

**The Personal is Political: School Counselors' Use of
Self in Social Justice Advocacy Work**

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the aspects of “self” school counselors ($N = 16$) described as central to advocating for social justice in their school systems. Using grounded theory, this study explored racial, feminist, and advocacy identity development in relation to the personhood of the counselor, and how these elements coalesced around action for social change. Implications for school counselor advocacy, training, and research are discussed.

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Effective school advocates are essential if schools are to be a key force in breaking cycles of poverty, discrimination, and injustice in our society (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Increasingly, school counselors have been called upon to be the guardians of this vision for American public education. The American Counseling Association (ACA) Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2003), and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Model (2005) are existing professional mandates guiding school counselors to make advocacy a core part of their professional identities and activities. There has been less focus on *how* practicing school counselors engage in social justice advocacy in their school settings however (Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010). In addition, there are no studies to date of counselors' advocacy identity development, leaving several gaps in the literature of how exactly school counselors may be trained to use advocacy as a powerful force for change. Many questions about school counselor advocacy identity development therefore remain: Why do some school counselors assume the mantle of advocate?; What are the sources of this identity development?; How do school counselors leverage their identities as advocates in the change process?; What aspects of self do school counselor advocates describe as being important to their advocacy as social change agents in their school settings?

This study explored racial, feminist, and advocacy identity development in relation to the personhood of the school counselor as an advocate for social justice. By investigating the lived experiences of professional school counselors who self-identified

as advocates for social justice, this study constructed a grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) of how school counselors' use of self is central to their social justice advocacy in their school settings.

The “Use of Self” in School Counseling and Advocacy

The counseling relationship is widely accepted as the fulcrum around which change is leveraged. With the advent of humanistic and person-centered approaches to counseling, counselors were invited to incorporate aspects of their self - their authentic personalities, beliefs, emotions, and experiences - rather than just their skills and knowledge into their therapeutic relationships with clients (Rogers, 1957). The personhood of the counselor as a powerful and dynamic therapeutic force serves as the cornerstone for many counseling practices and significantly influenced interpersonal therapeutic methods. It has been argued by some theorists and practitioners that counselor use of self is the most powerful and important tool for change that the counselor possesses (Dewane, 2006; Edwards & Bess, 1998). In the realm of advocacy and social justice, use of self is argued to be a similarly important tool for change and necessary for competent cross-cultural work (Kim, 2006). The use of self related to one's professional identity has also been identified as a strategy school counselors may use to navigate politics within school environments (Lee, 1983).

The professional emphasis on school counselor advocacy has been widely supported in the literature, underscoring the pivotal role school counselors play as agents of change for social equity in schools (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). It is less clear, however, what is actually happening in school settings related to school counselor advocacy across the country. Though limited,

research has indicated that despite professional models to guide the work of school counselors, school counselors are attempting to implement programming in a variety of ways and with varying degrees of effectiveness (Scarborough & Luke, 2008). Other research has indicated that some school counselors have not actively redefined their roles as advocates despite professional mandates for advocacy (Bemak & Chung, 2005).

In a review of the literature on school counselor advocacy, no empirical studies were found that address how the personhood of school counselors impact their work as advocates. There have been studies, however, that suggest the personal characteristics of school counselors powerfully impact their professional work (Brott & Myers, 1999; Littrell & Peterson, 2001). Research has also indicated that the vision and personhood of the counselor is a more powerful factor in governing their activity than their role and function (Lewis & Borunda, 2006; Littrell & Peterson). A recent study has also indicated that for school counselors the identity of advocate plays a central role in their work as agents for social justice (Singh et al., 2010). Therefore, how and why a school counselor engages advocacy as part of professional identity is a question that continues to evolve and be critically important for the profession.

Racial Identity Development, Feminist Identity Development, and Advocacy

There has been a great deal of scholarship on racial identity development over the past several decades (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1984; Sue & Sue, 2003) and feminist identity development (Downing & Roush, 1985; McNamara & Rickard, 1989) and the process by which an individual's relative status of privilege in society is interpreted and eventually incorporated into a conceptualization of self and society. A similarity among

many theoretical models is that individuals in latter stages of development often become committed to social justice and civil rights, and become actively engaged in challenging systems of oppression and unfairness in society—they become advocates for social justice.

Empirical study focusing on racial identity and engagement in political action has been studied for the past several decades, mainly exploring African American political engagement. Early study on racial identity and activism has focused mainly on collectivist action relative to political participation and political values (Brown & Johnson, 1999; Miller, Gurin, Gurin, & Malanchuk, 1981), rather than on more individual dynamics. Thompson (1999) explored variables affecting racial identity salience and found racial identity to be related to political activism. A recent qualitative study by Ginwright (2007) suggested a reciprocal relationship between racial identity and activism. Researchers have also found connections between feminist identity and activism (Duncan, 1999; Duncan & Stewart, 2007; Zucker, 2004). For example, Duncan and Stewart (2007) found that as a personality characteristic, the connection between politics and personal identity plays a role in women's gender identity and political participation. Therefore, literature suggests a relationship between advocacy activity and racial and feminist identity development – especially as these dynamics of identity and personhood bear on the work of school counselors working as advocates. This study sought to understand this relationship further, guided by the following research question: What aspects of self do school counselor advocates describe as being important to their advocacy as social change agents in their school settings?

Method

Grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was selected for this study because it allows researchers to analyze the subjective experiences of participants. This method is a rigorous, lengthy, inductive process where researchers become heavily immersed in the data. Through a constant, recursive process of analyzing that data, researchers develop an empirically grounded theory of patterns and phenomena within complex experiences, perspectives, and observations, such as those of the school counselor advocates in this study.

Research Team

Researchers are connected to the subjects that they study. Qualitative research requires a reflexive exploration of researchers in relation to their subject and the lens through which interpretations of data are made. A team of four researchers met to discuss their assumptions and potential biases at the initiation of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and continued this reflexive dialogue during their weekly or bi-monthly meetings throughout the data collection and analysis process. Prevailing assumptions going into the study included that institutional racism and discrimination are pervasive and insidious elements in American public education. The research team members also each self-identified as being feminists and engage this philosophical and theoretical stance in their lives, research and professional work. All research team members self-identified as women (1 South Asian school counselor educator, 1 White counseling psychology doctoral student, 2 White master's community counseling students).

This study grew out of a larger qualitative research project that focused broadly on school counselors as advocates for social justice and their perspectives of their

graduate training and preparedness, resources, needs, and overall experiences as agents of change in school settings. The first phase of the project resulted in a grounded theory for the strategies that school counselors use to enact change (see Figure 1). One broad theme identified in the data was the centrality of the self or advocacy identity as an active element in the change process (Singh et al., 2010). For this study, the research team initiated a second phase of the project asking a different question of the data to further identify the aspects of self school counselor advocates describe as important in their advocacy work.

Participants

Sixteen professional school counselors were interviewed for the initial phase of this study. All of the participants self-identified as advocates for social justice and resided in the Southeastern part of the United States. Participants varied in terms of self-identified gender (12 women and 4 men), age (range = 27 – 56 years, mean age = 39), socioeconomic/ class status (5 upper middle class, 10 middle class, 1 lower middle class), training (14 school counseling Master's degrees, 2 counselor education doctoral degrees), ethnic/ cultural group (1 Asian, 4 African American, 11 Caucasian), professional setting (6 public elementary schools, 2 public middle schools, 7 public high schools, and 1 private middle school), and school counseling experience (range = 1-22 years, mean = 8.6).

Sampling

Purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to establish selection criteria for target participants. All the participants met the following criteria: (1) self-identification as advocates for social justice, (2) held a master's degree in school counseling, and (3)

had work experience in school settings. Participants were recruited via electronic flyers that were circulated to several school counseling listservs, and via personal contacts/networks of the research team. Participation in this study was voluntarily, and selected school counselors signed an informed consent form prior to being interviewed.

Participants selected or were assigned pseudonyms, which were used throughout the research process.

Instruments

Demographic questionnaire. All participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire, which inquired about age, gender, race/ ethnicity, school setting, education level, socioeconomic status, and number of years working as a school counselor post-master's degree.

Semi-structured interview. All participants also completed one semi-structured interview that was audio-taped. Interviews generally lasted between 45 to 120 minutes. Interview questions and protocols were developed by the research team based on a review of literature and the working knowledge of researchers from school settings and advocacy experiences. Research questions and interview protocols were piloted in an initial interview, with feedback from the pilot shaping subsequent interview questions and protocols. Questions were framed to be open and flexible in allowing participants to express their individual perspectives on working as school counselor advocate. Researchers used spontaneous probes and follow-up questions during interviewing to gather additional information. At the end of the interview, participants were provided an opportunity to contribute anything else they deemed relevant to the interview but had not been captured by the interview questions.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers transcribed all interviews verbatim. Data collection and analysis were simultaneously performed, each process informing the other, in a deliberate, recursive method that allows a grounded theory to emerge from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, after the first two interviews were completed and transcribed, the research team began to code and analyze the data. This data analysis, in turn, informed subsequent interviews.

Open coding. Researchers began to analyze data through an unrestricted, independent open coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this stage of the data analysis, researchers individually analyzed each line of transcript meticulously, capturing as many codes and themes as possible that are relevant to the research question. Codes represent discrete ideas, concepts, or themes. Researchers used constant comparison throughout the data analysis process in order to come to a consensus about main themes and categories that emerge, and to resolve any discrepancies about coding (Corbin & Strauss). Researchers coded two transcripts at a time and then met to compare coding and reach agreement about findings in the data. Codebooks for each participant transcript were developed to provide structure and organization to emergent themes.

Axial coding. As core themes emerged, researchers began a process of “axial coding” to create subcategories and determine the interrelationship of themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this phase of analysis, the process begins to shift from looking at concrete meaningful units of data towards focusing on the abstract relationships between concepts. Higher-level categories were created to begin to provide structure to

the emerging theoretical model of the phenomena being analyzed: the aspects of self that are important in work of school counselor advocates. Again, analysis of data engaged a deliberate recursive process. Linkages and relationships between concepts that were developed by researchers were constantly compared to both incoming codes and previous analysis so that constant, circular layers of consensual analysis informed the emerging theoretical frameworks.

Selective coding. Finally, researchers used selective coding to refine the emergent theoretical model and to develop an overarching category that encompassed the phenomena being analyzed, including all other sub-categories. Researchers developed an abstract theoretical framework that explained the phenomena being studied, and formalized the relationships between categories and concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Researchers looked for common and divergent ideas across all transcripts. Each transcript was analyzed until saturation was achieved and no new concepts are identified.

Trustworthiness of Research Process

The research team engaged in a process of constant comparison of data coding and analysis, and endeavored to achieve consensus on identified themes. Researchers were thus immersed in the data and data analysis process for a prolonged period of time, meeting weekly for over a year and a half. Researchers looked for both common and divergent concepts across transcripts at every stage of data analysis, and used negative cases analysis searching for cases other than identified themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Member checking of transcripts for participant feedback was used in the initial phase of the project, analysis of researcher reflexive journals, and peer debriefing

were also used as methods of ensuring trustworthiness. One research team member served as an internal auditor throughout the research process. The internal auditor regularly attended research meetings, reviewed data, observed constant comparison and consensual data analysis processes, and monitored the emergence of the theoretical model. Additionally, an external auditor reviewed the materials of the study (e.g., transcripts, coding schemas, reflexive journals) to build trustworthiness.

Findings

The research team found several aspects of self that are important to school counselors in their advocacy work. Three prominent elements emerged as critical to school counselors' advocacy work; these elements permeated all other aspects of self: (a) racial identity, (b) self-reflection, and (c) feminist style of work. Additionally, several facets of personhood fell into four descriptive categories: (1) personality, (2) experiences, (3) beliefs, and (4) emotions. Researchers identified a model that described the aspects of self that school counselors' use in their advocacy work (see Figure 2). The model illustrates how aspects of personhood and racial identity circulate in a self-reflective cycle. Further, the model demonstrates that this advocacy is informed by and reflective of feminist principles.

Racial Identity

Racial identity emerged as a powerful theme from the data. Each participant expressed awareness of his or her power relative to having a racial/ ethnic majority or minority status; participants described both personal and professional manifestations of this status. For example, Karl shared his frustration with his community's lack of

awareness about the issue of minority students failing to pass a graduation exam at his school:

People are looking down their nose, they don't understand—I want people to have an open mind about it, for them to get it. And that's me speaking as White majority. I see so many people in my own community who just don't get it. And, it's easy not to get it when it doesn't affect you.

Another participant, Amy, explained how her racial identity impacts the perception of her activity as an advocate in her school:

I, being a person of color... it certainly is difficult to work within a building that is mostly, Caucasian American... and to feel like you are always the one that says, "but wait, this kid of color" ... a lot of people attributed that to me being a minority. When you're sitting at a table with eight women that are all White and me, and I'm the one saying, "Are we looking at this in a different way because this kid is of a different color?" It's kind of tough to do that when you're the only person of color at the table.

Some participants also referenced identities including sexual orientation, disability, religion, and gender, and reflected upon the ways in which these identities impact their advocacy work. For example, Karl shared,

I certainly felt like an agent of social justice in that I was able to provide that for students so that they knew that they had an advocate... I obviously took a strong interest in the issues of sexual minorities, as a sexual minority myself, I relate to feeling undervalued and underrepresented, and so dealt with a lot of gay and lesbian students.

Self-Reflection

Every participant expressed a large degree of self-reflection about all aspects of their personhood, racial identity, and work as advocates. One participant, Ajax, described himself as a “reflexive practitioner,” in that he is constantly reflecting on his motives, emotions, and actions. Anna expressed that “being aware of our own belief system is key” to working as an advocate in schools. Another participant, Candy, explained her process during a complicated intervention:

Sometimes it's difficult because people will see your advocacy occasionally as punitive. They're thinking that I'm doing something mean to them, and I have to self reflect and check myself and make sure, 'ok Candy, what are your motives here?'

Feminist Style of Work

While none of the participants in this study reported subscribing to feminist theory, researchers noted that all participants' style of work adheres directly to feminist principles, specifically collaboration, giving voice, empowerment, ongoing self-examination, and consciousness raising. For example, Raven's discussion of her work as an advocate illustrates strategies of consciousness raising, giving voice, and empowerment:

We are in positions of responsibility to raise issues or to make sure that those people who don't have a voice, have a voice. For me it is very important to raise awareness. Raise awareness not only for others but also for those who have no power. To inform and raise awareness that you have a right to this, and this is what you are entitled to and how are you going to get it? Dialoguing, talking

about it, infusing it in everything that you do; your way of being as a teacher, counselor, whatever.

Personality

Twelve participants referenced their personalities as important in their work as advocates. Personality traits that were commonly described as crucial to advocacy work included proactivity, directness, patience, curiosity, tenacity, flexibility, resourcefulness, and being a challenge-seeker. Courage and willingness to take risks was another important personality characteristic that participants described as being central to their work. As Simone explained,

Anytime you are an advocate, especially in a system, a school system, you have to be prepared to be disliked and to be thought of as a rabble-rouser. Anytime you kind of head out there and go out on a limb, you make yourself vulnerable and you don't know what is going to happen.

Participants described utilizing their personalities as a tool for building relationships and raising awareness of social justice issues. Kim shared how she approaches raising difficult issues at her school:

I'm sure that there are different arguments for how that can be done, but we have to be authentic for the way we go about things. I spent forty years becoming who I am. I believe you can still be that helping, nurturing person at the same time you kick ass on issues. Because they don't even see you coming. And then you're there, and you're pointing out things...and they're not going to just cast you aside, because they like you.

Experiences

All participants shared numerous personal histories that have shaped their perspectives as advocates. Often experiences were related to exposure to diverse populations, cultures, and injustice. Ten participants also recalled significant childhood influences. Ajax shared:

A lot of my identity as an advocate came from childhood experiences. My mom and dad were very active in the community where we grew up. My mother was an educator, and dad was a minister, but also the headmaster of a private school. My father worked in the civil rights movements...I used to travel with my dad to different religious convocations and revivals and that kind of thing, and we would go to different cities, different states, and getting to know people of a variety of walks of life and variety of ethnicities and actually have those people live with us, when we would have visitors from the church, and pretty much every Sabbath we would have a different family.

Some participants also described childhood experiences of witnessing racism or oppression. Kim explained,

I grew up in small town south Georgia, and I still, that still feels like who I am, my roots still feel there. And so, I grew up and kind of came of age in the 70's and 80's there, and I think I was one of the first generations in that part of Georgia to have people of color in authority roles. But at the same time, I saw racism happening...I found I really became who I am in paradox of seeing people not liked for their race, but loving these people; they were my teachers, they were my school principal. My first school counselor was a Black woman, and I'm a school

counselor today, so I think that my strong feelings about issues of social justice came from that, uhhhh?! Kind of, don't you see you're acting one way, treating people one way, but I'm seeing they're not really that way! These are authority figures in my life. These are role models for me.

Fourteen participants reported that exposure to models of advocacy—people who were engaged in successful advocacy for themselves or others—were critically important to the development their sense of empowerment as advocates. Participants shared that modeling occurred in many different contexts, and discussed familial, community, and professional advocacy models. Participants emphasized modeling to be continually and currently important to their work. One participant, Joy&3Kids, explained what he needs to aid his work:

Show me social justice in practice. If there was a way you could go shadow someone who does this pretty well, that would be phenomenal. There's nothing that takes the place of feeling that interaction, what's going on, and getting a sense of the tension. Going to a training, like a two day seminar, and you hear all this really great stuff, but you don't know if it really works or not, but to see that in action...it's got to be somehow an experiential piece.

Further, all participants stressed that learning and growth experiences have been and continue to be important to their work. Participants described formal learning via professional literature, seminars, and conferences, but they especially emphasized learning from the experience of successes and failures of advocacy interventions in their school settings.

Beliefs

Ten participants described advocacy as a duty and a moral imperative. Often these participants explained advocacy as an instinctual way of acting in response to injustice. Seven participants described their work as advocates as a spiritual or religious calling. Maya shared,

I can remember the feeling of having that responsibility when you do have gifts, you are part of the talented tenth, you do have to speak up, and if you have it within you, from whatever spirit that comes from...Whatever that divine gift that I had at that point...And having that sense of responsibility.

Thirteen participants also expressed the belief that resistance to change is natural, inherent to the change process, and should be anticipated in the work of advocacy.

They expressed resilience in the face of obstacles to their work as advocates.

Samantha shared her way of approaching resistance as compared to some of her colleagues:

When you think about resistance, I sort of think about it almost in a kind of an Eastern way in that some school counselors really move against that resistance or are very passive to sort of fall underneath that resistance, and in both cases they are sort of immobilized. But I think my stance was always to accept that resistance somehow and to work with it.

Aligned with these ideas about resistance, participants also expressed beliefs about their limitations as advocates. Participants described knowing that they had limited amounts of time and energy and had to be realistic and efficient about where they spent their efforts. Candy explained,

I can't control other people...I think that people get so used to doing things a certain way, that it becomes normal to them and it's habit-forming. I guess that's why I say whatever I have control over, because the fact of the matter is, I don't have control over these people and their minds. Some of these women are older than I am...they don't want to change. They think that they're fine and they think what they believe is correct. So I can't use all my energy with them. I have to try to channel my energy through routes that I feel are going to be successful.

Participants expressed a sense of responsibility about their work as advocates, but also expressed that they did not feel a responsibility to engage every social justice issue in their settings.

Emotions

Participants commonly described a significant emotional component to their advocacy. Fourteen participants stated that they were passionate, enthusiastic and emotionally invested in their work as advocates. They described the excitement of seeing systems changing or students being empowered to use their voices to advocate for themselves. Karl shared his enthusiasm about his advocacy efforts in his school:

It's a place where you definitely feel like you're doing some good. When you've got a high-need, high-risk population, you always feel valued. You know, you always feel like there's something going on that you can actually have an effect on somebody's life, and I think that's what was so exciting about working in this school.

Discussion

The school counselors who participated in this study expressed their experiences of working as advocates for social justice in school settings. They described three important areas that help them to be effective agents of change in their respective school settings: self-reflection and racial identity, feminist style of work, and personhood. Participants in this study demonstrated active and ongoing self-examination related to their own status of privilege and power, and communicated its importance in shaping their activity as advocates. This finding is aligned with feminist and multicultural scholars who emphasize the critical importance of practitioners to reflect on their own positions of power relative to race, ethnicity, class, and gender in all practice settings (Brabeck & Brown, 1997; Sue & Sue, 2003). Participants in this study clearly demonstrated an intense and deliberate scrutiny of themselves, their motives, and their actions as they engaged in the work of successful advocacy. It is possible that this active self-reflection helps to mitigate the emotional exhaustion of advocacy work. Kiselica and Robinson (2001), for example, suggest that though the emotional costs of social justice activism are notable, successful activists maintain an acute sense of personal growth and satisfaction. This personal growth and satisfaction may also come from an open and purposeful stance towards self-reflection and self-exploration demonstrated by the school counselors in this study.

None of the participants explicitly identified themselves as feminist, nor did they state that they subscribed to feminist theory. Their work as advocates, however, revealed an internalization of several feminist principles including giving voice, raising students', parents', teachers', and administrators' consciousness about social injustices,

giving students the tools to create and maintain change, and engaging in ongoing self-evaluation. This finding is consistent with research that suggests that although most Americans do not identify as feminist, they often ascribe to many of the goals and core values of feminism (McCabe, 2005; Zucker, 2004). This finding suggests that it may be powerful and important to offer the participants in this study as well as other change agents the label of feminism for the style of their work as advocates. This finding also suggests that school counselor training on advocacy should address how to integrate feminist principles into training, which has been demonstrated to be powerful and effective in training counseling psychologist on advocacy (Goodman et al, 2004). The participants in this study demonstrate the integration of both multicultural and feminist principles in action.

The finding of this study that school counselors deliberately leverage aspects of self in engaging in social justice work in their schools suggests that the realm of advocacy requires the use of the advocate's personhood (e.g., personality, values, worldview) in the process of promoting change. These findings affirm the argument by several scholars that that use of self is an important tool for change and can be deliberately leveraged by professionals working in difficult school environments (Kim, 2006; Lee, 1983). These findings are also consistent with the work of Lewis and Borunda (2006) and Littrell and Peterson (2001), which proposed the centrality of a school counselor's vision and personhood to their work in schools.

One of the most prominent personality characteristics discussed by the participants of this study was courage and the ability to take risks. This finding is congruent with Bemak and Chung's (2008) suggestion that school counselors' personal

fear of being disliked or ostracized professionally is a powerful inhibiting force for engaging in advocacy in school settings. It is clear that school counselors must often act as courageous, thick-skinned trailblazers if they are to engage in confronting oppression and challenging inequities in their school settings.

The experience of many participants of witnessing or experiencing racism as pivotal in contributing to their development as advocates corresponds with scholarship on racial identity development (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1984; Sue & Sue, 2003) and feminist identity development (Downing & Roush, 1985; McNamara & Rickard, 1989). This finding lends support to models wherein experiences of oppression and diversity set a process into motion that can ultimately result in an individual's commitment to actively challenging systems of oppression.

The experiences of the school counselors in this study are consistent with the literature that supports mentoring relationships and models for professional activity for school counselors (Desmond, West & Bubbenzer, 2007). Participants emphasized that their personal development as advocates was deeply impacted by experiences with advocate models and mentoring by others engaged in initiatives of social justice. Scholars have noted that school counselors sometimes feel isolated in their work (Desmond et al.), so it is important for them to build a network of support (Paisley & McMahon, 2001) related to their social justice advocacy in school settings.

While participants in this study indicated a deep emotional connection and passion about their roles as advocates, and they also expressed a belief in their own limitations and indicated the importance of setting boundaries. They revealed an acquired awareness that they have time and energy for a limited number of issues, and

fighting injustice is not their responsibility alone. Additionally, because self-awareness is a protective factor against burnout (Lambie, 2007), it is likely that the self-reflective practices of participants in this study contribute to defending against burnout. These findings suggest school counselor advocates can be emotionally invested in their work while avoiding burnout. The findings also underscore that school counselors should be trained in burnout prevention strategies for engaging in advocacy work.

Limitations of Study and Future Research Directions

There are several limitations of this study that are important to note. First, inclusion criteria for this study required that participants identified themselves as advocates for social justice. The findings of this study might have been quite different if participants who did not self-identify as advocates were interviewed. Second, this study was a secondary analysis of previously collected data. Therefore, the research team did not have the opportunity to ask different interview questions based on identified themes. Additionally, the study's sample was comprised of three times as many women as men, and most were White, middle class school counselors residing and working in the southeastern United States. Future research should draw upon a wider and more diverse sample. The data of sixteen participants collected in this study was interpreted by the research team and emerged as a representative grounded theory of the important aspects of personhood that school counselors leverage in advocacy work. Additional research is needed to build upon this work in order to inform the development of an advocacy identity development model for school counselors. Such a model could provide important conceptual structure for training programs and practice applications.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the school counseling literature by providing insight into school counselors' advocacy identity development, which in turn, can help inform graduate programs in training effective school counselor advocates. If the U.S. educational system intends to live up to its promise of providing vital avenues of access and opportunity, school counselors must engage all the powerful tools they have to make change in their schools, including their unique personalities, experiences, values, beliefs, and emotions. As the participants in this study courageously demonstrated, the personhood of the school counselor advocate is indeed itself a powerful force for change.

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