really forced me to see what I believe.

Academic Learning

Academic learning is defined in the context of this study as formal learning that has taken place in K-12 schools and higher education. One participant noted her master's level course in multicultural counseling as influential, as well as her early childhood experiences in elementary school.

Janie recalled her early childhood experiences,

They gave me a great deal of literature of all kinds of cultures of the world in social

studies and reading class, and I had a great deal. So, people, I don't think I put people in

these little boxes of these prejudiced people. They were the heroes of my stories.

She later discussed the impact of her master's level counseling course,

So I began to learn more about other people's world views and what I needed to know,

because I just tried [to] think kind of that all people are equal. All people need the same

things, and it's like no. That's not true. They're all equal. They have equal opportunities,

but they haven't all been raised the same.

Past Work Experiences

Four out of six participants noted past work experiences with diverse populations.

Notably, two participants decided to choose their careers in education after previously working

with a diverse population or undocumented students. Orange, a former Latino recruiter at a large

university, discussed her decision to go into school counseling,

One of the things I did notice is that often times by the time the student got to me it was

too late. I couldn't help them, I couldn't go back and try to help them work on things in

their high school or realize what the important things are that would be good to put in a

college application, grades, test scores and things like that. That planning time was so

valuable and a lot of them had missed out on that for whatever reason, their schools didn't

provide that support so I got my counseling degree.

Katherine shared the impact a student she worked with at a camp had on her development,

Every once in a while, she'll send me a message or something and she's talking about how

much I meant to her life which is crazy because I was only in her life for two weeks. That

was when I decided I needed to change my major, I needed to be in education. That was

the moment. Not just that moment, but that was a really powerful moment in my life.

Student Impact on the Counselor

All of the participants indicated that their experiences with undocumented students had a

significant impact on their social justice identity development. Several participants shared stories

of students disclosing their undocumented status, and each participant shared stories of students

overcoming challenges and barriers.

John shared,

> I think the biggest thing I've learned again is just from the kids and getting to know them.
>
> That's the biggest gift, I'd say, is them sharing their time with me and getting to see and
>
> hear what they've gone through and continuing to motivate them. Okay, we've got to push
>
> forward. I hear you. I understand what you're going through. Maybe I can't relate 100%,
>
> but I can say, you know what? There's still opportunities. This is how we can break that
>
> cycle, whether it's a cycle of poverty, a cycle of whatever it is, not getting a high school
>
> diploma or not getting a college degree. You could be the one to break that cycle.

Another participant recalls a conversation with a student who disclosed his undocumented status.

Janie recalls,

> You know, you jump in, " Well, you are somebody," you know. He goes, "Well, I want to
>
> be somebody." "Well, you're somebody to me. You're eating lunch with me." You start
>
> through this, what you want to do, but he said, "I don't know if should tell you this," but
>
> he said, "I don't have papers and I can't work and I can't get a job. I'd like to be somebody
>
> and I can't be." I don't remember his exact quotes. It's been a year or something since I

had that story. Those are the ones that about bring tears to your eyes because he's a

wonderful young man.

Similarly, Andrea shares a story of an undocumented family she worked with early in her career,

The cousin was a gifted soccer player, but he was undocumented. The coach really

wanted him to play. I didn't go into why. I said, "No, he's not going to be able to do

that." Try to keep him under the radar. I was out ill for about a week. I got back and the

student was gone. I don't know where he went because I couldn't find that out. He was

just gone.

The Academic Counselor speaks to the fears her students have,

They think everything is going to lift them out of the shadow, and it's a very scary thing

living in a shadow. That's how I feel my kids think. They feel like they're always looking

over their shoulder because they're afraid of being sent back. On top of it there's this

other realization that happens and it's very sad for some of them.

The critical incidents provided by each participant centered on their own experiences, formal

education, work experiences, and student impact.

Research Question 2: **How have these critical incidents impacted the social justice identity**

development of professional school counselors?

Participants were asked a series of follow-up questions to expand on the impact the

critical incidents they described had on their social justice identity development. Participants

were asked about the importance of their experience and its significance to their development,

their perspective towards the immigrant population, their relationships with undocumented

students, and how their practice as a school counselor has changed. One central theme emerged:

development through connection and introspection.

Connection as defined by Relational Cultural theorists is mutual respect and empathetic engagement (Jordan, 2010). In the context of this study connection also includes expressing empathy, personal experiences and the impact the critical incidents have on the social justice identity development of the participants. Introspection is the concept of recognition, self-reflection, learning, and evaluation (Harro, 2000). In the context of the study, participants often reflected on their experiences, how they have changed over time, and the recognition of how others have influenced their development.

Participants indicated that understanding, recognizing and acknowledging students' experiences provided clarity to the counselor and increased his or her empathy and passion. Participants noted that the influence of others, whether family, students, or educators when they themselves were a student, positively impacted their development.

Katherine shared,

I think it's definitely making me a more empathetic and better school counselor. I just think it's a process. It's not just one day you wake up, and you're just the most global, wonderful, aware, competent counselor. It might take something to hit home. Then, you readjust and think, "How can I be a better school counselor from here from this moment?"

Relatedly, Orange shared,

Understanding their experiences and their goals or aspirations in their, you know, just their reality makes it better...so understanding their reality and their real concerns helps me better inform my practice.

John credited his former teachers for influencing his current work as a school counselor,

I think just through my own experiences of having those teachers that I felt were real with

me, those are the ones that I felt that connection with, that's what I feel like I've been

doing here, through my four years here as [a] school counselor.

Participants noted the benefit of their own personal experiences with immigration and the

immigration system or witnessing the experiences of those close to them. Another participant

cited formal learning as an opportunity to help her students. Participants indicated an increase in

confidence, happiness, understanding, and personal growth. Participants recognized the need to

address all of their students' needs.

Janie shared how she found value in what she was doing,

It made me believe what I was doing was right, or it was important or it was valuable,

because you could see. I mean it was like, because I had these experiences, I had more

confidence that I knew what I was talking about.

John recognized the contribution of his own experiences,

I think through my own experience of having the immigration system be so broken and

can move so many different directions for people has really made me an advocate of,

okay, well here's what we know and here's what we don't know. Here's how we address

the fears.

Orange reflected on her own experiences by comparing them to the experiences of her students,

The things that a lot of the students and their families have gone through are quite

inspirational and they make me look at my life and be like, wow I did nothing. I don't

deserve this. These guys, crossed the desert, got lost in the desert and somehow lived.

Another year they've got 4.0s, they've got like really awesome test scores it's like, what

do I have on you? Not a thing. It makes me re-evaluate where I'm coming from.

The Academic Counselor also credited the education she received,

> Yes, absolutely. I think that some of the experiences that I had that opened doors for me was because someone cared and that the more education I got, the more I was able to learn about my field of expertise. In education. The more I learned, the more I realized even as a student going through that I had a lot more resources that I never took advantage of because I didn't know they were there.

All but one participant indicated that their perspective of the immigrant population did not change. Participants indicated that they have always had a positive perspective, and one participant could relate as a parent doing what is necessary for their children. Participants' personal experiences as immigrants and/or a child or family member of an immigrant were cited as reasons for having a positive perception.

Janie responded,

> I understand why people would come without paperwork. I have been a single mom. My kids are grown now, but if my boys were in danger, or if they were hungry, I would have crossed the border for my children. So I understand why a family would do that.

John, who immigrated here with his family, shared his beliefs,

> No. I continue to believe that we are here in order to make a better life for our kids, and that's the reason my parents came here. A lot of times, we're escaping not just poverty, but sometimes persecution. Sometimes people that are coming after us. Bottom line, just like anybody else. Whether you've been here two years or you've been here 15 generations or whatever. Your goal is to leave your kids with a better life than what you had.

Orange shared how her understanding of the immigrant population grew over time,

I mean I was never anti-immigrant because I was always taught it's a country of

immigrants. I don't really understand, or really understood that when I was younger but

now I truly understand that and I ... when I hear, especially more recently of the rhetoric

against immigrants it worries me immensely. To say that oh well we're just going to close

our borders or we're going to kick people out or we're going to register all these people

well it's of great concern to me because these are people. They're not animals, they're not

cattle, they're not like rats, they're people. I know so many of them who are just true true

contributors to society who are doing great things really really impacting communities

and to think that someone's just going to say oh well you weren't born here so you gotta

go.

The Academic Counselor who reflected on her own experiences of the immigrant population

shared her positive perceptions,

That, I have absolute empathy for the immigrant population. Here's the thing, being an

immigrant, you're not able to show how proud you are of that status until you have

overcome that status, until you become an American citizen you can't put your fist up in

the air and say, "Yeah, I did it and guess what? I'm proud of my immigrant roots." You're

afraid to do that until that day comes.

Participants also noted stronger relationships with undocumented students, an increase in

awareness, a desire for continuous learning, and a recognition of the impact the student

relationship had on their social justice identity development. When discussing her relationships

with undocumented students Katherine shared,

Yeah. I think I'm way more aware of what's going on than I was before. I think they are a

lot stronger just because I can realize how much harder it is for them. I can see it would

be easy for them to be disheartened because it's so difficult, and everything takes money and time and it's so much harder for them. I think my relationship is stronger with those students than it is with a lot of the other students.

Similarly, Andrea shared the influence of her students,

It has been impacted. Like I said, initially I didn't really know anything about undocumented students. I hadn't had those personal experiences. It wasn't that I was uncaring I just didn't have any information whatsoever. This is again before media and social media, the ability to see thing across the world in an instant.

Orange shared her growth in connection with her students,

I feel a lot more connected to them. I'm so proud of them and I'm a lot more open than I think I ever was earlier in life to what might be coming through the door next.

Finally, participants spoke of a growth over time that is continuous in nature crediting their students and their own families. Through personal experiences, the impact of students has increased awareness, changed their perspective, and strengthened their resolve as school counselor advocates for undocumented students.

John reflected on how he has changed,

I think I've evolved more as I've been here, understanding what the kids and what the families are going through, and to be appreciative of what I have and of the opportunities that I was given because of the tough choice that my parents had to make to leave. To leave their home country, leaving everything they know, for an opportunity that they didn't know where they were going to end up. I think that's one of the biggest sacrifices that they made is to just uproot, leave everything, and say, "Well, we're told this is a new country that we didn't know anything about that can give us opportunity."

Andrea shared the importance of humanizing the issue,

>I think that over time because of my being sensitive to some of their struggles and just seeing the human side to their stories. I think it's a combination of just being experienced now, because of those beginning. There's stuff that you don't learn being in the counseling program. It's like baptism by fire with that. It's not something that I can teach. You can't teach people to be empathetic like that. You can certainly tell them this is how you go about it, but you either have that or you don't have that. You may be able to awaken something in someone with it, but if it's not there. It's not there.

Orange also reflected on her personal growth,

>Overall, I am far more open and empathetic than I ever have been I realize that. Not just with undocumented populations but just with students in general. My goal as an educator is to help students be the best version of themselves possible and to provide them equitable resources regardless of where you're coming from and how much money you have or don't have or whatever. I think that perspective has changed and I work far more harder than I ever had and I put a lot more time energy into it than anything I initially did. I'm a better educator because of my experiences and I am a better advocate because of my experiences, not just for undocumented but for all of my students because I see a greater value than I think I did before.

Lastly, the Academic Counselor gave advice to fellow counselors,

>If you're a counselor that has an undocumented kid or has a kid who speaks a different language or has a different heritage or has a different religion, instead of looking at that as an obstacle, you have to find ways to meet their needs. You have to find ways to make

them have the same opportunity to graduate on time as the kid who doesn't have the

obstacles. That's the bottom line.

Summary

Research question one provided four categories and numerous subcategories. The six

secondary school counselors provided critical incidents that impacted their social justice identity

development through sharing meaningful experiences. Participants shared the influence their

personal experiences had on their development. Participants also discussed the contribution of

formal learning. Some participants shared their decisions to go into education based on past work

experiences. Lastly, all the participants shared the significant impact their students had on their

development.

Research question two expanded on research question 1 exploring the impact of the

critical incidents described by the participants. One central theme emerged: development through

connection and introspection. The responses of the participants reflected on the significance and

importance of their experience, their perspective towards the immigrant population, and their

relationships with undocumented students. Participants' responses to how their practice as a

school counselor has changed appears to be the sum of all the questions before it. The findings of

the study resulted in participants' connection to others and the impact of introspection. This

chapter provided framework for Chapter 5 which will include discussions and implications of the

study.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the social justice identity development of professional school counselors who identify as advocates for undocumented students through critical incidents. The process in which a counselor develops a social justice identity has not been explored in depth. More extensively, research related to counselors' advocacy efforts with undocumented students is sparse. This study sought to merge the two, exploring the social justice identity development of advocates for undocumented students. In an effort to study the social justice identity process, this study was framed in Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) (Jordan, 2010) and *The Cycle of Liberation* (Harro, 2000). RCT is a humanistic, feminist theory that focuses on social change with three main tenets: mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and growth fostering relationships (Jordan, 2010). The three main tenets allow the client/student to experience connection, connection results in Miller's Five Good Things (Duffey & Somody, 2011, p. 227):

1. An increased feeling of zest or vitality

2. A willingness to act or acting in this world

3. Greater awareness of self

4. Increased sense of worth

5. Increased connection to others and a motivation to connect

Bobbie Harro's (2000) *Cycle of Liberation* is a continuous cyclical approach of an individual's experience of cognitive dissonance (critical incidents) that liberates him or her to a place of advocacy. Further discussion will be presented on how RCT and *The Cycle of Liberation* are embedded into the findings of this study. The findings of this study revealed that

the critical incidents cited by participants impacted their social justice identity development. All participants credited their work with students as critical incidents.

This qualitative study enlisted *The Critical Incident Technique* to explore the social justice identity development of school counselors. A total of 6 secondary school counselors participated in the study, five women and one man. It was a diverse sample allowing for a richness of data. After the completion of a demographic questionnaire, eligible participants participated in a semi-structured interview. Participants were asked to share a story of their work with undocumented students. Follow up questions were asked to expand on the critical incidents that emerged from the participants' stories. The follow-up interviews were conducted electronically to give participants the opportunity to clarify critical incidents and review the transcript for accuracy. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using open, axial and selective coding. A summary of the findings is provided in the context of previous literature. Chapter 5 also includes a discussion of findings, limitations, implications for school counselors and counselor educators, and recommendations for future research.

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Summary of Findings

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Research Question 1: **What do school counselors who identify as social justice advocates describe as critical incidents in their social justice identity development when working with undocumented students?**

The critical incidents provided by each participant centered on his or her personal experiences, formal education/learning, past work experiences and student impact. The critical incidents were described as meaningful experiences in their development with an average of four incidents per participant.

Personal Experiences

Over half of the participants credited their parents as being influential in their social justice identity development. The childhood experiences of the participants encouraged them to view the world inclusively and spoke fondly of being taught early in life to "be a better person." Participants also found their experiences with the immigration process to be influential in their social justice identity development. Participants shared their experiences of immigrating to this country without legal documentation; others shared the experiences of their families' immigration and their own lengthy process obtaining citizenship in the United States. Finally, participants acknowledged educators in their childhood as influential to their development as an advocate and their decision to become school counselors.

Formal Education/Learning

Many of the participants discussed the influence education/learning had on their social justice identity development. One participant credited her master's level multicultural course for increasing her awareness of diverse populations. Comparatively, two participants commented that a master's level program could not fully prepare them for the work they were doing. Though academic education was not heavily influential, experiential learning significantly influenced the social justice identity of the participants. Participants spoke of developed friendships with individuals of diverse backgrounds personally and professionally. Others reflected on the opportunities to explore their own racial/ethnic identity as an undergraduate student.

Past Work Experiences

Four out of six participants believed that their previous work experiences with diverse populations influenced their social justice identity development. Participants chose to become school counselors because of their work with undocumented students in positions as a camp

counselor or a university recruiter. Two participants attributed their career change to working with undocumented students. Participants who worked with diverse groups felt that experience prepared them for their advocacy work in schools.

Student Impact

All six of the participants believed that their students impacted their social justice identity development. Participants shared stories of student self-disclosure and how it impacted their development. Participants also reflected on the strengths of their students to overcome challenges. Participants often compared their own experiences to their students and were in awe of what their students have achieved. There was an overwhelming sense of pride and appreciation in the participants' responses.

Research Question 2: **How have these critical incidents impacted the social justice identity development of professional school counselors?**

Participants were asked follow-up questions to the critical incidents they provided. Participants discussed the importance of their experience, the significance of the critical incidents on their development, positive perceptions of the immigrant population, strengthened relationships with undocumented students, and the change in their practice as a school counselor. One central theme emerged: development through connection and introspection.

As described in Chapter 4, connection as defined by Relational Cultural theorists is mutual respect and empathetic engagement (Jordan, 2010). This study expands that definition to expressing empathy and an impactful personal experience. Introspection as presented by Bobbie Harro (2000) is defined as recognition, self-reflection, learning and evaluation. This study is supported by this idea: participants were self-reflective, they evolved, and were influenced by others.

Participants received "clarity" (Duffey & Somody, 2007) through understanding, recognition and acknowledgement of students' experiences; their empathy and passion increased as a result. Participants shared the positive influence individuals (i.e. family, students and former educators) had on their development; the participants' positive perceptions of the immigrant population was the result of being an immigrant or witnessing the immigration process of a family member. Participants' relationships with undocumented students were strengthened, their awareness increased, and they had a strong desire for continuous learning. All of the participants recognized the impact the student relationship had on their social justice identity development. It is worth noting that participants who identified as a racial/ethnic minority found commonalities of challenges and barriers with their students. Participants who identified as white often questioned why they believed differently than their white colleagues and expressed gratitude for their own self-awareness.

Discussion

Research Question 1: **What do school counselors who identify as social justice advocates describe as critical incidents in their social justice identity development when working with undocumented students?**

The critical incidents provided by the participants are examples of the process towards social justice identity development experienced through cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance as described by Harro (2000) is an experience that awakens the person to changing the core of what they believe about themselves (Festinger, 1957) Furthermore, the participants constructed new relationships in the context of cultural understanding and meaning making (Kincheloe, 2005). The experiences provide opportunities for critical thinking leading to a new narrative of self-discovery. The process was continuous and cyclical. It is important to

acknowledge that counselors are always in a process of developing as they encounter critical incidents throughout their career. Research supports the influence of family and educators as contributing factors to the social justice identity development of counselors (Caldwell, 2010). Contributing research also addresses the impact of one experiencing or witnessing oppression (Caldwell, 2010; McMahan et al., 2010). Though participants did not explicitly use the term oppression, they did share their own challenges or the challenges of others with the immigration process.

Social justice literature provides evidentiary support of the influence of education, learning and work experiences on counselors' awareness (Caldwell, 2010; Dollarhide, 2016; McMahan, et al., 2010; Singh et al., 2010). Summer's (2014) account of her racialized awakening contributes to the literature an experience of cognitive dissonance as a result of a student. Summer's account of her racialized awakening is framed in *The Cycle of Liberation* (Harro, 2000). Summer's story is told in four parts, similar to findings of this study. Comparatively, the participants also acknowledge an *incident* that led to an evaluation of themselves *the climax*. Following "the climax" was *the falling action*, participants formed community by working with others to build support. As a result was *the resolution*, like Summer the participants spread hope and modeled authenticity. The four parts: the incident, the climax, the falling action, and the resolution are relative terms to Harro's *Cycle of Liberation* (2000).

As discussed in *The Cycle of Liberation* (Harro, 2000), participants acknowledge a period of *waking up* when sharing their experiences of parental influence, experiences with immigration, work with diverse populations, and the impact their students had on their development. These experiences provided opportunity for introspection and consciousness raising, or *getting ready*. Participants used these experiences for intrapersonal reflection (Harro,

2000), changing the core of themselves; their interpersonal reflection (Harro, 2000), to change how they value others and saw the world. Participants also discussed *reaching out* by seeking experience through increasing their awareness, *speaking out* and *naming injustices* (Harro, 2000) through discussions, involvement, and persistence. Similar to *building community*, participants questioned the idea of restricting individuals from entering the United States to *coalescing* by becoming a role model to their students and other educators (Harro, 2000). Participants often educated other professionals on the needs of undocumented students and explored ways to act. All of the participants took part in *creating change* by taking risks and creating a space of *power shared* with their students to increase empathy and student empowerment. Lastly, all of the participants reached a place of *maintaining* through their authenticity and integration (Harro, 2000).

Participants maintained a sense of hope despite the concerns they shared about the future of the immigrant population in the United States. At the core of *The Cycle of Liberation* (Harro, 2000) is a sense of joy, support and increased self-esteem. Participants acknowledged that they were happier, more confident and aware.

Table 1. The Cycle of Liberation and Participant Experiences

	Cycle of Liberation		Participants Experiences	
I **N** **T** **R** **A** **P** **E** **R** **S** **O** **N** **A** **L**	Waking Up	Critical Incidents	"Well, it's definitely evolved, because I had an immigrant parent. I will say that going through the immigration process myself, knowing what I had to go through. It took me 12 years and I have U.S. born, American citizen parent advocate for me, and it still took me 12 years to get my citizenship. That's what I remember as a school counselor. I still work with people that act like that. I'm different because I experienced it. It was my own personal journey that crafted who I've become and how I provide resource because I want it to be ... Not only do I want it to be comprehensive, but understand, I want it to be dignified."	**I** **N** **T** **E** **R** **P** **E** **R** **S** **O** **N** **A** **L**
	Getting Ready	Introspection & Consciousness Raising	"I think I'm far more understanding and open than I ever used to be. I think when I initially started I was like yeah yeah I know what this is, I know what that, it was just, you know, guns blazing, I got this. I don't think I truly understood the real situation all the way through but now having worked so closely with so many students and families and witnessing the hardship and helping them work through it I have a much better understanding and I can empathize a lot better with the situation and I know that there's no one right answer for anybody and it definitely has helped me be ... grow myself as just a person in general to be a lot more empathetic and really want to help."	
	Reaching Out	Speaking Out & Naming Injustices	"To say that oh well we're just going to close our borders or we're going to kick people out or we're going to register all these people well it's of great concern to me because these are people. They're not animals, they're not cattle, they're not like rats, they're people. I know so many of them who are just true true contributors to society who are doing great things really really impacting communities and to think that someone's just going to say oh well you weren't born here so you gotta go. Excuse my language but that's bullshit just because you have been so lucky just to be born here, what gives you the right? You didn't get to choose, they didn't get to choose so if you're going to be a positive contribution to society like hey, you've got a good reason to stay."	

	Building Community	Building support, questioning assumptions, rules and roles	"I think I've been realizing it's easier to see more of the injustice as you ... I don't know. I think I really started out with just viewing like a small portion of the injustices that are in our world especially in America. I think it's getting bigger and bigger and bigger in my head. I think it's definitely making me a more empathetic and better school counselor. I just think it's a process. It's not just one day you wake up, and you're just the most global, wonderful, aware, competent counselor. It might take something to hit home. Then, you readjust and think, 'How can I be a better school counselor from here from this moment'?"	
	Core			

	Cycle of Liberation		**Participants Experiences**	
I	Coalescing	Becoming a role model, moving into action	"I think that over time because of my being sensitive to some of their struggles and just seeing the human side to their stories. I get a lot of love from the parents because they know that I am authentic. I may not always be able to help. They know that they can come to me. I'll do what I can to try to help. Even if it's something small. I think it's a combination of just being experienced now, because of those beginnings."	**I**
N				**N**
T				**T**
R				**E**
A	Creating change	Taking leadership risks	"Doing what I do also comes at a price. I'm not a very popular person when it comes to the conversations that I have, especially when it comes to district or the legislation. When you're asked to speak for the minority or the people that are too afraid to speak sometimes you can be viewed as a whistle blower or a trouble maker or someone who wants to make waves."	**R**
P				**P**
E				**E**
R				**R**
S	Maintaining	Spreading hope	"I am a school counselor that attempts to address educational gaps by creating system of intervention and prevention. Also, I work closely with a social justice Non-profit organization called Child Leader Project and I advise a DREAM Club.	**S**
O				**O**
N				**N**
A				**A**
L				**L**
	Core			

Research Question 2: **How have these critical incidents impacted the social justice identity development of professional school counselors?**

Participants' emotional responses to the challenges their students and the immigrant population faced was an empathic response that was evident in each interview. Participants did not explicitly discuss empowerment, but they shared their motivations for advocating and their shared experiences of immigrating to this country as motivators for advocacy. Through their experiences they were then empowered to act. Many of the participants saw a positive increase in their relationships with their undocumented students. The most significant impact is the RCT concept of "connection" (Jordan, 2010).

Connection per Miller leads to "Five Good Things" (Jordan, 2010) which are relative to this study. "Zest," a sense of well-being, grows from a connection to others. Participants spoke of doing more now than they did before and expressed a desire to continue advocating not just for undocumented students but for all students. When discussing how they have changed as a school counselor, overall, the participants felt more aware, reflective and encouraged by their experiences. Participants maintained a positive perception of the immigrant population, which is comparable to Miller's explanation of "clarity" as a more accurate picture of self and others.

Finally, all of the participants noted the actions they have taken, their desire to do more, and the connection they made through humanizing the issue. Miller describes this as *increase*, one's ability to act and a "desire for more connection", a greater motivation for others. Based on this study RCT has a role in the counselors' social justice identity development. When coupled together, RCTs connection and *The Cycle of Liberation's* introspection is a part of a process of social justice identity development.

Relational Advocacy

Relational Advocacy is an emergent theory that connects the tenets of Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan, 2010) to the ACA Advocacy Framework (Ratts et al., 2007). The concept of this theory, that is supported by the findings, is the importance of fostering a relationship with the population the counselor is advocating for. When the counselor is empowered and empathizes with the student, the student is in turn empowered and is moved towards a place of connection through empathy. The fostered relationship is a motivator for both the counselor and student to move through the ACA Advocacy Framework. The ACA Advocacy Framework encourages the counselor to advocate with and on behalf of their client/student. Relational advocacy proposes that through a fostered relationship, mutual empathy and empowerment advocating with and on behalf of the client/student can be achieved. Future research will explore the incorporation of connection and introspection and relational advocacy.

Connection and Introspection

The participants' experiences specifically with their students led to a sense of connection, the critical incidents allowed for introspection. Liberation occurred as a result of the connection and introspection the counselors experienced. Liberated in the context of this study is an increased self-awareness, a desire to continue to advocate and a hope for change. As the counselor is liberated his or her social justice identity develops, it is a continuous and cyclical process (Harro, 2000).

The figure below is an illustration of the counselor's process towards a social justice identity. The counselor experiences a critical incident (meaningful experience). That critical incident leads to connection and introspection. The connection and introspection liberate the

counselor. Through liberation the counselor's social justice identity develops. The process is the

combination of the critical incident, connection and introspection and liberation.

Figure 5. Connection and Introspection: A Continuum of Liberation
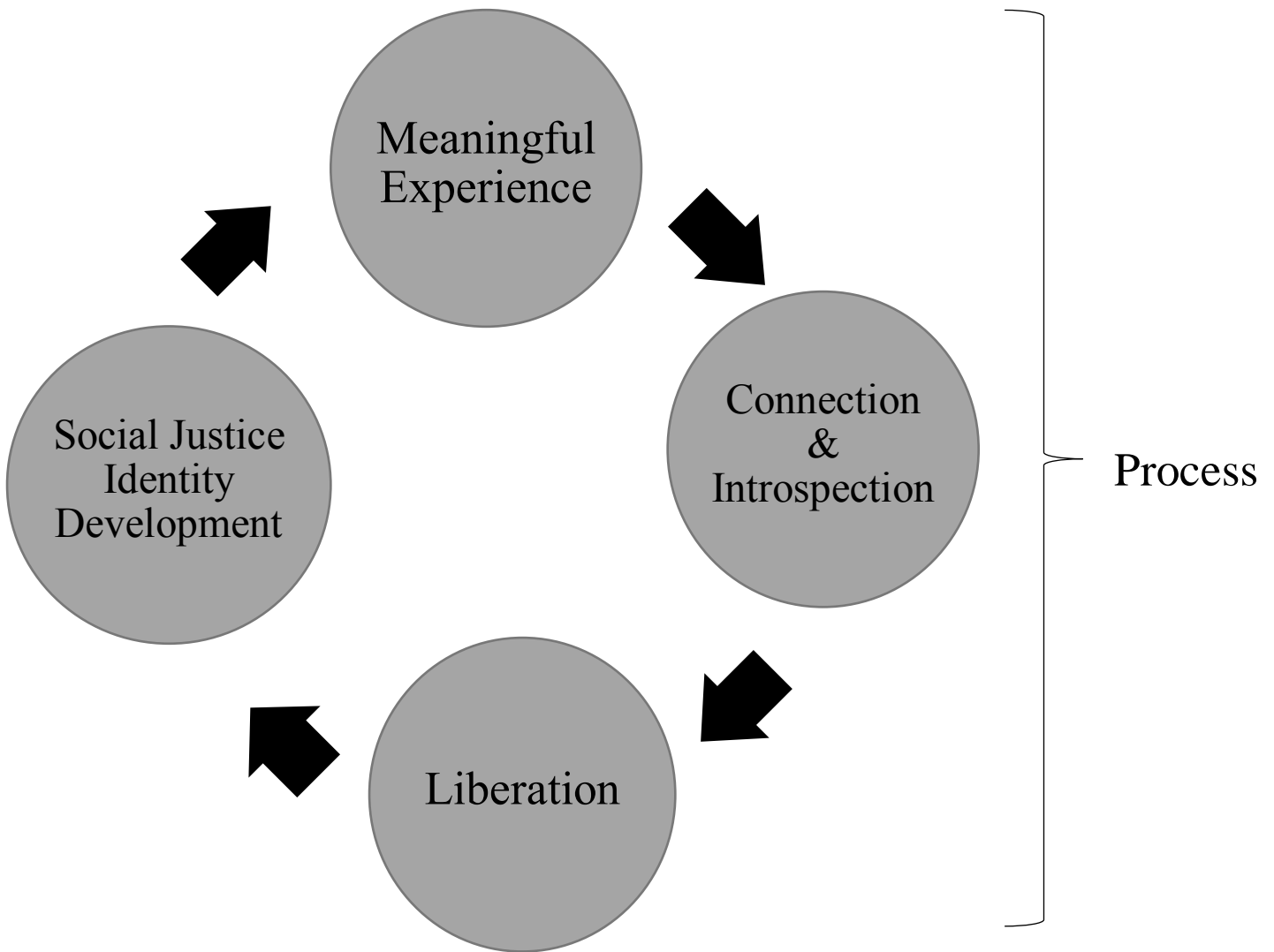
Summary

The findings of this study provide support that self-exploration, the influence of others, and prior experiences create cognitive dissonance that propels a counselor on a journey to his or her social justice identity. There are similairites to counselor identity develoment and social justice identity development that further supports the process. The counselor identity development is a cyclical process, encompassing academic and experiential learning that begins internally and expands externally. The counselors are always self-reflecting and developing (Auxier et al., 2003; Brott & Myers, 1999; Gibson et al., 2012). Social justice identity development is a continuous process that expands a lifetime. This chapter also includes limitations of the study, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Limitations

Political Climate

The political climate is a contextual factor in this study that is important to note. The data was collected following the 2016 United States presidential election. The nation was having numerous conversations on comprehensive immigration reform, the character of undocumented immigrants, a physical structure to prevent immigration to the United States and an executive order temporarily banning specific individuals from immigrating to this country. A tension in the country persisted that ignited fear in some and prompted an evaluation of our stance as counselors; anti-immigrant rhetoric and xenophobic thoughts festered. There is a possibility that collecting data following the election could hinder the number of participants in the study. It is reasonable to say that the low response rate could be a result of the recent discussions surrounding undocumented immigrants. The low response rate could also be an indicator of how few advocates there are for undocumented students.

The recent election had an impact on the responses of the participants. The participants mentioned a need for change, were fearful of what the future holds, and had a desire to continue advocating in uncertain times. One participant noted the harsh reality of her student's experience when one student wore a T-shirt to school that said, "Relax Trump, I'm legal." Another participant who is a DACA recipient expressed his personal concerns of continuing his work as a school counselor. This study includes a population that is often the topic of politically-charged conversations, and that is often disproportionally affected by the decisions of others.

Sample

As mentioned above, the number of participants was small, but the diversity of the participants provided a richness of data. It is interesting to note that the participants resided in geographical regions of high immigrant populations; participants worked in areas near poultry plants and factories that hired temporary workers. There is a possibility that the responses of participants in more southern or northern states could have been different from those in the Midwest and West.

Critical Incidents

Other limitations related to the methodology of the study are the participants' recollection of the events, inconsistencies, and memory lapses (Edvardsson, 1992; Gabbott & Hogg, 1996; Singh & Wilkes, 1996). The participants had to recall experiences of working with undocumented students. Some of the participants reflected on experiences early in their careers having worked as a school counselor for close to twenty years. There was a possibility that some of the information provided could be difficult to recall. The follow-up questions that the participants answered provided an opportunity to expand on those experiences, which minimized recall bias and allowed the participant to clarify any inconsistencies.

Implications

Implications for school counselors and counselor educators are based on the findings of this study. School counselors are encouraged to take part in professional development and workshops. It is important for counselors to be aware of the changing immigration policies at the state and federal levels. Professional development and personal and professional experience increase the counselor's awareness of the challenges undocumented students face. Counselors should create pathways for undocumented students by providing resources of support. The resources could include a financial aid workshop and navigating the college choice process as an undocumented student. In doing so counselors create safe spaces that encourage dialogues for students to feel comfortable disclosing their status. Collaboration with community stakeholders includes receiving and providing knowledge surrounding this population, as well as developing a network of support and resources.

 School counselors are also encouraged to reflect often and to increase their awareness of the systemic barriers that impact the students they serve. In doing so, the counselor is moved to a place of empathy and empowerment that fosters the relationship with the student to increase connection. The counselor who is more aware and connected to their students has the ability to recognize the barriers to the student's academic, personal/social, and college/career success. This personal reflection and growth can be done individually, as a counseling team or as a faculty/staff group will facilitate the counselor's growth as a social justice advocate.

Counselor educators are also encouraged to take part in professional development and workshops to stay abreast of the changing state and federal policies. Counselor educators should include in their curriculum assignments activities that create cognitive dissonance. Activities such as reflections, journaling over the course of a semester, or having students map out their

current journey to advocacy could spark cognitive dissonance. Such activities will facilitate dialogues to explore the social justice identities of emergent counselors. Counselor education courses should include issues related to the immigrant population and the impact systemic barriers have on the client/student. Counselor educators are further encouraged to explore their own social justice identity development to study areas of research that will impact the counseling field and greater community.

Recommendations for Future Study

The findings of this study will contribute to the development of an emergent theory, Relational Advocacy (Appendix G). Further research will explore how the two are interconnected and how relational advocacy can be incorporated into the training of counselors.

The exclusion of elementary school counselors from the study may have had little impact on the social justice identity development of school counselors. The experiences of elementary school counselors who advocate for undocumented students are worth exploring. A comparison of the social justice identity development of elementary school counselors to secondary school counselors could provide insight into what elementary counselors have experienced with undocumented students. Similarly, clinical mental health counselors and counselor educators' experiences with undocumented students can be further explored. Research on the social justice identity development of counselors is recommended. It is worth exploring the social justice identity development of counselors who advocate for other marginalized populations (ex. sexual minorities, racial/ethnic minorities, or religious minorities).

Research related to counselors' multicultural competency of undocumented students should be examined. Research addressing the challenges of undocumented immigrants is also needed with further exploration of the mental health impact of immigrating to the United States.

Research related to the experiences undocumented students had with their school counselors can provide recommendations to better serve that population. Other areas of exploration could include exploring the relational-cultural concept of connection and disconnection and how that impacted undocumented immigrants' experiences in K-12 schools and within counseling.

Researchers who intend to use the Critical Incident Technique should embrace the flexibility of the method and the opportunity for modification. The Enhanced Critical Incident technique, which includes wish lists and helping or hindering facts, could contribute to future research. The Critical Incident Technique gave the participants freedom to share their stories and reflect on their development. This technique has proven to be useful for areas of research that have not been explored in depth.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 provided a summary of the findings outlined in Chapter 4. Research question 1 was an inquiry of the participants' critical incidents. Four categories emerged: personal experience, formal education/learning, past work experience, and student impact. Research question 2 explored the impact of the critical incidents provided by participants; one central theme emerged: development through connection and introspection. Following the summary of the findings, a discussion of how the findings related to the theoretical frameworks were presented. The findings resulted in implications for school counselors and counselor educators. Recommendations for future research and limitations of the study were also addressed. The purpose of this study was to address the social justice identity development of school counselors who advocate for undocumented students. The findings of this study concluded that connection and introspection are an integral part of the process towards the counselor's social justice identity development. Finally, counselors' social justice identity is always developing.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Invitation to participate

Dear,

My name is Shekila Melchior. I am a former high school counselor. I worked in Bassett, Virginia for three years and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education program at Virginia Tech. This dissertation research study is under the advisement of Dr. Nancy Bodenhorn. I am conducting a study to increase our knowledge of the social justice identity development of Professional School Counselors at the secondary level who advocate for undocumented students. If you are a secondary School Counselor who identifies as an advocate for undocumented students, I would like to invite you to participate.

The interview is informal and will last 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded. The interview will take place in person or virtually in a space that is confidential and comfortable for you. Your participation in the study will be kept confidential and all identifying information will be removed. You can withdraw from the study at any time.

There is no compensation for this study but your participation will contribute greatly to increasing our knowledge of the school counselor's social justice identity development.

If you are interested in participate in this study, please complete the demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire should take 10-15 minutes to complete. You can access the questionnaire from the following link:
https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_e4CQOj4XtrGHNpb

At the completion of the demographic questionnaire, if you are eligible to participate in the study you will receive an email to schedule the interview.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact myself, Shekila Melchior at shekilam@vt.edu or my faculty advisor, Dr. Nancy Bodenhorn at nanboden@vt.edu.

Warm Regards,

Shekila Melchior

Appendix B

Inclusion Criteria and Demographic Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this study. Your participation is voluntary and confidential. The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete. The purpose of the demographic questionnaire is to gather information related to the dissertation study. This information will be used in the dissertation research even if you do not participate in the interview. If you do participate in the interview this information will be used in the dissertation research. If you have any questions regarding this survey or the study feel free to contact myself, Shekila Melchior (shekilam@vt.edu) or my dissertation chair, Dr. Nancy Bodenhorn (nanboden@vt.edu). Should you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Morre at moored@vt.edu. Consent to participate in this part of the study is indicated with submission of the survey.

Do you identify as a social justice advocate for undocumented students?
   ❏ Yes
   ❏ No

Name _____
Age _____
Email _____
School Name _____
Pronoun (i.e. he/she) _____
Race/Ethnicity (multiple selection)
   ❏ Black/African American
   ❏ Hispanic
   ❏ Latino/a
   ❏ Asian American
   ❏ Native American or Pacific Islander
   ❏ White or Caucasian – Non-Hispanic
   ❏ Other: _____
Gender
   ❏ Male
   ❏ Female
   ❏ Transgender man
   ❏ Transgender woman
   ❏ Non-binary (e.g. gender non-conforming, genderqueer, gender fluid)
Level of Education (earned)
   ❏ Bachelor's Degree
   ❏ Master's Degree
   ❏ Education Specialist
   ❏ PhD
Citizenship Status
   ❏ U.S. Citizen
   ❏ Naturalized Citizen
   ❏ Permanent Resident

❏ Temporary Status (i.e. work visa)
❏ Undocumented Immigrant
    DACA recipient
        ❏ Yes
        ❏ No

Number of years working as a school counselor
❏ <1
❏ 1-3
❏ 3-5
❏ 5-7
❏ 7 or more
Number of years advocating for undocumented students
❏ <1
❏ 1-3
❏ 3-5
❏ 5-7
❏ 7 or more
Estimated percentage of undocumented students in your school
❏ 0-5%
❏ 5-10%
❏ 10-15%
❏ 15-20%
❏ 20-25%
❏ 25-30%
❏ 30-35%
❏ 40-45%
❏ 50% or more
❏ Unsure
Size of school
❏ Small (<1,000)
❏ Medium (1,001 - 1,499)
❏ Large (>1,500)
School setting
❏ Rural
❏ Suburban
❏ Urban
School level
❏ Middle School
❏ High School
❏ Combined Secondary

How do you define social justice?

Why do you identify yourself as a social justice advocate?

What characteristics do you believe you possess as a social justice advocate?

What activities have you done, or are doing as a social justice advocate?

Appendix C
Informed Consent

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Principal Investigator: Shekila Melchior (Doctoral Candidate, Virginia Tech)
Advisor: Nancy Bodenhorn, Ph.D. (Associate Professor, Virginia Tech)

I. Purpose of the Research
The purpose of this study is to explore the social justice identity development of Professional School Counselors at the secondary level who advocate for undocumented students. The research study may be published and used in a dissertation.

II. Procedures
You will participate in a 60 minute in person or virtual interview following the completion of the demographic questionnaire.

III. Risks
The researcher foresees minimal risk to the participant. There are no foreseen physical risks associated with the study. The participant might experience some discomfort or negative emotions as a result of responding to questions and reflecting on previous events. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

IV. Benefits
The benefits of the study are the contributions made to the literature in social justice and advocacy for undocumented students and the social justice identity development of school counselors.

V. Anonymity and Confidentiality
As the researcher I will remove any identifying information from the study. You will have the opportunity to select a pseudonym for confidentiality. The dissertation committee, Critical Incident Technique expert, peer reviewer and myself will review the transcripts, all identifying information will be removed and only the pseudonym will be attached. The electronic transcripts will be kept on a password protected drive. Confidentiality will be broken if child abuse is suspected or the participant is a threat to themselves or someone else.

VI. Freedom to Withdraw
The participant may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants can choose to not answer questions without penalty.

VII. Participant Responsibilities
I agree to participate in this study and will complete the demographic form prior to the interview. I also agree to an in-person or virtual interview. I will respond to emails from the researcher to schedule the interview and to review the transcript, data analysis and results.

VIII. Compensation
There will be no compensation for this study.

IX. Participant Permission
I acknowledge that I have read the consent and give my voluntary consent to participate in the study. Any questions that I have were answered.

_____   _____
Participant signature   Date

If you have any questions or concerns about the study you may contact myself or my faculty
advisor,
Shekila Melchior   Nancy Bodenhorn, Ph.D.
Doctoral Candidate   Associate Professor
(336) 301-9765   (540) 231-8180
shekilam@vt.edu   nanboden@vt.edu

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research
subject, or need to report a research related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair,
Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

Appendix D

Interview Guide

<u>Introduction</u>

I want to thank you for participating in this study and taking the time to speak with me. As a former school counselor I understand that your time is valuable. Thank you for reviewing the informed consent prior to the interview, do you have any questions about the informed consent before we begin. Do you agree to participate in this study? To ensure confidentiality, please provide me a pseudonym.

Before I have you share your experiences I would like to briefly discuss your responses to the four open ended questions on the demographic questionnaire.

<u>Critical Incident questions:</u>

Please think back over the course of your personal and professional development. Share your story of how you became a social justice advocate for undocumented students.

A. Please draw your timeline of social justice identity development.

B. Identify specific experiences on your timeline that are most important to you.

1. Why is this specific experience important to you?
2. What about this experience is significant to your development as a social justice advocate?
3. What did this experience mean for you as a social justice advocate?
4. Did this experience change your perspective towards the immigrant population? How so?
5. How have your relationships with undocumented students been impacted by this event?
6. How has your practice as a school counselor changed? Overall? With specific diverse groups?

Appendix E

Follow up email

Dear,

Thank you for your participation in this study. I have attached your interview for your review should you want to provide clarification to any of the experiences you shared. I have also attached the critical incidents discussed during your interview, if you are willing would you please compare the critical incidents to your transcripts for accuracy. Please respond via email by _____. I want to thank you again for your participation in this study and your advocacy work for undocumented students.

Warm Regards,

Shekila Melchior

Appendix F

IRB Approval Letter

VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
email irb@vt.edu
website http://www.irb.vt.edu

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 3, 2016

TO: Nancy E Bodenhorn, Shekila Shemika Melchior

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)

PROTOCOL TITLE: An Exploration of the Social Justice Identity Development of Professional School Counselors Who Advocate for Undocumented Students

IRB NUMBER: 16-747

Effective November 3, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As:	**Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7**
Protocol Approval Date:	**November 3, 2016**
Protocol Expiration Date:	**November 2, 2017**
Continuing Review Due Date*:	**October 19, 2017**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

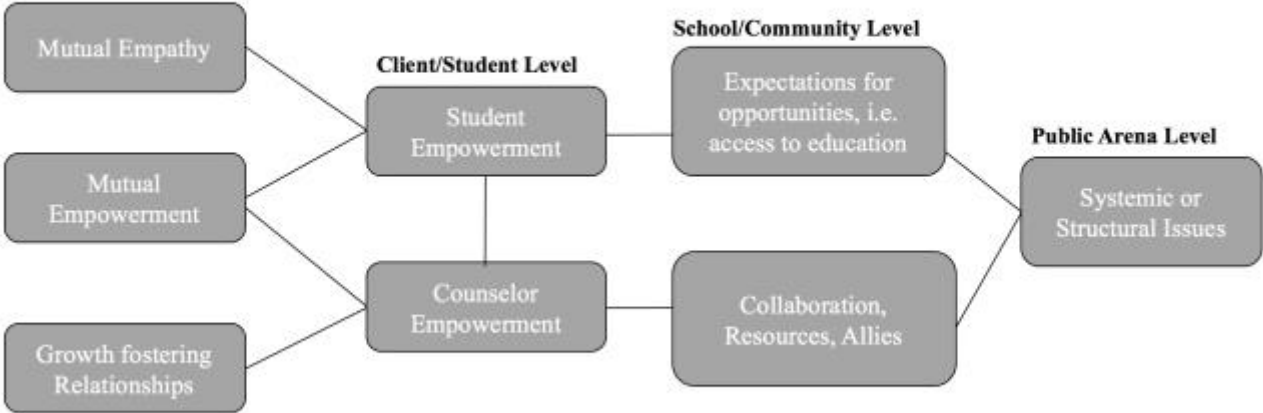**FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:**

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

Appendix G

Relational Advocacy

Melchior, 2015

Table 2. *Demographic Summary (n = 6)*

Name	Gender	Race	Level of Education Earned	Citizenship Status	School Size	School Level	Years as a School Counselor	Years advocating	Percentage of undocumented students	Geographic Location
Janie	Female	White	Master's	U.S. Citizen	Small	High School	7 or more	7 or more	10-15%	Nebraska
Katherine	Female	White	Master's	U.S. Citizen	Large	High School	1-3	<1	Unsure	Arkansas
Andrea	Female	Black	Master's	U.S. Citizen	Medium	High School	7 or more	7 or more	Unsure	Illinois
Academic Counselor	Female	Bi-racial	PhD	Naturalized Citizen	Large	High School	7 or more	1-3	40-45%	Delaware
Orange	Female	Hispanic	Master's	U.S. Citizen	Small	High School	3-5	7 or more	5-10%	California
John	Male	Hispanic	Master's	DACA recipient	Small	High School	3-5	3-5	10-15%	Nebraska