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School Counselor Multicultural Counseling Competence Assessed by State School Counselor Licensure Examinations

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Abstract

This study is the first systematic examination of how school counselor multicultural counseling competence (MCC) is addressed in state licensure examinations of school counselors. Results offer preliminary support to the notion that state licensure examinations indeed address some important aspects of MCC, as identified by Holcomb-McCoy (2004). Yet, considerable variability exists across examinations in the percentage of content devoted to these commonly addressed areas. Quantitative content analysis shows there are several important aspects of school counselor MCC that are not being tested in state examinations. Discussions and implications are provided.

Keywords: school counselor, multicultural counseling competence, state licensure examinations, quantitative content analysis

Licensure examinations for public school educators is not a new phenomenon; however, a great proliferation of state licensure examinations occurred after the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) that required states to provide assurance that public schools hire highly qualified educators (Blackford et al., 2012). State departments of education increasingly turned to these examinations as a way to assure that public school educators were at least minimally qualified for work. While the major focus during this time was on the implementation of teacher licensure examinations, several states also developed content examinations for school counselors. Researchers focusing on teacher licensure examinations have assessed the content validity, predictive validity, and utility of those exams as a policy lever to assure teacher competency (Angrist & Guryan, 2008; Berliner, 2005; Buddin & Zamarro, 2008; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Almost no research has examined these important issues related to school counselor licensure examinations (Carey et al., 2018; Rawls, 2007; Trevisan et al., 2020). A reasonable starting point for such research would be the analysis of how these examinations reflect the best thinking of the school counselor profession regarding critically important competencies for practice.

Practicing school counselors and school counselor educators have professional obligations to engage in advocacy for the profession, including encouraging the development and implementation of government policies that affect practice (Meyers et al., 2002; Oehrtman &

Dollarhide, 2021; Sweeney, 2012). State school counseling licensing and certification practices have a profound impact on school counseling because they determine who is endorsed for practice. They also influence the school counselor education curriculum by affecting the curricular decisions counselor educators need to make in program curriculum design and instructions. Professional advocacy by state organizations and individuals can influence state licensure standards for school counselors to ensure that they are aligned with the profession's training standards and that the certification and licensing processes accurately measure these competencies. School counselor competencies in essential areas, such as multicultural counseling competence, need to be accurately addressed. With the widespread and increasing use of state licensure examinations (Trevisan et al., 2020), it is important to know how current state licensure examinations address these essential multicultural counseling competencies as a foundation for professional advocacy.

Multicultural counseling competence (MCC) is defined by Sue (2001) as obtaining the awareness, knowledge, and skills to work with people of diverse backgrounds in an effective manner. Sue and colleagues (1992) developed the tripartite model of MCCs that includes three characteristics: (a) counselor awareness of own assumptions, values, and biases; (b) understanding the worldview of the culturally different client; and (c) developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques. These characteristics are organized in three dimensions: (a) attitudes and beliefs; (b) knowledge; and (c) skills (Sue et al., 1992).

The present study aims to investigate how school counselors' multicultural counseling competence is addressed in state licensure examinations. Increasingly, licensure examinations are relied upon to ensure that school counselors have the necessary knowledge and skills for effective practice (Trevisan et al., 2020). Currently, 30 states and the District of Columbia require a content examination for school counseling licensure (Carey et al., 2019). To date, only one study has examined the extent to which these examinations address critical school counselor competencies. Carey et al. (2019) conducted a content analysis of all the existing school counseling content examinations related to competencies in research and program evaluation. They found that (a) in general, state licensure examinations only cover a small amount of knowledge in research and program evaluation; and (b) great variability exists across states in the adequacy of the content

covered in these areas. According to Carey et al. (2019), passing a state licensure examination could not serve as evidence for school counselors' competence in either research or program evaluation.

Multicultural Counseling Competence in School Counseling

Given the growing diversity in schools across the United States, school counselors need to possess strong competence in working with diverse student populations (Owens et al., 2010). The School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies published by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2020) outlined the knowledge, attitudes, and skills school counselors need to have in order to meet the rigorous demands of the profession and the needs of pre-K-12 students. One of the competencies school counselors need to demonstrate is an understanding of the impact of cultural, social, and environmental influences on student success and opportunities, which directly speaks to MCC of school counselors. School counselors are expected to infuse MCC into their daily practice, such as developing and implementing a comprehensive school counseling program and align their practice to ASCA Mindset & Behaviors for Student Success in large-group, classroom, small-group, and individual settings (ASCA, 2014).

Extensive literature exists regarding school counselors' MCC, and researchers have conceptualized it as the awareness, knowledge, and skills that counselors should have in order to work effectively with diverse individuals (Sue, 2001). In response to a request from the Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD), MCC guidelines were developed to focus on counselor awareness of own cultural values and biases, counselor awareness of client's worldview, and culturally appropriate intervention strategies (Sue et al., 1992). In 2015, AMCD revised the guidelines, and now it is called the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2015). This revised framework expands the previous version of MCC to include intersectionality (an approach to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics intersect with one another and overlap; Crenshaw, 1994) and focuses on how multiple social identities are connected and thus form unique experiences (Minton, 2017).

MCC's Impacts on Students' Outcomes

School counselors play a pivotal role in shaping the climate of their schools with regard to diversity and inclusion (Minton, 2017). When school counselors are multiculturally competent, they are more prepared to appropriately identify and address the academic, cultural, and linguistic needs of culturally diverse students (Morrison & Bryan, 2014). When adopting culturally responsive school counseling programs, school counselors could improve students' academic achievement and behaviors (Betters-Burbon & Schultz, 2017; Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011), promote college and career readiness (Jones et al., 2019; Lapan et al., 2019;

Mariani et al., 2016), and enhance students' social and emotional development (Bardhoshi et al., 2018; Midgett et al., 2018; Steen et al., 2018).

Evaluation of School Counselors' MCC

A series of studies examined the competence of school counselor practitioners and school counselors-in-training in working with culturally diverse students (e.g., Bidell, 2012; Chao, 2013; Dodson, 2013; Guzman et al., 2013; Owen et al., 2010). Dodson (2013) found white school counselors reported a higher level of cultural awareness than other ethnicities, which was inconsistent with previous research (e.g., Chao, 2013; Guzman et al., 2013) that found minority school counselors scored higher in cultural awareness and knowledge. Further, Owen and colleagues (2010) found school counselors' level of cultural acceptance was related to their reported levels of competence on all three of the multicultural subscales. More specifically, counselors who had a higher level of cultural acceptance had higher levels of competence in working with students from diverse cultures (Owen et al., 2010). Also, school counselors' years of experience were a statistically significant predictor of all three MCC subscales (Terminology, Knowledge, and Awareness) in Owen et al.'s study (2010). When comparing school counselors with community mental health counselors, pre-service school counselors had significantly lower self-reported cultural competence (Bidell, 2012).

In previous studies that examined school counselors' MCC, a variety of instruments were used, for example, MCCTS-R (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001), Multicultural Counseling Inventory (Sodowsky et al., 1994), and the Cross-Cultural Counseling Inventory-Revised (CCI-R; LaFromboise et al., 1991). Among these instruments, a checklist developed and published by Holcomb-McCoy (2004) was the only one that pertained to school counseling, and it provided a comprehensive and detailed list to guide professional school counselors' multicultural development and training. The checklist includes 51 items organized along nine categories. The categories and items in the checklist were extracted through a theme analysis of the literature pertaining to multicultural issues and school counseling (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). No psychometric information was available about this checklist. Considering the close relevance of the checklist to school counselors, the present study used this checklist to evaluate the extent to which current state licensure examinations reflect school counselors' MCC.

Purpose of this Study

There exists scarce information on school counselors' licensure exams; however, state licensure exams have significant impacts on school counselors' preparation endorsement practice. The purpose of this study is to offer some preliminary findings on how MCC is addressed in state licensure examinations. The findings will also provide exploratory and descriptive results on what specific competencies are addressed in state licensure examinations

and whether the state examinations could reasonably assure school counselors have necessary competencies in this area. Specifically, this study addressed two related research questions:

1. How much of the content in state licensure examinations is related to school counselors' MCC?
2. What aspects of school counselors' MCC do available state licensure examinations assess and not assess?

Method

In this study, we employed a quantitative content analysis method defined by Berelson (1952) as "a research technique for the systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18). In particular, we followed the key steps outlined by Rose et al. (2015) for quantitative content analysis, where design begins with the identification of relevant concepts based on existing theory and prior research. These basic concepts helped to form the basis of the coding scheme and final analysis, which involved the application of quantitative techniques. In this study, we used a descriptive quantitative content analysis where only descriptive analysis (such as count, percentages, frequencies) was conducted. Specifically, in the first phase of analysis, the test objectives from all eleven existing state school counselor examinations were reviewed to determine which objectives were related to MCC. In the second phase of analysis, these MCC-related objectives were coded according to an existing checklist of essential areas of school counselor MCC (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001).

Research Team

In content analysis, bracketing is used to explain how the investigators should be aware of his or her knowledge so that it does not affect the analysis process nor the study results (Bengtsson, 2016). In the present study, both researchers have knowledge and experience in preparing school counselors for multicultural counseling competence through teaching counselor education programs and field-related research (e.g., school counselors working with diverse student populations). The first author is an Asian female faculty member in a counselor education program. The second author is a male, white professor emeritus in a school counseling research center affiliated with a university. A research assistant who is a female, white graduate student enrolled in the first author's school counseling program assisted with auditing the codes and categorizations.

Reliability Testing

In quantitative content analysis studies, an important additional step in data analysis is reliability testing (Rose et al., 2015). When more than one coder is involved, the examination of the consistency between coders is critical for reliability (Rose et al., 2015). We employed several strategies to enhance reliability throughout the coding process. The main formative strategy involved two

researchers reviewing the same text and creating codes. Discussions were based on agreement or disagreement of code creation or text categorization. We resolved disagreements before moving on to the next source material. Summative strategies involved a research assistant who did not create codes auditing the codes and categorizations. Finally, we resolved any disagreements via discussion involving the whole research team until consensus was reached. Inter-rater reliability can be measured by percentage agreement (Rose et al., 2015). The percentage agreement in this study reached 100%.

Source Materials

The state licensure examination data used in this study were the same data used in a study conducted by Carey et al. (2019) in which the following procedure was used to collect data: (a) a web search was conducted to obtain current state school counselor initial licensure information using two authoritative websites, Counseling Licensure and Certification Requirements: State Guide (Online Counseling Program, 2020) and the American School Counselors Association State Certification Requirements (ASCA, 2021); and (b) a web search was then conducted to locate the examination guides for all the eleven examinations. We examined all the licensure examinations that states are currently using.

These eleven guides were published online by either the commercial test developers (e.g., Educational Testing Service) or the state department of education (e.g., Florida State Department of Education, 2021) that required the examination. All the guides were detailed and comprehensive and included the major content domains (reflected in the examination components) and the related examination objectives. The examinations showed considerable variability in terms of total number of objectives: PRAXIS ($n = 115$), National Evaluation Series (NES) ($n = 45$), Colorado ($n = 22$), Florida ($n = 60$), Georgia ($n = 60$), Illinois ($n = 101$), Michigan ($n = 42$), Missouri ($n = 61$), Ohio ($n = 48$), Oklahoma ($n = 73$), and Texas ($n = 61$). Most guides also included information on the percentage of test items related to each major examination component.

Coding Objectives for Content Related to MCC

In phase 1, researchers reviewed all the test objectives from all eleven examinations and identified objectives that were related to MCC. Discrepancies between reviewers were resolved by discussion. In phase 2, researchers reviewed all the MCC-related objectives and coded the objectives using the checklist of 51 competencies that Holcomb-McCoy (2004) identified as necessary for school counselors to work with culturally diverse students. Again, discrepancies in coding were reviewed and resolved through discussion. Holcomb-McCoy (2004) organized the 51 competencies in the checklist into nine categories: multicultural counseling, multicultural consultation, understanding racism and student resistance, multicultural assessment, understanding racial identity development, multicultural family counseling,

social advocacy, developing school-family-community partnerships, and understanding cross-cultural interpersonal interactions. We present the findings following these nine areas.

Estimation of Percentage of Examination Content in MCC

In this study, we followed the same procedure as Carey et al. (2019) to estimate the amount of content related to MCC. Since it was not quite possible to review the examinations themselves, the researchers estimated each examination’s percentage of content related to the nine areas of MCC identified by Holcomb-McCoy (2004) based on the test objectives related to these areas. It was also assumed that the percentages of the actual examination items in these areas would correspond to the percentage of test objectives. For the eight examinations (PRAXIS, NES, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, and Texas) that have the information on the number of test items in the subsections of the examination provided by the examination guides, the researchers used this information in estimating percentages of content. For example, the Michigan guide indicated that in the Student Diversity and Assessment section of the examination, the multicultural counseling competence (first category in Holcomb-McCoy’s checklist) was mentioned twice.

This study found that 3 out of the 12 Student Diversity and Assessment section objectives (25%) reflected multicultural counseling competence. However, the Student Diversity and Assessment section is only 29% of the exam.

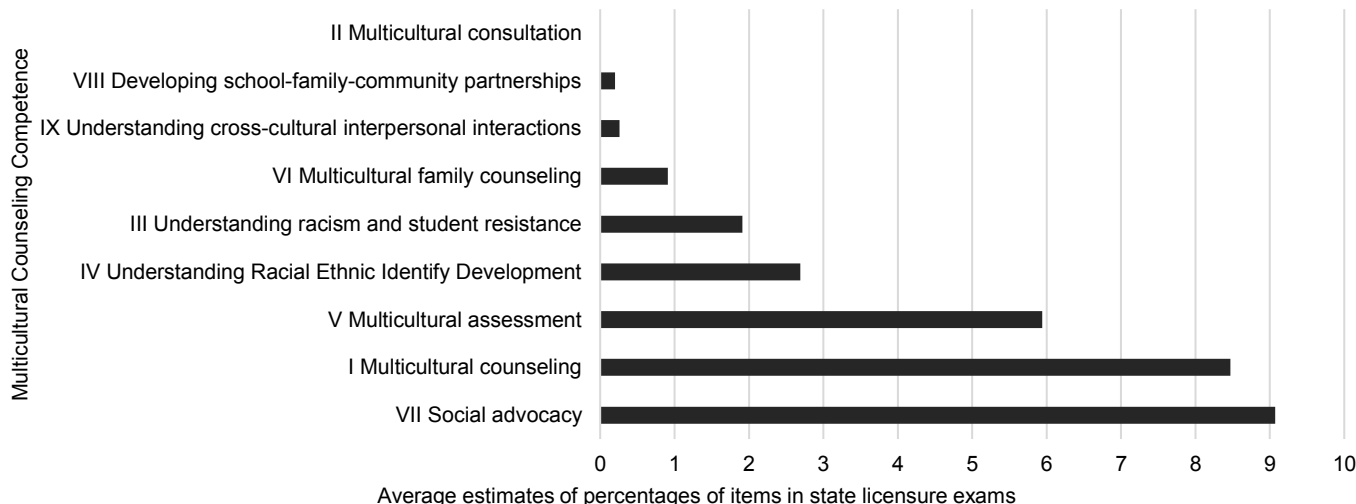
The percentage of the total objectives in the Student Diversity and Assessment section is 25% * 29% = 7.25%. In this same manner, the researchers determined the percentages of each MCC area in the Student Diversity and Assessment section and in the other two sections of the exam, summed across the three sections to estimate the total percentages for each MCC area.

For the three examination guides (Colorado, Illinois, and Oklahoma) that did not provide information on the number of items per exam section, the researchers determined the total number of test objectives associated with the nine multicultural counseling competence areas. Then, the researchers compared these to the total number of test objectives to determine estimated percentages.

Results

Research Question 1

For the first research question, we examined how much of the content in state licensure examinations is related to MCC. Table 1 summarizes the percentages of examination content (based on estimates from test objectives) related to the nine areas of multicultural competence identified by Holcomb-McCoy (2004). Of these nine areas, Social Advocacy showed the highest average estimated percentage of total examination content ($M = 9.07\%$), followed by Multicultural Counseling Competence ($M = 8.47\%$) and Multicultural Assessment ($M = 5.94\%$). The lowest average estimated percentage of the total examination content occurred in Multicultural Consultation ($M = 0\%$), followed



Note. Multicultural counseling competence in this figure are from Holcomb-McCoy’s (2004) Checklist. Permission to use the checklist was granted by ASCA, the publisher.

Figure 1
Average Estimates of Percentages of Items in State Licensing Examinations Related to Multicultural Counseling Competence across All Examinations

by Developing School-Family-Community Partnerships ($M = 0.20\%$), Understanding Cross-Cultural Interpersonal Interactions ($M = 0.26\%$), Multicultural Family Counseling ($M = 0.91\%$), Understanding Racism and Student Resistance ($M = 1.91\%$), and Understanding Racial and/or Ethnic Identity Development ($M = 2.69\%$).

Research Question 2

For the second research question, we examined what aspects of school counselors' MCC do available state licensure examinations assess and not assess. As shown in Figure 1, the following five areas of MCC are more commonly tested in the state licensure examinations: (a) social advocacy, (b) multicultural assessment, (c) multicultural counseling, (d) understanding racism and student resistance, and (e) understanding racial and/or ethnic identity development. Specifically, in the social advocacy area, ten state examinations address "I am knowledgeable of the psychological and societal issues that affect the development of ethnic minority students," eight state exams address "I intervene with students at the individual and systemic levels," seven state exams address "I perceive myself as being a social change agent (anyone who has the skill and power to stimulate, facilitate, and coordinate the change effort; Leathers et al., 2016)," and "I can discuss what it means to take an 'activist counseling' approach," and six state exams address "when counseling, I consider the psychological and societal issues that affect the development of ethnic minority students." Table 2 includes a summary of MCC covered in the 11 school counselor licensure examinations.

In the multicultural assessment area, six state exams address "I am able to use test information appropriately with culturally diverse parents" and five state exams address "I can evaluate instruments that may be biased against certain groups of students" and "I can identify whether or not the assessment process is culturally sensitive." In the multicultural counseling area, nine state exams contain "I use culturally appropriate interventions and counseling approaches (e.g., indigenous practices) with students," seven state exams contain "I can anticipate when my helping style is inappropriate for a culturally different student" and "I can recognize when my attitudes, beliefs, and values are interfering with providing the best services to my students." In the area of understanding racism and student resistance, five state exams address "I can identify racist aspects of educational institutions." In the area of understanding racial and/or ethnic identity development, four state exams address "I use racial/ethnic identity development theories to understand my students' problems and concerns."

No state exam addressed multicultural consultation competence. In addition, three other aspects of school counselors' MCC (e.g., multicultural family counseling, developing school-family-community partnerships, and understanding cross-cultural interpersonal interactions) are barely mentioned in state exams.

Furthermore, researchers found several aspects in cross-cultural school counseling work that were not identified in

Table 1
State Licensure Examination Content: Estimates of Percentages of Items Related to Multicultural Counseling Competence

Test	I. Multicultural counseling		II. Multicultural consultation		III. Understanding Racism and Student Resistance		IV. Understanding Racial and/or Ethnic Identity Development		V. Multicultural Assessment		VI. Multicultural Family Counseling		VII. Social Advocacy		VIII. Developing School-Family-Community Partnerships		IX. Understanding Cross-Cultural Interpersonal Interactions	
	4.36%	0%	0%	0%	0.38%	0%	0%	0%	4.40%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Praxis (Pearson) School Counselor Examination (NES)	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6.43%	0%	2.44%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Colorado	18.18%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13.64%	0%	27.27%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9.09%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Florida	12.51%	0%	0%	0%	0.8%	8.33%	0%	1.5%	0%	0%	0.2%	0%	1.7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Georgia	6.67%	0%	0%	0%	6.67%	6.67%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	23.33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Illinois	9.9%	0%	0%	0%	1.98%	0.99%	0%	4.95%	0%	1.96%	0%	0%	2.97%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Michigan	7.25%	0%	0%	0%	6.64%	0%	0%	21.75%	0%	0%	0%	0%	23.56%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Missouri	5.55%	0%	0%	0%	2.78%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13.89%	0%	2.22%	0%	1.11%	0%
Ohio	13.70%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8.07%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Oklahoma	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5.48%	0%	1.37%	0%	0%	4.11%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Texas	0%	0%	0%	0%	1.76%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10.59%	0%	0%	0%	1.76%	0%
Mean	8.47%	0%	0%	0%	1.91%	2.69%	0%	5.94%	0%	0.91%	0%	0%	9.07%	0%	0.20%	0%	0.26%	0%

Table 2
Multicultural Competence Contained in School Counselor Licensure Examinations

	Praxis	NES	Colorado	Florida	Georgia	Illinois	Michigan	Missouri	Ohio	Oklahoma	Texas
I. Multicultural Counseling											
1. I can recognize when my attitudes, beliefs, and values are interfering with providing the best services to my students.	x	x		x	x	x		x	x		
2. I can identify the cultural bases of my communication style.	x	x		x		x				x	
3. I can discuss how culture affects the help-seeking behaviors of students.		x	x	x		x				x	
4. I can describe the degree to which a counseling approach is culturally inappropriate for a specific student.		x					x			x	
5. I use culturally appropriate interventions and counseling approaches (e.g., indigenous practices) with students.	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x
6. I can list at least three barriers that prevent ethnic minority students from using counseling services.			x	x	x						
7. I can anticipate when my helping style is inappropriate for a culturally different student.	x	x		x		x	x	x	x		
8. I can give examples of how stereotypical beliefs about culturally different persons impact the counseling relationship.		x		x	x	x				x	
II. Multicultural Consultation:											
9. I am aware of how culture affects traditional models of consultation.											
10. I can discuss at least one model of multicultural consultation.											
11. I recognize when racial and cultural issues are impacting the consultation process.											
12. I can identify when the race and/or culture of the client is a problem for the consultee.											
13. I discuss issues related to race/ethnicity/culture during the consultation process, when applicable.											
III. Understanding Racism and Student Resistance											
14. I can define and discuss White privilege.											
15. I can discuss how I (if European American/White) am privileged based on my race.				x		x					
16. I can identify racist aspects of educational institutions.				x	x		x	x			x
17. I can define and discuss prejudice.				x							
18. I recognize and challenge colleagues about discrimination and discriminatory practices in schools.			x	x	x			x			
19. I can define and discuss racism and its impact on the counseling process.	x										
20. I can help students determine whether a problem stems from racism or biases in others.											
21. I understand the relationship between student resistance and racism.											
22. I include topics related to race and racism in my classroom guidance units.							x				
IV. Understanding Racial and/or Ethnic Identity Development											
23. I am able to discuss at least two theories of racial and/or ethnic identity development.			x	x		x					
24. I use racial/ethnic identity development theories to understand my students' problems and concerns.			x	x	x	x					
25. I have assessed my own racial/ethnic development in order to enhance my counseling.											
V. Multicultural Assessment											
26. I can discuss the potential bias of two assessment instruments frequently used in the schools.			x			x	x				
27. I can evaluate instruments that may be biased against certain groups of students.	x		x			x	x				x
28. I am able to use test information appropriately with culturally diverse parents.	x		x	x		x	x				x
29. I view myself as an advocate for fair testing and the appropriate use of testing of children from diverse backgrounds.	x		x				x				
30. I can identify whether or not the assessment process is culturally sensitive.	x		x			x	x				x
31. I can discuss how the identification of the assessment process might be biased against			x			x	x				x

Note. x = Areas addressed in state licensure test, NES = National Evaluation Series

Table 2 (Continued)
Multicultural Competence Contained in School Counselor Licensure Examinations

	Praxis	NES	Colorado	Florida	Georgia	Illinois	Michigan	Missouri	Ohio	Oklahoma	Texas
VI. Multicultural Family Counseling											
32. I can discuss family counseling from a cultural/ethnic perspective.				x		x				x	
33. I can discuss at least two ethnic group's traditional gender role expectations and rituals.						x					
34. I anticipate when my helping style is inappropriate for an ethnically different parent or guardian.											
35. I can discuss culturally diverse methods of parenting and discipline.											
VII. Social Advocacy											
36. I am knowledgeable of the psychological and societal issues that affect the development of ethnic minority students.		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
37. When counseling, I consider the psychological and societal issues that affect the development of ethnic minority students.			x		x	x	x	x			x
38. I work with families and community members in order to reintegrate them with the school.								x			
39. I can define "social change agent."								x			x
40. I perceive myself as being a "social change agent."		x			x		x	x	x	x	x
41. I can discuss what it means to take an "activist counseling" approach.		x			x		x	x	x	x	x
42. I intervene with students at the individual and systemic levels.		x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x
43. I can discuss how factors such as poverty and powerlessness have influenced the current conditions of at least two ethnic groups.			x				x	x			
VIII. Developing School-Family-Community Partnerships											
44. I have developed a school-family-community partnership team or some similar type of group that consists of community members, parents, and school personnel.					x			x			
45. I am aware of community resources that are available for students and their families.											
46. I work with community leaders and other resources in the community to assist with student (and family) concerns.					x			x			
IX. Understanding Cross-Cultural Interpersonal Interactions											
47. I am able to discuss interaction patterns that might influence ethnic minority students' perceptions of inclusion in the school community.			x								
48. I solicit feedback from students regarding my interactions with them.											
49. I verbally communicate my acceptance of culturally different students.											
50. I nonverbally communicate my acceptance of culturally different students.											
51. I am mindful of the manner in which I speak and the emotional tone of my interactions with culturally diverse students.								x			x

Note. x = Areas addressed in state licensure test, NES = National Evaluation Series

Holcomb-McCoy's checklist but were frequently addressed in state examinations. These are noted in Table 3 and include: (a) understanding diversity issues with student learning, career, personality, and behavior (addressed in seven states exams); (b) multicultural counseling related to comprehensive school counseling programs (addressed in six states exams); and (c) legislation and ethical knowledge in counseling students with special needs (addressed in five state exams).

Discussion

The present study's findings offer preliminary support to the notion that state school counseling licensure examinations indeed assess some important aspects of MCC as identified

by Holcomb-McCoy (2004). The most common aspects of MCC covered by state licensure examinations include social advocacy, multicultural assessment, and multicultural counseling, understanding racism and student resistance, and understanding racial and/or ethnic identity development. Yet, considerable variability exists across examinations in the percentage of content devoted to these commonly addressed areas. For example, the percentage of examination content related to social advocacy (the most commonly addressed aspect of MCC) ranges between 0% (PRAXIS) and 23.56% (Michigan). Similarly, the percentage of examination content related to understanding racial and/or ethnic identity development ranges between 0% (PRAXIS, NES, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Texas) and 13.64% (Colorado). This high level of variability in how

states assess aspects of MCC, suggests that despite the guidelines and positions published by ASCA (2020) and AMCD (2015), the state examinations are not based on a commonly accepted professional framework for multicultural counseling competence. This point is supported by the observation that critically important aspects of school counselors' MCC, as identified by Holcomb-McCoy (2004), are dramatically underrepresented in state examinations. For example, no state examination was found to address school counselors' competence in multicultural consultation. Only one of the 11 examinations addressed competence in establishing and maintaining multicultural family-community partnerships, which became problematic because previous research supported when school counselors served as social justice leaders, school-family-community partnerships had positive impacts on students' achievement (Bettors-Burbon & Schultz, 2017; Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011).

Finally, only two of the 11 examinations addressed understanding cross-cultural interpersonal interactions. This result helped to explain previous research that found school counselors had lower ratings on multicultural competence when being compared to mental health counselors (Bidell, 2012). It is reasonable that school counselors do not perceive themselves competent in the areas that were not even tested in their state licensure exams. If Holcomb-McCoy's (2004) taxonomy represented an accurate description of essential school counselors' MCC, state examinations failed to address the full range of these necessary competencies. These state examinations should not be expected to support valid inferences about school counselors' competence in serving students from diverse backgrounds or provide acceptable quality assurance information related to examinees' MCC.

In addition, state examinations addressed several multicultural-related school counselors' competencies that were not included in Holcomb-McCoy's (2004) taxonomy. The most noteworthy examples included understanding diversity issues related to learning, career, and personality development, implementing multicultural counseling in the context of comprehensive developmental school counseling programs, and legal and ethical issues related to counseling students with disabilities. These preliminary results again point to a lack of alignment of the examinations with a well-connoted taxonomy of school counselors' MCC. In total, the results of the present study indicate the need for the development of a comprehensive set of school counselors' MCC that can serve as the foundation for quality assurance and guide the development of the counselor education curriculum.

Implications

We have identified several important implications for future research and practice from our findings in this study. First, there is not yet a complete consensus among school counselors, school counselor educators, and state policymakers on what competencies school counselors should have to work effectively with diverse student

populations. Consequently, a complete and well-established checklist of school counselors' MCC that researchers could use to examine state licensure examinations or review the curriculum and courses of school counselor education programs does not exist. The development of such a definitive statement on school counselors' MCC is needed.

While there are several ways that this statement could be developed, the researchers suggest professional associations in conjunction with accreditation bodies take the initiative to develop taxonomy of MCC. To create a taxonomy on MCCs, diverse stakeholders (e.g., school counselor practitioners, counselor educators and researchers, and community members) could be invited to collaborate in this work. Public review and feedback would enhance the validity and utility of this taxonomy.

Second, school counseling researchers as well as school counseling practitioners should make efforts to collaborate with each other to refine and modify the existing taxonomy of school counselors' MCC initially developed by Holcomb-McCoy (2004). As pointed out in the findings of this study, there are some aspects of school counselors' MCC that are not identified in the checklist, and the researchers consider these aspects important since they are related to comprehensive school counseling programs, legislation, ethics, and student learning, personality, career and behavior issues. Considering the positive impacts of school counselors' MCC on students' outcomes in academic (Bettors-Burbon & Schultz, 2017), career and college readiness (Jones et al., 2019; Lapan et al., 2019; Mariani et al., 2016), and social/emotional development (Bardhoshi et al., 2018; Midgett et al., 2018; Steen et al., 2018), it is critical to work towards alignment by either altering examination content or expanding the taxonomy. School counselors are expected to perform in these areas using culturally responsive and appropriate interventions. A more comprehensive and complete checklist of school counselors' multicultural competence should be developed using a collaborative approach to guide both policy development and curricular decisions.

Third, school counselors and counselor educators should advocate for better licensure and quality assurance policies. Policy research is much needed in this area of study, and the results of such research could be used to initiate policy reforms at the state and national levels. Since most of the actual government policy regarding school counseling is at the state level, the researchers believe that professional advocacy efforts of school counselors through state counseling associations will be most effective toward this initiative. Here, it is important to note that requiring a licensure examination is only one of many possible policy levers that can be used to promote and assure effective practice. The recently developed Taxonomy of Policy Levers to Support High Quality School-Based Counseling (Aluede et al., 2020; Morshed & Carey, 2020) may prove very useful in guiding such professional advocacy initiatives. This taxonomy includes a comprehensive list of 25 different types of government policies that have been used to support effective school counseling practice (e.g., licensing/certifying school-based counselors; accrediting

Table 3
Multicultural Competence Aspects Addressed by State Licensure Examinations but Not Identified in Holcomb-McCoy’s Checklist

	Praxis	NES	Colorado	Florida	Georgia	Illinois	Michigan	Missouri	Ohio	Oklahoma	Texas
1. Multicultural Counseling competency in career counseling							x	x			
2. Evidence-based approach for specific student populations				x							
3. Multicultural counseling related with comprehensive school counseling programs		x		x	x			x	x		x
4. Legislation and ethical knowledge in counseling students with special needs	x			x	x			x			x
5. Use systemic interventions to close achievement gaps				x							
6. Knowing multicultural context in different school levels					x						
7. Understanding diversity issues with student learning, career, personality, behavior, etc.		x			x	x		x	x	x	x
8. Understand U.S. education system and how culture influences education practice					x						
9. Understand individual and group theories and apply them appropriately in multicultural society					x						
10. Being able to respond to student diverse needs	x				x	x					
11. Knowledge of disability and exceptionality and services needed	x					x				x	
12. Knowledge of multicultural characteristics of family						x					
13. Knowledge of multiple definitions of intelligence and instructional methods		x				x	x				
14. General knowledge of diversity and its implication for school counselor	x						x	x			x
15. Knowledge of multicultural competence and culturally responsive counseling							x				x
16. Advocacy role to ensure postsecondary goals							x		x		
17. Use research knowledge to identify achievement gaps and use assessment data to advocate for systemic change								x			
18. Reevaluate school counseling programs based on cultural trends	x								x		
19. Strategies for helping students maintain relationship with multicultural peers and cross-cultural effectiveness										x	x
20. Create inclusive learning environment								x			x

Note. x = Areas covered by that state licensure test but not identified in the checklist developed by Holcomb-McCoy (2004), NES = National Evaluation Series

school counselor training programs; and developing and disseminating resources to support effective practice). Once a comprehensive statement of competencies is developed, it would be possible to decide which levers are most appropriate for which competencies. For example, using licensure tests may be a useful mechanism to assure that entry-level counselors have the necessary knowledge while using program accreditation processes may be better matched to the assurance that prospective counselors can show good judgment based on multicultural counseling principles.

Lastly, Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited programs follow CACREP standards (2015) to prepare pre-service counselors and therefore need to align their coursework with the requirements set by CACREP. Social and cultural diversity is one of the eight core areas in CACREP Standards. However, gaps exist between

CACREP Standards in the social and cultural diversity area compared with Holcomb-McCoy’s checklist. We recommend CACREP reviews its standards based on the results of this study and Holcomb-McCoy’s checklist. It is important for school counseling programs to review their curriculum so that their students receive the most accurate training in aspects of multicultural competency of school counselors.

Limitations

The findings in our study should be interpreted with caution due to the following limitations. First, the actual state examination items are not available for researchers to access. Instead, this study used the examination objectives, assuming that the percentage of the actual examination items in a given area would correspond to the objective percentages. It is possible that our results may underestimate

or overestimate the actual examination content. Future research will need to address this issue and more precisely ascertain how state examinations address important school counseling competencies. This research will require gaining access to the actual licensure tests to perform content analyses.

Second, to examine the extent to which current state licensure examinations reflect MCC of school counselors, this study chose to use a checklist developed by Holcomb-McCoy (2004). Despite its content validity, this checklist might lack factorial validity. Therefore, it might be different if researchers choose a different competence scale (e.g., CACREP Standards; CACREP, 2015). Future researchers will need to address these issues and more precisely examine how well the state licensure examinations can address multicultural counseling competencies.

Conclusion

MCC is critical to the success of professional school counselors and is essential to ensure all students have access to comprehensive school counseling programs that address their academic, social/emotional, and career development in a culturally responsive and effective way. Yet, there exists very little information in the literature on school counselors' state licensure examinations. This study offers preliminary support to the notion that state licensure examinations indeed address some important aspects of MCC as identified by Holcomb-McCoy (2004). Yet, considerable variability exists across examinations in the percentage of content devoted to these commonly addressed areas. Quantitative content analysis shows there are several important aspects of school counselor MCC that are not being tested in state examinations. To move the school counseling profession forward, it is important to clarify state program evaluation expectations for school counseling licensure and to enhance graduate program curriculum for both masters and doctoral students. It is essential to provide professional development for practicing school counselors and counselor educators.

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