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THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN ADVOCATING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
FOR ALL STUDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A Dissertation

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by

Amna Jaffer

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN ADVOCATING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
FOR ALL STUDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by Amna Jaffer

The field of K–12 school counseling has evolved to embrace social–emotional and mental wellness aspects of students in addition to academic and career/college readiness. Social justice advocacy has been added to the role of school counselor by professional and educational entities. What is less clear is how well-versed school counselors are in social justice advocacy competencies, whether they are equipped to lead and advocate for social justice, barriers and accomplishments in doing so, and ways in which this role may be further developed and integrated into the field of school counseling, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the research questions for this study sought perspectives of school counselors, teachers, administrators, and counselor educators to better understand the role of school counselors as social justice advocates in K–12 public schools. Utilizing the qualitative method of documentary film, 26 participants were interviewed. The result is presented in a documentary film called *Counseling for Social Justice.* Although this is an exploratory study, a number of themes have emerged suggesting that social justice advocacy is an ideal that remains to be integrated fully into practice, that school counselors interpret social justice in varied ways, and that despite best efforts of some counselors, there are impediments that must be addressed. Recommendations are suggested for ways in which school counseling may be further oriented toward social justice advocacy.

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Introduction

The aim of school counselors and school counseling programs is to advocate for all K–12 students' mental, social–emotional, and physical wellness so that students may attain their educational and career goals. However, societal inequities and disparities in the United States are mirrored in the U.S. educational system. Due to pervasive structural and systemic racism in the United States that has hindered meaningful reform in the educational system (Oakes & Lipton, 2002), there is much to be done to address existing inequities. School counselors are tasked with perceiving, identifying, and tackling educational inequities and social injustices; however, they may also face obstacles that deter them from carrying out this essential mandate. Many educational, social, and economic inequities were minimized or ignored before the COVID-19 pandemic, such as high poverty levels in immigrant families (Capps et al., 2009), persistent segregation in schools (Orfield et al., 2019), and gaps in achievement and opportunities for students of color (America's Promise Alliance, 2021; Brown et al., 2004). Such iniquities, particularly for students of color from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, were graphically exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic (Levin, 2020; Root & Simet, 2021). The pandemic has also had the effect of exacerbating existing inequities (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). The effect of COVID-19 on the lives of marginalized students and the ways in which educational institutions are approaching these students is cause for great concern.

The purpose of this exploratory documentary study was to investigate school counselors' perceptions and understanding of their role as social justice advocates and the extent to which they can execute this role, if at all. Therefore, I explored the ways in which school counselors

perceive, understand, and apply social justice competency advocacies. In this study, school counselors shared successful interventions that they had implemented to resolve educational inequities and barriers they encountered that prevented them from doing so. Through video recorded narratives from school counselors and other stakeholders, this documentary film dissertation offered a glimpse into school counselors' practice problems, applied solutions, and practical approaches.

COVID-19 Shock and Awe

In February 2020, the general public in the United States became aware of the COVID-19 virus as a global threat. On March 11, 2020, a shelter-in-place (SIP) order went into effect across most counties in California. This meant that educational institutions shut their doors to students. Initially, authorities indicated that things would go back to normal within a few weeks, and students were told to treat the school shut down as an early spring break. It became increasingly clear, however, that COVID-19 was not just a temporary nuisance, but rather would linger for the foreseeable future. K–12 administrators and educators were faced with an unprecedented situation, and with no roadmap and no time to prepare, they had to adapt as they went along. Teachers were unprepared to teach remotely or to provide online learning support (Francom et al., 2021). The infrastructure was not in place, and teachers lacked training to teach online. Educators faced many challenges, including distributing free lunches, pivoting to online instruction, providing students with academic and emotional supports, and ensuring that students had access to Wi-fi and computers.

Effect of COVID-19 on School Counseling Services

School counselors support students in academic, social–emotional, and college/career readiness domains (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2021). As part of student support services, school counselors are indispensable in high schools. They have a variety of purposes, including facilitating academic achievement, preventing truancy and increasing attendance, tending to disciplinary matters, and ensuring graduation requirements are met (ASCA, 2021; Bemak et al., 2015). They also read transcripts, help students with credit recovery, and guide students and their families through the college application process. Middle school counselors work with students to develop positive study habits, to help students manage their behavior, to support their character development, and to generate interest in a college-going culture. Although elementary school students benefit from having access to school counselors, it is only a recent and tenuous trend for elementary schools to employ school counselors. Like their older counterparts, elementary school-aged students experience food insecurity, grief, fear, and parental hardship. Providing early intervention to meet the needs of younger children is important.

During the SIP, the basic services that school counselors could provide to students were severely limited. When schools shut down, it was hard for school counselors to locate and contact students, especially those who were more vulnerable. It was a challenge for school counselors to establish communication with high-needs students and to deliver targeted resources. Students with low SES faced real consequences of the digital divide. They struggled to access technology, such as computers, tablets, or high-speed internet (Burney & Graham, 2020). Many students missed weeks or months of school, and they were unable to

keep up with their peers. They failed classes and were reported for chronic absenteeism (Jones, 2021). Access to college presentations, applications, and preparations was also heavily negatively impacted.

The field of school counseling and guidance has many facets. School counselors are tasked with implementing prevention and intervention measures with individuals and groups and creating comprehensive school counseling programs. Counselor preparation programs also must adhere to performance standards to maintain their accreditation. In California, the Pupil Personnel Services Credential authorizes four specialties including school counseling (California Education Code, 2021). The purpose of credentialing standards is to ensure consistency across the preparation of professional school counselors. Counseling and guidance professionals have increasingly recognized that it is critical for school counselors to look beyond the individual student and into their environment to seek out the root cause of barriers that students face. Having grit, good character, and resilience can only help a student so much when the cards are stacked against them.

Social Inequities and Injustices

In the United States, students' access to achievement, opportunities, and careers depends on many factors, such as their SES, gender, race/ethnicity, (dis)ability, and immigration status (America's Promise Alliance, 2021; Brown et al., 2004; Capps et al., 2009; Orfield et al., 2019). The recognition of racist practices in schools and by school personnel themselves has led to a reckoning of sorts, with Ladson-Billings (2006) arguing that school systems and school personnel are culpable for upholding systemic racism and contributing to the "education debt." The shift to actively end this tyranny has led to much research and

discourse on the essential role of school counselors and how they can advocate for social justice through systemic changes in their school systems and in the communities where their students live (Álvarez, 2019; The Education Trust, 2009).

The pandemic has both exposed and exacerbated critical systemic issues in America, such as disparities in race, substance use, poverty, and public education (Abramson, 2021; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021; Root & Simet, 2021). Communities of color and immigrants have been systematically deterred from accessing high-quality education, safe housing, healthcare, and citizenship (Burney & Graham, 2020; Czeisler et al., 2020; Equal Justice Initiative, 2018; Ford, 2020). Persons with disabilities are similarly impacted as they experience discrimination and exclusion (Mitcham et al., 2009).

Disparities continue to mount as proportionately more lives have been lost to COVID-19 in the African American, Indigenous, and Latinx communities as compared to the White community (Johnson et al., 2021). Frontline essential workers continued their jobs despite extremely stressful situations. Often, frontline essential workers were in high-risk environments where they had increased exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Their families have also been impacted. Families have experienced increasing levels of hunger, economic instability, housing insecurity, emotional distress (Lopez et al., 2021). Lines for food banks reached unseen proportions, and suicide rates are rising as COVID-19 increasingly claims more lives (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021).

In addition to facing punitive measures, students who are economically disadvantaged or lacked access to resources started falling behind in school during COVID-19, with some students experiencing school failure (Office of Civil Rights, 2021). Due to a lack of social

connections that in-person school allows for, students' feelings of isolation and their mental health needs have increased (Douglas et al., 2020). According to Smart (2021) essential workers have been unable to stay home and help their children with online classes, which leaves these students to self-monitor their learning. Parents who are not fluent in English or lack technological skills have been unable to effectively assist their children to pivot to online schooling. Furthermore, students with special needs have been severely disadvantaged by the online environment, which can require hours of sitting, being still, and focusing on a computer screen (Klass, 2020).

Public schools are a microcosm of the society at large. The way in which certain school districts (especially urban schools) are funded reflects implicit values in American culture and social fabric. Disadvantaged students experience barriers in the form of disparate consequences for truancy and problem behaviors, which can put students on the school-to-prison pipeline (National Council on Disability [NCD], 2015). Educational institutions do not value individuals with fluency in languages other than English. Instead, English language learners are penalized. They are held back from progressing when they are unable to meet expectations. The level of trauma that exists in American society is underrecognized and underestimated. Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities are more vulnerable to adverse childhood experiences and the effects of trauma due to racism, marginalization, and injustice as well as ensuing detrimental health outcomes (Sacks & Murphy, 2018).

The effects of unjust practices and systems are felt in the social, emotional, academic, career, and mental health spheres. The ensuing trauma is chronic and can have lifelong

consequences, such as decreased opportunities for upward mobility, reduced access to health care, decreased engagement from civic and community organizations, and stunted educational achievement. Simultaneously, students and their families possess a reservoir of strategies and strengths to help them in the face of adversity to survive and thrive.

School Counselors as Social Justice Advocates

School counselors have traditionally relied on in-person interactions with individual students or small groups to discuss their academic progress, classroom behavior, and coursework (Gysbers, 2010). School counselors work collaboratively with parents and teachers to empower students to make necessary changes and positive growth. However, no matter how much persistence or grit students have, if they are from a marginalized community, they have a mountain of institutionalized inequities to overcome. Helping disadvantaged students requires school counselors to be aware of social injustices and institutionalized barriers and to work to change inequitable practices in schools and communities (Lytle et al., 2018). School counselors are urged by professional counseling organizations and preparatory programs to advocate on multiple levels that include individual, school, community, and policy (ASCA, 2021).

Serious barriers exist for school counselors when they try to address the underlying factors impeding the educational success of marginalized students. Insufficient training, awareness, experience, and competence in challenging social inequities are widespread for school counselors (Fuschillo, 2018). Additionally, school counselors have found their role is misunderstood by administrators, teachers, and students. In some cases, administrative duties that are shifted onto school counselors prevent them from focusing on the preventative and

comprehensive aspects of school counseling (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). School counselors in California often have caseloads far exceeding the recommended number (Bray, 2019). They spend most of their time "putting out fires," which impedes their ability to positively impact their school's climate due to a shortage of time and resources. Consequently, marginalized students or students with high needs can get stuck in a vicious cycle when they do not get the services or resources they need until there is a crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a crisis of immense proportions, making the need for mental health services a priority for educators. This has placed added pressure on school counselors to address growing educational disparities as well as to help their students with their feelings of isolation, depression, anxiety, and general despondency. One of the biggest challenges that school counselors face in meeting this increased demand is that school counseling programs are understaffed. In California, the ratio of counselors to students in 2020–2021 was 1:572 (U.S. Department of Education et al., 2020-2021). Although this is an improvement from the previous ratio of 1:708 for the 2015–2016 academic year (Patel & Clinedinst, 2018), school counselors nonetheless find themselves addressing immediate concerns and crises. This leaves counselors with little time, resources, or support to address comprehensive, prevention-based school programming that has a lasting impact on systemic change.

As such, the research questions that emerged for this dissertation were:

Q1. What is the expected role of school counselors as advocates to address social justice issues in schools according to school counselors, teachers, administrators, and counselor educators?

Q2. How are school counselors as leaders and change agents influencing school systems to be more equitable?

Q3. What has been and should be the role of school counselors as leaders and social justice advocates during the pandemic?

Scope of the Study

I created an exploratory documentary film that consisted of interviews with school counselors, school administrators, teachers, and counselor education faculty. The study was conducted with school personnel in various school districts mainly in California. The goal was to elicit specific examples and narratives concerning the role of school counselors in addressing social justice issues. Another goal was to highlight the resources and scaffolding school counselors need to become competent and active social advocates.

Interviewees were informed about the goals of this study and were asked for their consent. They could withdraw their consent any time before the documentary was finalized. Now that the documentary is completed, it can be used in educational settings to inform, educate, and teach K–12 school personnel and policymakers. Moreover, the documentary can not only increase awareness of school counselors' roles as champions of social justice, but also increase awareness of their ethical obligation to fight for equity and social justice for all students.

Literature Review

School counselors are underutilized and undervalued by school districts as change agents for social justice. With the increased demands placed on school systems by COVID-19 and the ensuing mental health crisis, school counselors are finding their roles and identities morphing. A review of the relevant literature provided a foundation for understanding the historical and professional context of school counselors as well as for understanding the role school counselors find themselves in relative to social justice advocacy. As such, this literature review provides background on the effects of the pandemic in exacerbating inequities, perceptions of school counselors related to their role as social justice advocates and ways they impact change, needs of underresourced students (including Title 1 schools), and efforts of counselor training programs and counselor membership organizations to provide social justice competencies.

This study utilized the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory (CRT), narrative theory (NT), and the phenomenological approach (PA) to ground the research and ensuing recommendations.

Effects of COVID-19 on Students, Families, and Schools

COVID-19 has affected people around the world and produced a seismic shift in global dynamics. In the United States alone the virus claimed the lives of over 964,000 people (New York Times, 2022) and left the rest looking for a new normal at a time that continues to be volatile. SIP orders to halt the spread of COVID-19 in March 2020 turned people's lives and America's economy upside down. Businesses, restaurants, gyms, schools, movie theaters, and airplane flights were either completely shut down or had stringent capacity limitations.

The enormous repercussions on the economy, on the educational system, and on people's living conditions and quality of life has had a ripple effect on every individual. Disparities have widened, and those increasing disparities pose a danger to the healthy development of a country and its citizens (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). Although this study did not address each disparity in depth, some of the most salient disparities caused by the pandemic are reviewed in the following sections.

Increased Poverty

Researchers have warned that millions of people in the United States are becoming impoverished and food insecure as 74.7 million people have become unemployed since the COVID-19 pandemic started (Root & Simet, 2021). Low-income families have seen a rise in gun violence, and they have experienced disproportionately high COVID-19 infection rates in their communities (Levin, 2020). Because there is no national health care system in the United States, money is a major deterrent to accessing care. Using data from Human Rights Watch, Root and Simet (2021) found that Americans with the lowest SES were the most impacted by the economic disruption caused by COVID-19 (Root & Simet, 2021).

Douglas et al. (2020) stated that job loss from COVID-19 occurred due to workplace closures, workplace infections, and business closures (i.e., companies going out of business). In the first 6 months of the pandemic, 11.9 million women and nine million men experienced job loss (Smart, 2021). Additionally, women shouldered the burden of both childcare and eldercare. Women left their jobs in droves to provide childcare and to homeschool their children who were attending online school from home (Smart, 2021). The gig economy also left many workers vulnerable as they are often consultants, self-employed workers, and

others who do not receive sick leave or health insurance (Douglas et al., 2020). Middle-aged workers who lost their job may not be rehired, and certain industries such as tourism and entertainment may experience more setbacks during economic recovery than others (Douglas et al., 2020).

Job loss during the pandemic generally fell on unskilled laborers. A census from April 2020 showed that 24 million adults (11%) in the United States were food insecure. Food insecurity describes individuals who do not have enough to eat or know whether they will have enough to eat for their next meal because they do not have the money to buy food (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). Moreover, researchers have also found that families with children were more impacted by poverty. Among families with children, 14% stated that they had insufficient food in the last 7 days. Additionally, BIPOC people were twice as likely to report food insecurity and hunger as White individuals (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021).

In addition to food insecurity and job loss, 13 million renters are behind on rent, and millions more are having difficulty with mortgage payments. Renters of color are more heavily represented in this group, with nearly double the number of Black renters facing hardship with paying rent as compared to White renters (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). Root and Simet (2021) reported that six million renters and homeowners were afraid of eviction or foreclosure due to financial hardship. The resulting economic pressures associated with increased debt and unemployment are associated with an increased risk for mental health disorders, substance use, and suicidality (Fegert et al., 2020).

Increased Mental Health Crisis

Mental health is an essential component of one's overall well-being. It plays a part in educational attainment and career trajectory as well as family dynamics and social relationships. In June 2020, 40% of adults in the United States reported a mental health or substance use problem (Czeisler et al., 2020). Czeisler et al. (2020) found that Black respondents reported a higher increase of both substance use and suicidality than White and Asian respondents during COVID-19. Douglas et al. (2020) argued that social distancing measures and quarantine requirements were also associated with increased stress and adverse mental health outcomes. Contributing factors were isolation from loved ones, frustration and anger at the situation, fear of exposure to the virus, and apprehension regarding inadequate food and other supplies (Douglas et al., 2020). Families also experienced stress from being in close contact with one another for long periods of time, especially when their homes were crowded, when they lacked enough resources for everyone, or when there were instances of domestic violence or child abuse.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated that there has been a 24% increase in mental health-related ER visits by children ages 5–11 years. Youth between 12–17 years also had a 31% increase in mental health visits to the ER compared to a year ago and before the COVID-19 pandemic started (Levin, 2020). Some hospitals reported psychiatric visits showing that children were exhibiting higher levels of anxiety and depression, social isolation, family stress, emotional and/or physical abuse, and food insecurity (Brennan, 2021). According to Brennan (2021), hospitals that showed a decline in child and adolescent psychiatric visits during the pandemic were concerning as it may have indicated obstacles to

accessing mental health resources. Brennan reported that in addition to students who were feeling academically challenged experiencing mental health issues, students who were doing academically well were feeling anxious. For those students, stress stemmed from the unpredictable nature of their lives during the pandemic and losing out on celebrating meaningful milestones (Brennan, 2021).

Researchers have found that infectious disease pandemics can cause emotional distress in communities, such as "fear, nervousness, fright, excessive worry, and other anxiety and panic behavior" (Guo et al., 2021, p. 2). Using a sample from China, Guo et al. (2021) found that symptoms of distress and depression have been elevated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Higher numbers of suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 in a particular area and/or in one's network of friends and family led to elevated stress for inhabitants. Although higher educational attainment was found to be a protective factor in psychological well-being, excessive time looking at social media and reading news sources for information on COVID-19 was correlated with an increase in psychological distress (Guo et al., 2021). Psychological distress felt by families reverberates to their children. When parental resources and coping skills are limited, children can experience acute feelings of confusion, isolation, and anxiety that may lead to severe mental health issues (Fegert et al., 2020). Among high school students in Jordan, AlAzzam et al. (2021) found that the level of parent education and the challenges associated with online schooling were correlated with level of depression and anxiety in students. Higher levels of both depression and anxiety were found in female students as compared to male students (AlAzzam et al., 2021).

In addition to increases in anxiety and depression, worldwide reports indicated a rise in domestic violence and child abuse during the pandemic. This was attributed to increased stress, uncertainty, and disruption caused by (Lawson et al., 2020). Lawson et al. (2020) noted that job loss due to COVID-19 was a significant risk for increased child abuse. Child welfare agencies experienced some level of disruption in the services that they could provide, which had serious implications for vulnerable youth and their families (Fegert et al., 2020). Access to parks and play structures was restricted, forcing families with little children to stay cloistered in their homes with frustration building (Fegert et al., 2020). Furthermore, children who witness domestic violence are at increased risk for long-term mental health problems. One way to distract oneself from the hardships of life when there are few outlets is online.

Increased Time Online

During the initial phases of the pandemic, students' reliance on technology for everything from attending school to socializing with peers increased. The increased time spent online meant that children and youth spent hours looking at screens. Fegert et al. (2020) warned that the combination of quarantining, social distancing, and online browsing increased the danger of youth exploitation. Stringer (2020) asserted that some students found it hard to stay motivated and focused on schoolwork as the relationships that are built in classrooms with friends and teachers are usually what contribute to engaging students. Depersonalization was pervasive as teachers were unable to provide individualized feedback to students (Stringer, 2020). Dependence on online resources made video gaming an even more attractive way to spend time with friends and to socialize.

Prevalence of Problem Video Gaming

During the SIP, children turned to a variety of indoor activities to spend their time. Video gaming was one such activity that gained popularity. "More than eight-in-ten teens (84%) say they have a game console at home or have access to one, and 90% say they play video games on a computer, game console or cellphone" (Perrin, 2018, section 3). Video gaming was further pronounced in teenage boys, with 41% admitting to spending too much time playing video games (Perrin, 2018).

Although there are some positive effects of online video gaming, excessive play is correlated with social deficits, behavioral issues, and aggressive behaviors (De Pasquale et al., 2021). In a controversial move, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) released the 10th edition of the *International Classification of Diseases* in which gaming disorder is identified in ways that are very similar to substance use disorder. There is impairment of both control and function with gaming prioritized over other life tasks and relationships (WHO, 2018). Youth with an internet gaming disorder can exhibit irritability, compulsive behaviors, and social difficulties (De Pasquale et al., 2021). Although there are no data yet to support this, researchers expect that the increased time teenagers spent video gaming during COVID-19 as compared to before COVID-19 will lead to more gaming disorder symptoms.

Substance Use and Addiction

Using data from a June 2020 CDC survey, Abramson (2021) found that 13% of Americans reported using substances to cope with stress or emotions related to COVID-19. Substance abuse treatment decreased across all ages, while the number of opioid overdoses rose across the United States, with some states showing as much as an 18% increase

compared to pre-COVID-19 opioid-related overdoses (Abramson, 2021; Brennan, 2021). Retail and consumer data collected between April 2020 and June 2020 showed that compared to the same time period the year before, alcohol sales had increased nearly 35%, and tobacco sales were13% higher (Lee et al., 2021). During the pandemic, 12-step in-person meetings came to a halt, and although online meetings became more popular, it was questionable whether people could build communities the same way online as they could in person.

Increased Health Disparities

Physical health is a prerequisite for general well-being and happiness. Although COVID-19 has impacted the whole world, the burden has been heavier on Black and other racial/ethnic minorities (Ford, 2020). In the United States, as in other countries, the harmful effects of COVID were disproportionately felt by low SES and BIPOC individuals. Lopez et al. (2021) found that Latinx, Black, and Asian individuals had much higher rates of coronavirus infections, hospitalizations, and fatalities compared to their White counterparts. Lopez et al. (2021) and Patel et al. (2020) proposed that the reason for this higher burden was because low SES, Black, Latinx, and American Indian individuals more often live in joint families or in crowded conditions. Furthermore, they comprise a large number of the essential workers in the United States. "Poor housing conditions, limited access to personal outdoor space and overcrowding will reduce compliance with social distancing" (Patel et al., 2020). Moreover, people with lower SES tend to use public transportation more than individuals with higher SES, which additionally puts them at higher risk (Lopez et al., 2021).

Historically underrepresented communities tend to have a higher prevalence of certain diseases (e.g., diabetes, obesity, hypertension) and to have lower access to health care (Lopez

et al., 2021). The reasons for this disproportionality range from working at part-time jobs with no health insurance to avoiding the health care system due to a lack of documentation. Furthermore, the stressors associated with low SES can damage the immune system thereby making one more vulnerable to viruses (Patel et al., 2020). In addition to health, low SES can impact many other aspects of life, such as access to resources.

Digital Divide

During the shift to online school, students who had access to devices, technology, and high-speed internet had a huge advantage over those who did not. Not all students were able to pivot easily to online school. The students who struggled with the shift to online schooling were generally from low-income homes and tended to be BIPOC. The disparity in digital access was heightened during the pandemic, which Burney and Graham (2020) argued will result in the achievement gap widening between low-income school districts and their affluent neighbors. Despite districts scrambling to provide students with Google Chromebooks and to offer free or cheap connectivity, there were still students who were unable to attend online classes due to the lack of digital access (Burney & Graham, 2020). These students were set up for failure by their school district. Other issues stemming from online classes were frustration with joining classes, Wi-fi instability, and lack of teacher training for online teaching. Zoom bombing and online privacy were also associated with online school. Moreover, students learning from home alongside other siblings and working parents had to share space and resources, all of which can pose their own set of challenges.

Hate Crimes Against Asian Americans

During COVID-19, hate crimes against Asian Americans increased. The presumed origin of the virus being traced to China has led to an increase in ignorant and prejudiced behaviors. A national report by Jeung et al. (2021) based on data collected from March 2020 to February 2021 showed that incidents involving physical assault, verbal harassment, and shunning of Asian Americans in public settings had risen. The largest ethnic group reporting these incidents were Chinese people. The data also indicated that women were twice as likely to be victims of hate crimes as men (Jeung et al., 2021). Asian Americans have been the target of slurs and ethnic/racial jokes since COVID-19 began, and there has been an increase in people saying racially insensitive things about Asian Americans (Ruiz et al., 2020).

Having explored the many effects of the pandemic, what role might school counselors play in addressing these issues?

School Counselors in the School System

Historical Context of School Counselors

The profession of school counseling goes back to the early 1900s when school administrators and teachers recognized the need, as well as value, of vocational guidance. For many decades, the field was very much focused on individual counseling for personal change (Gysbers, 2010). The title of *Guidance Counselor* was used until the 1990's when the ASCA and other governing bodies elected to change it to *School Counselor* in order to better project the broad array of duties and tasks that fall under the school counselor purview (Zyromski et al., 2019). Through much debate about the primary role and duties of school counselors, the

ASCA recommended a national model in 2003. This led to the design, development, and implementation of school counseling programs across the United States (Gysbers, 2010).

School Counselors as Part of Educational Reform

The purpose of educational reform is to create equitable educational experiences and outcomes for all students in public schools. School counselors are considered an essential component of a school's support staff and are critical to supporting student success. The role school counselors might play in addressing all forms of equity (e.g., educational, financial, mental and physical, etc.) is a relatively new approach. Historically, school counselors have focused on the academic, career, and social–emotional development of the student (ASCA, 2019). The school counseling framework relied heavily on counseling individuals, working within the system, and placing the burden for a student's achievement on the student and their family. This lens has largely been devoid of recognition of structural and institutional racism in school systems. Although school counseling literature and counseling professional organizations have often stressed the role counselors might play in social justice, implementing that role in practice has proved to be challenging for school counselors.

Professional Role of School Counselors

School support staff are an essential component of every type of school, whether it is public, private, charter, or religious. School support staff are tasked with fostering trusting relationships with students, communicating with parents to elicit engagement, and promoting a positive school climate where students can learn in a safe and nurturing environment (National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments [NCSSLE], 2020). School counselors, who are part of school support staff teams, have a variety of professional roles,

tasks/competencies, and identities. Other professionals, such as nurses, school resource officers, and special education aides, are also part of student support staff (NCSSLE, 2020).

Lytle et al. (2018) argued that it is incorrect to expect that, "the work of school leaders is to manage schools, attend to the standards, and implement the policies that their states, school boards, or superintendents direct." Instead, Lytle et al. (2018) suggested that school counselors must develop the skill of inquiry to tackle significant issues and problems in schools and districts. Using inquiry as a foundational approach can help school counselors to identify practices and policies that have a deleterious effect on marginalized students and to bring about positive changes that benefit students and schools (Lytle et al., 2018).

School climate is multifaceted and includes a school's physical structures, philosophical frameworks, and disciplinary actions. A positive school climate may be attributed to the efforts of school personnel in fostering safety (NCSSLE, 2020). According to the Safe and Supportive Schools Model, a positive school climate includes three overlapping areas: engagement, environment, and safety. School administrators and national education agencies regularly evaluate school climate as a critical indicator of a school's success in fostering a conducive learning environment and developing the whole student. Moreover, a positive school climate improves student outcomes, such as attendance, achievement, and graduation.

To that end, school counselors play an essential role in student engagement, school safety, and a positive learning environment. These expectations are also part of the professional standards set by counseling professional associations (e.g., ASCA). Such organizations offer counselors opportunities for professional development. Organizations may host workshops, webinars, and trainings that members can complete to obtain

continuing education units. Professional organizations also offer access to conferences and publications. Counselors can turn to these organizations for guidance on best practices and the latest policy changes. The topics of focus are indicative of the recognized import of particular issues. In turn, professional organizations are committed to disseminating policy changes made by government entities such as the department of education. All of these have played a part in the standards set forth for professional school counselors' competencies as social justice advocates.

Every Student Succeeds Act

In December 2015, the U.S. Department of Education reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Both policies reflected an effort to create equal opportunity for all students. ESSA specifically called for the advancement of equity and protections for disadvantaged and high-need students. Yet, researchers have found that ESSA had detrimental effects on the students that the policy was supposed to protect. ESSA's emphasis on standardized testing and teacher accountability led to dubious practices when some teachers were burdened under the weight of test scores (Berliner, 2014). Certain groups were more negatively affected than others by ESSA, such as English language learners (Mitchell, 2017). Although ESSA was a good faith effort to help marginalized students, researchers have found that the competitive environment fostered by ESSA led to students who underperformed being pushed out. These kinds of practices hurt student learning. As such, national professional organizations called for ethical behavior of school personnel when supporting student competencies and success.

Social Justice Advocacy and Counseling Organizations

American Counseling Association

The American Counseling Association (ACA) traces the spirit of social justice advocacy to the beginnings of the field of counseling (ACA, 2018). Leaders in the field of counseling recognized that counselors must build competence in working with diverse clients not only on the individual level, but also on the systemic level (Ratts, 2008; Sue et al., 1992).

Counseling professionals are encouraged to address the psychological barriers and simultaneously challenge discriminatory and inequitable practices built into societal structures (ACA, 2018). In 2002, Lewis, Arnold, House, and Toporek created the *ACA Advocacy Competency Domains*, which is a model based on long-recognized multicultural competencies (Sue & Sue, 2016). The ACA Advocacy Competency Domains model was further refined in 2018. The model addresses advocating and empowering counselors not only on an individual level, but also on a school, community, and policy level. Additionally, counselor responsibilities range from collaborating with individuals to further their empowerment to intervening on behalf of clients (ACA, 2018; Ratts et al., 2007).

Ratts and Hutchins (2009) focused on the microaspects of social justice competencies and provided specific examples that counselors may use in their practice. In their study, Ratts and Hutchins asked counselors working with individuals to use a strengths-based lens to identify positive coping mechanisms and positive attributes, to assist with recognizing the effects of racist practices, and to help with building self-advocacy skills. They found that when counselors advocated on behalf of their individual clients, counselors had to navigate resources, services, and access to services that were previously unavailable to their clients.

Thus, although this kind of advocacy calls on counselors to use skills such as confrontation, building alliances, and carrying out a plan of action (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009), questions remain as to whether school counselors have the skills to engage in such advocacy.

Counselors for Social Justice

Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ) is a division of the ACA. The CSJ was created when several counselors met informally with the purpose of deepening their understanding and visibility as vehicles of social change, disseminating information for other counselors, and recognizing the legacy of the counseling profession as being dedicated to social justice (Toporek et al., 2009). The mission of the CSJ is to "promote social change through confronting oppressive systems of power and privilege that affect professional counselors and our clients and to assist in the positive change in our society through the professional development of counselors" (CSJ, 2021, We are Advocates, para.1).

American School Counselor Association

The ASCA is a national membership organization established in 1952 that consists of school counselors, counselor educators, and school counseling graduate students. School counselors are instructed to "provide leadership to create systemic change to enhance the school" (ASCA, 2016, section B.2) and to "collaborate with appropriate officials to remove barriers that may impede the effectiveness of the school or the school counseling program" (ASCA, 2016, section B.2). School counselors are to strategically utilize community resources to address unjust practices and inequity. To stay current regarding best practices in social justice advocacy, the ASCA *Ethical Standards for School Counselors* mandates that school counselors must continually engage in professional growth by interrogating their own

biases and by understanding how privilege and oppression play out, especially in marginalized segments of society (ASCA, 2016). Additionally, the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors tasked school counselors with making decisions based on disaggregated data so as to develop interventions that address educational gaps and disparities. Furthermore, counselors are to use assessments to determine efficacy of practices and to implement improvements that benefit all students (ASCA, 2016).

The ASCA *School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies* (2019) states that school counselors should "demonstrate [an] understanding of the impact of cultural, social and environmental influences on student success and opportunities" (ASCA, 2019, section B-PF 6). Moreover, school counselors are required to have the ability to recognize systemic problems and to have the skills to create systemic change by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2019). An essential component of a comprehensive school counseling program is to "identify gaps in achievement, attendance, discipline, opportunity and resources" (ASCA, 2019, section B-PA 2).

California Association of School Counselors

The mission of the California Association of School Counselors (CASC) is to advance the school counseling profession in California while keeping high standards of integrity. The mission also includes "empowering school counselors with the knowledge, skills, linkages, and resources to promote equity and access to a high-quality education for the overall success of every student in California schools" (CASC, 2020, para. 3). Through a variety of media, the CASC engages in educating school administrators about the role and responsibilities of school counselors. The CASC has outlined guidelines for best practices guidelines, has

advocated for employing school counselors in more California schools, and has encouraged the hiring of more school counselors per school to meet the recommended ratio of 1:250 (CASC, 2019).

Bearing in mind the social justice advocacies advanced by professional counseling associations, how does this trickle down to school counselor role and identity? Or does it?

School Counselors and Social Justice Advocacy

In the 1970s, school counselors joined the movement demanding that historically marginalized groups be recognized as equals and receive equal treatment. Because of this call to "action and implementation of a social justice education program within counselor education, social justice advocates and leaders in the counseling profession have taken substantial strides to integrate a social justice worldview into the counseling field and governing ethical standards" (Pignato, 2019, section 3, para. 1).

School counselors are credentialed and trained to oversee the academic, social– emotional, and career well-being of students in their schools. Given that the progress of a school and its students are interrelated, school counselors have advocated for high academic achievement for all students while nurturing the whole child (ASCA, 2019; CASC, 2019). The increasing diversity of students in the United States means that school counselors need to become well-versed in multicultural and social justice advocacies (Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015). Programming targeted at the whole school includes preventative measures, targeted interventions, and special programs as well as parent engagement and individual, group, and classroom counseling services. The careful designing and implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program has enabled school counselors to holistically

approach the educational system (ASCA, 2019; CASC, 2019; Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015).

Implementation needs to be revaluated and revised periodically. School counselors may also

serve as consultants to teachers and school administrators by providing staff training and

developmental workshops (CASC, 2019).

According to CASC, one of the nine areas that school counselors can dedicate their effort

toward is advocating for the equitable treatment of students and ensuring their access to a

quality education. School counselors are expected to use data to identify existing gaps in

achievement, resources, discipline, and attendance. School counselors create pathways for

underrepresented students to access rigorous course work and to be on track for higher

education. Furthermore, school counselors promote just and fair school policies so that

students have the same opportunities and advantages (CASC, 2019). School counselors, due

to their role in the school, have a wide perspective and can help to determine systemic

barriers for students of color and low-income students (Martin, 2002).

The following definition of social justice counseling by Sue and Sue (2016) is applicable

to school counseling:

> Social justice counseling/therapy is an active philosophy and approach aimed at
> producing conditions that allow for equal access and opportunity; reducing or
> eliminating disparities in education, healthcare, employment, and other areas that
> lower the quality of life for affected populations; encouraging mental health
> professionals to consider micro, meso, and macrolevels in the assessment,
> diagnosis, and treatment of client and client systems; and broadening the role of
> helping professional to include not only counselor/therapist but advocate,
> consultant, psychoeducator, change agent, community worker, and so on. (p. 293)

School Counselors as Social Justice Advocates

It is critical to hear from school counselors about how they perceive their role and

identity as they relate to social justice advocacy. Most often, counselors' roles in schools are

a combination of standards from professional associations, expectations from school administrators, and expectations from students.

Feldwisch and Whiston (2015) conducted a study in which 171 school counselors completed a questionnaire and two self-report advocacy measures. They found that school counselors reported moderate to high levels of social justice attitudes and beliefs. Counselors who reported higher levels also indicated that they were more engaged in social justice advocacy actions (Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015). Feldwisch and Whiston's (2015) findings showed that more education and awareness of social justice advocacies can result in increased positive action among school counselors. Moreover, in general, school counselors believe in the importance of this work, which is a critical first step (Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015).

In order to determine how school counselors can operate effectively as advocates, Betters-Bubon and Schultz (2018) investigated how action research focused on building relationships between schools, families, and communities could increase Latinx student achievement in an elementary school. The authors argued that school counselors need to develop leadership skills that can positively impact systems and communities. Schultz, a school counselor herself, started by building culturally responsive relationships with Latinx parents. She gained their trust by trusting them, listening to them, and incorporating their suggestions in her plans. She also served as a liaison between parents and teachers, and parents and administrators. After the first year, Shultz assessed the community-based homework program and made necessary modifications. Shultz demonstrated various social justice advocacy skills, such as perceiving a particular inequity, investigating the inequity

thoroughly, and creating a new vision that includes underrepresented or marginalized students (Betters-Bubon & Schultz, 2018).

Young and Bryan (2016) examined the reliability and validity of the School Counselor Leadership Survey (SCLS), which is an instrument that measures transformative school leadership. Factor analysis of the SCLS revealed five factors: interpersonal influence, systemic collaboration, resourceful problem-solving, professional efficacy, and social justice advocacy. As social justice advocates, school counselors must be willing to challenge and address existing inequities, yet barriers to accomplishing these remain (Young & Bryan, 2016).

Barriers to Counselors as Social Justice Advocates

Using the High School Longitudinal Study data, Goodman-Scott et al. (2018) investigated student-to-counselor ratios and the relationship between those ratios and student academic outcomes. Although there has been some improvement in the overall student-to-counselor ratio in the United States, on average, the ratio is nearly double the ASCA recommendation of one school counselor per 250 students (Bray, 2019). Data collected by the U.S. Department of Education et al. for 2020–2021 displayed the differences across states. Arizona was the worst off with a ratio of 716:1; Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, and California all had more than 550 students per school counselor. There were only four states/territories that fell below the ASCA recommended ratio of 250:1, including New Hampshire, Vermont, the Bureau of Indian Education, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. All other states were above the recommended ratio but less than Arizona, Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, and California (U.S. Department of Education et al., 2020–2021).

Fuschillo (2019) highlighted the problems students encounter caused by a lack of sufficient school counselors. Many high school students do not receive guidance pertaining to cultivating a college-going culture and the college admission process, including selecting which colleges to apply to and securing financial aid or a scholarship. Students experience this lack of resources and opportunities because there are an insufficient number of counselors to provide the needed guidance. Furthermore, Fuschillo (2019) argued that despite the school counselor role including the social–emotional health of students, only a small percentage of children who have mental health needs actually get the help they need due to counselors' high caseloads (Fuschillo, 2019).

Even though the ASCA promotes a comprehensive school counseling program to meet the dynamic needs of students, many school counselors have yet to access such programs and therefore implementation has only occurred so far in select schools and districts. School counselors are challenged by more demands, and a high counselor-to-student ratio is a barrier to counselors being able to focus on systemic and institutional inequities. Moreover, counselors are frequently assigned administrative duties that are not in the purview of their profession (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). This prevents them from being able to fully execute the duties and standards that are espoused by ASCA, ACA, and CSJ. The dearth of time and resources experienced by school counselors while also being told that they are ethically, morally, and professionally bound to recognize and actively work against inequities experienced by students and their families, leads to school counselors experiencing frustration and burnout.

Counselor advocacy has been met with resistance or even outright negativity (Álvarez, 2019; Bemak & Chung, 2005). Because advocating means not accepting the status quo, counselors challenge teachers and administrators in their treatment of students. Institutional policies need to be scrutinized so that the past is not repeated. Bemak and Chung (2005) also pointed out that because new counselors come into a school system where their professional role is already prescribed, they may become victims of institutionalized racism or inequities. To avoid this, counselors must proactively question their job description and add the role of student advocate to their responsibilities (Bemak & Chung, 2005). This is hard given that school counselors have little to no administrative authority, and they are expected to act as bridge-builders and as team players (Bemak & Chung, 2005).

Systems Change Agents

Janson (2009) conducted a Q study to find out how school counselors practice leadership in schools and their perspectives on their role as leaders. Janson (2009) categorized leadership qualities into four categories: self-focused and reflective exemplar, ancillary school counseling program manager, engaging systems change agent, and empathic resource broker (Janson, 2009). The factor engaging systems change agent contributes the most to the role of change agents for social justice. Some counseling strategies most aligned with this factor include looking at the whole school system rather than focusing on individuals and challenging the status quo. However, this factor does not capture the focus on the routines and procedures related to counseling duties (Janson, 2009).

Joseph et al. (2015) identified a number of ways that school counselors can be effective change agents for students from low-income families. Such strategies included creating

strategic connections with various school personnel to help build a school climate where students are cared for, nurtured, and supported in culturally relevant ways. Simultaneously, school counselors have an ethical imperative to seek out professional development opportunities so as to stay aware of implicit and explicit biases they may have toward social class and other factors (Joseph et al., 2015). Joseph et al. (2015) highlighted that using data to show school administrators where there are gaps and what is or is not working is an essential part of the school counselor domain. School counselors are responsible for strategically designing and implementing a comprehensive guidance curriculum that encourages all students to achieve at high levels, uncover barriers, find community-based solutions, and identify life and career goals (Joseph et al., 2015). The school counselor is also responsible for identifying student assets and community resources and finding ways in which these can be accessed and maximized. Furthermore, counselors are tasked with teaching life skills to students and providing in-class instruction (Joseph et al., 2015).

The National Center for Transforming School Counseling (NCTSC) promoted a new vision of school counseling in which school counselors advocate for educational equity, access to a rigorous college and career-readiness curriculum, and academic success for all students. According to the NCTSC, school counselors must advocate assertively for marginalized students and focus their attention on closing the achievement gap for students (The Educational Trust, 2009). Students are the target population and, as such, the most important stakeholder. It is important for them to also have a voice and to be heard.

Students' Perceptions of School Counselors

Joseph et al. (2015) gained significant feedback from interviewing low-income middle school students ages 12–13 years. Students were asked to share their perspectives on what school counselors could do to increase achievement for low-income students. Joseph et al. (2015) generated three main categories based on the perspectives shared. Students perceived the role of counselors to include building meaningful relationships, building on the cultural wealth of students, and providing mental health services in schools.

Davison et al. (1999) conducted focus groups with Latinx youth ages 16–24 years. Using three targeted questions, Davison et al. (1999) identified the many ways in which students felt that school personnel had failed them. This process helped to outline the expectations and requirements that students have for school counselors. "In addition to the counseling, consulting, and coordinating functions counselors typically undertake, the liaison role organizes home and community resources not usually found in traditional guidance programs" (Davison et al., 1999, p. 471). The liaison role includes having a holistic awareness of students and a deep understanding of cultural differences between the school and students' home life and creating bridges between the two (Davison et al., 1999).

Davison et al. (1999) further recommended that school counselors set up clear structures and policies that consider students' financial responsibilities, migrant patterns, and bilingual needs. Additionally, school counselors should review outcomes of interventions provided to students, to stop students from being "facilitate[d] out," and to present beneficial options to students for the short- and long-term (Davison et al., 1999).

Inequities School Counselors Disrupt as Social Justice Advocates

Although the COVID-19 pandemic brought into focus unjust and inequitable practices in public schools, these have long been in existence. Orfield et al. (2019) found that schools where minority students are segregated based on race and income have tripled in the last 30 years and that students in these schools are mainly from low-income families. Orfield et al. (2019) further stated that segregation has a negative impact on academic achievement, college success, and employment opportunities for students of color. The detrimental effects of segregation on students are long term.

It is warranted that school counselors focus their attention on students for whom schools have been the least successful—low-income students and students of color. Counselors must concentrate on issues, strategies, and interventions that will help to close the achievement gap between these students and their more advantaged peers (Álvarez, 2019; Davison et al., 1999). School counselors are accountable and should measure their success by demonstrating how their activities contribute to increasing the number of students who complete school and who are academically prepared for postsecondary options, including college (The Educational Trust, 2009).

An example of how school counselors can intervene in the school-to-prison pipeline is to improve counselors' understanding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Additionally, counselors need to "assist students with disabilities and their families in securing services and providing oversight to the delivery of services" (NCD, 2015, p.6). Students with disabilities are a special group that relies heavily on counselor advocacy. Mitcham et al. (2009) argued that school counselors should advocate for students with

disabilities the same as they advocate for other marginalized groups. "Studies show that up to 85 percent of youth in juvenile detention facilities have disabilities that make them eligible for special education services, yet only 37 percent receive these services while in school" (NCD, 2015, p.5). The NCD (2015) report elucidated the plight of students with disabilities who are denied equal access to educational opportunities and resources either due to the absence of protective policies or due to the failure to follow set policies. These students are more likely to get suspended or expelled, which leads to other behavioral issues. Suspension or expulsion puts students with disabilities at a higher risk of entering the juvenile justice system and the school-to-prison pipeline. Students with disabilities who are also students of color face disproportionate barriers to educational attainment, which also heightens the risk of incarceration (NCD, 2015).

School counseling practices need to be inclusive and proactive, and champion equity and advancement for all students. School counselors are the ones who educate individuals in the school and community by conducting outreach, providing consultation, and protecting vulnerable students from educational neglect (Mitcham et al., 2009).

Educational Inequity

Schools across the United States do not have fairly distributed resources. Schools in low SES areas are poorly funded and generally do not have the same level of technology, resources, programs, and opportunities that more affluent schools do (Álvarez, 2019).

Inequitably distributed resources are a social injustice and one that school counselors are expected to challenge and change. Despite graduation rates around the United States at an all-time high of 85% in 2018, students of color, English language learners, low-income and

homeless students, and special education students graduated at lower rates (America's Promise Alliance, 2021). Low-income students and students of color have lower academic achievement and higher drop-out rates than their White, non-Hispanic counterparts (Martin, 2002).

Oakes and Lipton (2002) noted that the need for equity in educational reform meets several forms of resistance because it delineates the need to remove tracking processes from schools, abolish policies that enhance segregation, and redistribute per-pupil spending. The conflict that arises due to advancing equity is political because it has been "a form of social conflict rooted in group differences over values about using public resources to meet private needs" (Wirt & Kirst, 2009). Fearing the deleterious effects of a high-pressure accountability system with emphasis on achievement on those students who are English language learners, poor, or immigrant, the Educational Trust took decisive action. Along with MetLife, The Educational Trust created the NCTSC with the following mission:

> The National Center for Transforming School Counseling promotes a new vision of school counseling in which school counselors advocate for educational equity, access to a rigorous college and career-readiness curriculum, and academic success for all students. Our mission is to transform school counselors into powerful agents of change in schools to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement for low-income students and students of color. (The Educational Trust, 2009, Mission Statement section)

There are many facets that comprise educational inequity, and each is discussed in the following sections.

The Achievement Gap

Annamma et al. (2014) argued that focusing on the achievement gap (i.e., when students do not perform to the level of expectation that is set out for them) can be misleading as there

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are many reasons for the existing achievement gap, with inequitable disciplinary practices being a large part of it. "We agree that lower achievement for certain racial groups can be connected not only to racial disproportionality in discipline, but also to special education and juvenile justice assignment" (Annamma et al., 2014, p. 54). Ladson-Billings (2006) reframed the achievement gap, calling it the educational debt. The achievement gap has not only become common parlance in educational settings, but it has also been explained using a deficit lens and/or by blaming families, teachers, or the curriculum. "I am arguing that the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society have created an education debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 5).

Attendance

Attendance is necessary for student learning and academic success. Students who miss a certain amount of instruction in school are classified as truants, chronic truants, or habitual truants (California Department of Education, 2020). In such cases, there are consequences for students and their families in an effort to remediate the situation. Such consequences can start with a letter sent to the parents and can escalate into a school attendance review board meeting. If a student's attendance pattern does not change, then students may be fined, suspended, or prosecuted (California Department of Education, 2020). Often truancy is the result of familial, societal, medical, and environmental dynamics. School counselors who are aware of these factors can offer strategic support and resources to the student and their family. Additionally, counselors can be vigilant by monitoring consequences doled out to truant students to ensure that such consequences are fair across the school or district and that no group gets singled out for harsher treatment than others.

Discipline

Discipline in schools is used as a method to manage classrooms, to keep students within acceptable societal and school norms, and to discourage disruptive behaviors (e.g., violence, bullying). Annamma et al. (2014) pointed out that the labeling of students as "disruptive" and "disabled" are often the first seemingly innocuous steps in setting students on their way into the school-to-prison pipeline. Annamma et al. (2014) found evidence that "race is salient in decisions of who, how, and when to discipline a student" (Annamma et al., 2014, p. 59).

Economic Inequity

In the 2018–2019 school year, there were 271,520 homeless children and youth enrolled in California public schools (National Center for Homeless Education [NCHE], 2021). According to the 2018 Census, 11.9% of all people in California were below the poverty line, and 1.5 million K–12 students experienced homelessness in the United States (NCHE, 2021). The McKinney-Vento Act, last reauthorized in 2015, provided federal and state leadership to enable district liaisons to identify children and youth experiencing homelessness and to provide them with support and resources (National Center for Homeless Education, 2021).

Capps et al. (2009) found that children from immigrant families face higher poverty rates, more developmental issues, and more language barriers as well as having less income and increased food insecurity as compared to children from nonimmigrant parents. Joseph et al. (2015) identified several ways that school counselors can be effective change agents, especially for students from low-income families. School counselors must strategically connect with various school personnel to help build a school climate where students are cared for, nurtured, and supported in culturally relevant ways. Simultaneously, there is an ethical

imperative for school counselors to seek out professional development opportunities in order to stay aware of implicit and explicit biases they may have toward social class and other factors (Joseph et al., 2015).

Joseph et al. (2015) highlighted that an essential part of the counselor domain is to use data to show school administrators where there are gaps as well as what is or is not working. Counselors are responsible for strategically designing and implementing a comprehensive guidance curriculum that encourages all students to achieve at high levels, uncover barriers, find community-based solutions, and identify life and career goals (Joseph et al., 2015). The counselor is also responsible for identifying and recognizing student assets and community resources and for finding ways in which these can be accessed and maximized (Joseph et al., 2015). Joseph et al. (2015) also reported that counselors are the ones who teach life skills in small groups and lead in-class instruction.

Racial Inequity

It is necessary to consider gaps and inequities in achievement, attendance, discipline, and resources among underperforming and disadvantaged students. California has the highest population of segregated Latinx students, with 58% of Latinx students attending intensely segregated schools and the typical Latinx student attending a school with only 15% White classmates (Orfield et al., 2019). African American students are both misrepresented and overrepresented in the students with disabilities group. Furthermore, they are overrepresented in the students with disabilities population in the juvenile justice system (NCD, 2015).

Annamma et al. (2014) conducted a mixed method study in which they found that when African American girls were referred to the school office for unruly and disruptive behaviors,

they tended to be punished more harshly than their White counterparts. The authors suggested that training is necessary for teachers to become aware of the historical context of their students and how the coping skills that are embedded in these students' behaviors are seen as defiant, disruptive, and disobedient (Annamma et al., 2014). Title 1 schools have higher numbers of underresourced students and marginalized communities as compared to non-Title 1 schools.

School Counseling in Urban Title I Schools

School funding varies by district and depends on the location of the school. There are vast differences in resources and programming available in well-resourced schools versus underresourced schools. Urban and inner-city schools serve a very different student demographic as compared to suburban schools. Urban schools have a bigger concentration of immigrant students, Latinx students, and Black students (Glass, 2008). Urban schools in city centers are "ghettoized" and have more students who are affected by poverty (Berliner, 2014). Brown et al. (2004) compared high-performing middle schools in suburban areas to low-performing middle schools in urban areas and found a 400-point difference in test scores. They examined contrasts between the two types of schools regarding teacher efficacy, curriculum design, leadership, and stakeholder expectations (Brown et al., 2004). Because SES, student ethnicity and race, and school location are all factors that impact variance, Brown et al. (2004) concluded that educational reforms need to be customized for each school in order to get the desired results of increasing academic achievement and more. "Above all, we need administrators, teachers and staff who share a long-range commitment,

dedication, and preparation to working with children in urban settings for high levels of academic achievement" (Brown et al., 2004, p. 452).

Title I schools are supported by federal funds that were first authorized by the ESEA and then reauthorized in ESSA as the Title I Program (California Department of Education, 2020). Title I programs were designed to support and improve academic achievement for disadvantaged students (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Local education agencies that encompass schools that have a need for comprehensive and targeted improvement are given financial awards. These are schools that have been identified as having 40% or more of their students coming from low-income families (California Department of Education, 2020).

The goal of Title 1 programming is to ensure that schools with disadvantaged or underserved students receive the support and resources that they need so their students can perform on par with peers from other schools and achieve equitable outcomes. In order for school counselors to engage in social justice advocacy and to produce positive changes in a Title 1 school (or any school), they need to be prepared well with adequate educational and professional development.

School Counselor Education and Professional Development in Relation to Social Justice

To practice in schools, school counselors must have a master's degree in school/educational counseling and guidance, meet the requirements for licensure/certification, and uphold professional and ethical standards set out by ASCA. Individuals are prohibited from becoming school counselors if they do not have a master's degree, if they have a previous legal record that prohibits them from obtaining a clear credential, or if they fail their background check/fingerprinting. School counselors must also

meet district requirements because they work closely with students and work privately with them in enclosed offices.

Steele (2011) found that both counselor educators and counseling students agree that social justice competencies are essential and that counselors should receive instruction on those competencies to some degree. However, Steele argued that there has not been enough emphasis placed on skills and behaviors related to social justice in the curriculum. Participants in Steele's study indicated that their confidence in implementing social justice competencies decreased as they moved from individual counseling to advocating on a policy or community level. Racial background and age were also found to influence the level of importance one attached to social justice competencies (Steele, 2011). Nevertheless, all counseling candidates are expected to meet specific standards.

School Counselor Credentialing Standards

The program standards for credentials in Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) were revised in 2019 by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Due to COVID-19, the adoption of the new standards was deferred to 2022–2023 (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2020). A vision was set forth that explicitly called on school counselor educators to provide their PPS candidates with:

> Opportunities to develop an understanding regarding issues of discrimination, implicit bias, social justice, diversity, and knowledge of how they may contribute to, or detract from, school success. PPS candidates learn how a positive school culture and climate can enhance the safety and well-being of all students. (Educator Preparation Committee, 2019, p. EPC 4E-4)

In the revised draft of the PPS Standards, the Educator Preparation Committee (2019) delineated 11 areas of competency in leadership and advocacy in social justice, equity, and

access that PPS candidates are expected to develop. These standards encompass multicultural and social justice competencies with marginalized populations; demonstrating leadership and advocacy as systems change agents; critically considering school, district, state, and federal policies; addressing oppressive structures, beliefs, and laws; and protecting all those students who are vulnerable (Educator Preparation Committee, 2019).

Counselor Training Programs

Sue and Sue (2016) argued that graduate training programs tend to focus on developing individual intervention skills while neglecting a systemic approach to prevention and intervention. Whereas counselors have traditionally been trained to see individual students in an office setting, when counselors work with minority and marginalized families, they may have to leave their office and become involved in neighborhoods and communities so as to actively understand different worldviews (Sue & Sue, 2016).

To provide mechanisms for multicultural understanding to counselors-in-training (CIT), counselor educators need to build on both didactic and experiential pedagogies and to expand how they immerse, expose, and use service learning for CIT in cross-cultural exchanges. These less utilized pedagogies are more likely to help counselors develop skills in social justice advocacy, social-justice-based interventions, and cultural competence (Killian & Floren, 2020). Killian and Floren (2020) argued that counselor educators have yet to embrace updated multicultural competencies. They suggested that counselor educators need to not only teach their CIT about knowledge, skills, and awareness, but to also teach their CIT to use a wider perspective that includes societal, cultural, economic, and racial dynamics in order to understand intersectionality and identities (Killian & Floren, 2020). As such,

counselor education programs may need to revisit their curriculum to consciously integrate social justice and cultural competencies to meet present needs of students. Pedagogical development will ensure that CIT are prepared to implement social-justice-based interventions and multicultural competencies.

Context for the Study

The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC, 2020) stated that close to half of California's school children live at or near the poverty line. PPIC (2020) researchers further argued that the situation for these children would be dire if Calfresh and other social services agencies were unavailable. Schools, therefore, need to provide free lunches and better programming and services to school populations hardest hit by poverty. Residential areas with larger numbers of low-income students tend to have underresourced schools, but school personnel are often unable to raise funds for those districts. Many parents in those districts are blue-collar workers who struggle with language barriers, have low education levels, and work multiple jobs. These parents do not have the means to support programming at their children's school, even though it directly benefits the students. The students who live in poor and underresourced homes are most likely to attend underresourced schools such that they experience a lack of equity in resources, opportunities, and achievements. Furthermore, underresourced schools have trouble retaining teachers over time and hiring trained and professional staff. Schools in low-income areas may also have difficulty maintaining safe school grounds, affording extracurricular activities, and providing comprehensive school counseling programs.

As shown throughout the literature review, school counselors are uniquely positioned to address the inequities and injustices that students face. Their role includes building trust and rapport with students, advocating for the rights and needs of the student, empowering students to have their own voice, and providing students with a basic understanding of careers and college application processes. Additionally, the ASCA (2022) recognizes that school counselors are systems change agents who do and must do much-needed equity work so that all students have a fair chance to achieve and access opportunities.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this dissertation was based on CRT, NT, and the PA. These three theories were specifically selected to create a framework so that actions, behaviors, and policies were looked at from a racialized perspective. Additionally, the essential nature of storytelling was established through NT, and the mechanics of meaningful change were understood within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory, which originated from the critical legal studies movement, was introduced to the education field by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). CRT places racism as well as White supremacy as the accepted norm in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT is positioned as a vehicle for the "deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power" (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In the last 20 years, scholars across all levels of education have utilized CRT as a critical tool to understand and frame/reframe the

experiences of historically underrepresented individuals and communities (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015).

Learning of racialized experiences through storytelling and the narratives of BIPOC individuals is an essential component of CRT (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Dixson and Anderson (2018) noted the shortcomings of CRT and offered a rationale for the use of CRT that is particularly applicable in education settings. The reasons for using CRT as an educational framework include that racial inequities stem from a competitive-based system of achievement where Whiteness is perpetuated as normative, historical contexts and relationships between old patterns and present day-practices must be understood, race intersects with other aspects of identity, and racial inequities must be challenged and changed and not merely brought into awareness (Dixson & Anderson, 2018).

Narrative Theory and Research

In narrative theory, the narrative is both the vehicle to gather information and the main source of data. It is a form of multilevel communication that moves from a participant or teller to the public (Herman et al., 2012). Goodson (2012) argued that narrative is not only what defines people as human, but it is also what contributes to people's humanity. Although school counselors' voices and stories are minimally represented in the research literature, their experiences deserve exploration to understand the profession of school counseling and school counselor perceptions.

Goodson (2012) noted that the way in which one frames a story is indicative of the teller's social construct, historical and cultural context, and patterns of social relations. Goodson (2012) explained how personal narratives redirect or interpret bureaucratic

initiatives. Given that the ACA and ASCA have laid out advocacy frameworks and competency standards for counselors, collecting narratives from school counselors will clarify how they translate those frameworks and standards into action.

Narrative research is a methodology that collects stories from individuals. Those stories may come from a researcher's own experience, or they may come from a researcher retelling someone else's story in a specific way (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Goodson (2012) warned that narrative research has become more individualized, and there is not enough focus on directing narratives toward understanding larger social constructs and political contexts. This was instructive to note so that the stories elicited from school counselors were viewed both as personal stories and as commentaries on the sociopolitical environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Phenomenological Approach

The phenomenological approach involves describing the experiences of individuals about a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Guillen (2019) further explicates that the phenomenological approach is the study of an individual's life experiences about a particular event, from their unique lens. All the individuals in this study were impacted by COVID-19 and described their experiences in the light of this global phenomenon.

In the next chapter, the study methodology, participants, and the use of an exploratory documentary to collect and analyze data are presented.

Methodology

An exploratory documentary film method was used to report the findings of this qualitative inquiry. A documentary film was produced consisting of personal interviews that were recorded on a camcorder or using the Zoom application. Structured interviews based on the central research questions were held with four main groups of participants: school counselors, other school personnel (e.g., administrators and teachers), counselor educator faculty, and persons who were recognized as leaders in the professional counseling field due to their position in national/local organizations or as book authors. Selected school counselors and other school personnel from a variety of school districts located primarily in California were invited to participate in the study.

Restatement of the Problem

The aim of school counselors and school counseling is to advocate for all K–12 students' mental, social–emotional, and physical wellness so they may attain their educational and career goals. More recently, social justice has also become a concern to school counselors. Yet, despite the efforts of school counselors, inequities in education and in society continue to grow. Due to pervasive structural and systemic racism in the United States, much work needs to be done to address this issue. Although school counselors are tasked with perceiving, identifying, and tackling educational inequities and social injustices, they face a number of obstacles that deter them from this essential mandate. One result has been that during the COVID-19 pandemic, educational, social, and economic inequities have become magnified and continue to worsen. The effect of the pandemic on the lives of marginalized

students and the ways in which educational institutions, specifically school counselors, are addressing students' needs is worthy of attention.

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided this investigation.

Q1. What is the expected role of school counselors as advocates to address social justice issues in schools according to school counselors, teachers, administrators, and counselor educators?

Q2. How are school counselors as leaders and change agents influencing school systems to be more equitable?

Q3. What has been and should be the role of school counselors as leaders and social justice advocates during the pandemic?

The Exploratory Documentary as Qualitative Research Methodology

This qualitative inquiry sought to understand, explore, and expose the cognitive landscape of the school counselors' approach to their work as social justice advocates. It also investigated the actions taken or not taken in the interest of K–12 public school students in primarily urban districts in the San Francisco Bay Area in California. The research questions deepened and became more targeted as the interviews with participants progressed. New themes emerged that were not fully considered when the research started. For example, for school counselors who were implementing or attempting to implement social justice practices, participant interviews revealed practices that helped to increase awareness of specific situations, challenges, and successes. Now that the documentary film is available on

YouTube, it can be used to inform the broader public about the advocacy role of school counselors and the importance of social justice advocacy competencies.

The documentary and video analysis method has been recognized as a rigorous method in qualitative research (visual and video ethnography) since the 1960s when it was first developed in Germany. The method has been applied across a range of topics in the education field and in other fields (Bohnsack et al., 2010; Fitzgerald & Lowe, 2020). The documentary method, also known as filmmaking research or video screen production research, has gained popularity in the last 10 years (Fitzgerald & Lowe, 2020).

The documentary method used in this study highlighted the subjectivist nature of the research and the data collected (Trautrims et al., 2012). The lens used by participants, how they processed interview questions, how they recalled their experiences, and how they processed their memories and knowledge was captured in the documentary. Trautrims et al. (2012) pointed out that the documentary method is part of the social constructivist tradition, which addresses how knowledge is built by interpreting experiences and looking for emerging themes and patterns. An advantage of using the documentary method is that it incorporates subjective interpretation, and the theoretical knowledge formed through data analysis can possibly be applied in other settings (Trautrims et al., 2012).

Fitzgerald and Lowe (2020) established the documentary method as a rigorous research methodology by elaborating on how the method fulfills the qualitative research criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1989). According to Fitzgerald and Lowe (2020), the documentary method has the potential to meet the *credibility* criteria through (a) prolonged engagement with participants due to

interviewing, editing, and analysis of data and (b) persistent observation as afforded by multiple viewings of recorded footage. *Transferability* occurs as viewers relate to the experiences of the participants and vicariously experience participants' feelings, thus leading them to form new thoughts and ideas about the subject matter and how it may apply to their own lives. *Dependability* can be claimed if the rationale for the decisions made in video recording, editing, and narrating, as well as the final product, are consistent and logical (Fitzgerald & Lowe, 2020). Fitzgerald and Lowe (2020) pointed out that *confirmability* is the easiest to establish when using the documentary method because the data, as well as the interpretation of the data, are confirmed when viewers see the participants speaking in the documentary. The authenticity criteria in qualitative research, such as fairness authenticity, ontological authenticity, and educational authenticity, can also be satisfied by the documentary method (Fitzgerald & Lowe, 2020).

Kemmitt (2007) extolled the use of the documentary as more than truth-telling—to Kemmitt, it is a form of social change. Kemmitt (2007) argued that human fascination with storytelling is engaged by presenting facts and simultaneously providing a view into the feelings of the participants. This was one of the main reasons for using the documentary method in this research. As the documentary and outcomes will be publicly available and shared with leaders in the counseling and education fields, there is potential for the documentary to influence social change in a positive direction.

Sampling Procedure

A purposeful sampling strategy was utilized for participant recruitment. Purposeful sampling reflects how sites and participants were chosen because they were more likely to

add meaningful perspectives to the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Patton (1990) identified several ways to use purposeful sampling. One of Patton's (1990) methods, called maximum variation samples, addresses differences in participant characteristics. In my study, participants were recruited based on their varied backgrounds (e.g., role at the school site, grade level, experiences, ethnicity, cultural background). Letters of invitation were sent to 65 individuals asking them to participate in this research between August and December of 2021 (see Appendix A). The letters were sent via email, text message, and LinkedIn. Individuals who met the study criteria were identified for recruitment through:

- recommendations from university colleagues, school counselor colleagues, participants, and dissertation committee members;

- researcher familiarity with counselors and administrators in Santa Clara County schools;

- researcher knowledge of expert counselor education faculty at San José State University;

- searching through identified schools' website staff directories to identify school counselors;

- contact with experts in the field that the researcher met during meetings and conferences held by national and local school counseling associations; and

- searching political titles such as governor of California and California State Superintendent of Public Education.

The interview dates were scheduled, and participants met at an agreed upon location. Location options included schools where permission was granted to conduct the study, public

libraries, and San José State University. No incentives were offered for participation. A Google calendar invite was set up, and a consent form was sent through Docusign (see Appendix B).

Twenty-four individuals were interviewed either via face-to-face at a location of their choice or via Zoom video conference. Interviews were 30–45 minutes in length. Interviews stopped when no new information or insights were being elicited from participants that would have informed the themes or further addressed the research questions.

Emergent Research Design

Qualitative research design continues to evolve in terms of its methodology and procedures as the researcher learns from the research experience itself and gains insights from participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hatch, 2002). I first started out intending for participants to come from two specific urban school districts in San José; one was a K–8 district, and the other was a high school district. However, I soon realized that I needed to broaden my research design to include other school districts in order to include more diverse perspectives and experiences. Because this was an exploratory study, it made sense to cast a wider net than I had previously considered. Additionally, as I interviewed participants, they sometimes recommended that I contact a particular professional or that I consider an angle that I had not previously considered. I discussed broadening the scope of the sample with members of my dissertation committee, and together we decided to include school personnel from a variety of counties and school districts and other professionals from local and state counseling organizations.

The research questions had initially included parents of K–12 students in order to understand their perceptions of school counselors and of school counselors as social justice advocates. However, the institutional review board stipulated that I could not reach out to parents and that I could only invite them to participate if they contacted me. With limited access to parents and especially with the complications related to the COVID-19 pandemic, I decided to exclude parents from the study.

Participants

There were three primary groups of participants in this study: (a) K–12 school personnel, (b) counselor educator faculty, and (c) leaders from the school counseling field. The K–12 school personnel group included professional school counselors, teachers, and administrators from seven school districts and one charter school, all of which were located in California. Counselor education faculty from San José State University and John Hopkins University were invited to participate so they could provide insight into the degree to which school counseling candidates were being offered educational preparation as social justice advocates. Finally, experts in the counseling field who authored *Interrupting Racism: Equity and Social Justice in School Counseling* were invited to participate over video conference. Each author was interviewed individually. Other experts who were interviewed included the executive director of the ASCA, the 2022 counselor of the year, and a prominent member of the CASC. Table 1 presents a list of participants, their position/title, and their institutional affiliation. As can be seen in Table 1, participants came from a range of geographic locations and a range of school sizes.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Participant ID	Interview date	Position/title	Filming location/ method	School district/ institution	School information/demographics
1	08/12/21	Director/principal	School campus/ face-to-face	A	Location: Independent public school in Santa Clara County, CA
2	08/12/21	Youth mentor	School campus/ face-to-face		
3	08/12/21	After school program staff	School campus/ face-to-face		Grades: 5–8
4	12/08/21	7th-grade math teacher	School campus/ face-to-face		Enrollment: 267 students
5	12/08/21	8th-grade English teacher	School campus/ face-to-face		Student demographics: 91.4% are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 54.3% are English language learners
6	12/08/21	Director of special education	School campus/ face-to-face		
7	09/07/21 & 11/11/21	Director of social–emotional learning	SJSU campus/ face-to-face	B	Location: Santa Clara County, CA Grades: P–8
8	09/21/21	Coordinator of mental wellness support services	SJSU campus/ face-to-face		Enrollment: 8,710 students Student demographics: 82.1% are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 36.3% are English language learners
9	09/08/21	Professor	SJSU campus/ face-to-face	C	Counselor Education Department at San Jose State University
10	10/15/21	Assistant professor	Zoom Video Conference		
11	09/30/21	Associate dean for diversity and faculty development	Zoom Video Conference	D	John Hopkins University, School of Education
12	10/12/21	High school counselor	School campus/ face-to-face	E	Location: Santa Clara County, CA
13	11/09/21	School counselor/ instructional service team coordinator	School campus/ face-to-face		Grades: 9–12 Enrollment: 22,576 students
14	11/11/21	School counselor	SJSU campus/ face-to-face		Student demographics: 49.4% are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 15.7% are English language learners
15	11/12/21	High school counselor	Zoom Video Conference		
16	11/03/21	School counselor	SJSU campus/ face-to-face		

17	11/18/21	Middle school counselor	Zoom Video Conference	F	Location: Santa Clara County, CA
18	11/08/21	School counselor	SJSU campus/ face-to-face		Grades: K–Adult Enrollment: 15,306 students Student demographics: 37.2% are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 24.2% are English language learners
19	12/02/21	School counselor	Milpitas Public Library	G	Location: Santa Clara County, CA Grades: K–Adult Enrollment: 10,308 students Student demographics: 31.2% are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 27.2% are English language learners
20	11/18/21	Middle school counselor	Fremont Public Library	H	Location: Alameda County, CA Grades: P–Adult Enrollment: 35,046 students Student demographics: 20% are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 12.6% are English language learners
21	12/22/21	7th grade English teacher	School campus/ face-to-face		
22	11/28/21	District school counselor leader	Zoom Video Conference	I	Location: Cary, NC Grades: K–12 Enrollment: 157,673 students Student demographics: 43,892 are socioeconomically disadvantaged and 18,463 are English language learners
23	12/06/21	High school counselor	Zoom Video Conference	J	Location: Rockland, MD Grades: P–12 Enrollment: 162,680 students
24	12/15/21	Executive director	Zoom Video Conference	K	American School Counselor Association
25	01/18/22	Lead counselor at middle school & district school counselor coordinator. CASC by-laws committee chair	Zoom Video Conference	L	Location: Livingston, CA Grades: 6–8 Enrollment: 790 students Student demographics: 84.30% are Hispanic, 86.46% are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 30.63% are English language learners
26	01/29/22	Coordinator of college and career readiness	Zoom Video Conference	M	Location: Orange County, CA Grades: K–12 Enrollment: 45,000 students Student demographics: 87% are low-income, 45% are English language learners

The Personal Interview

Freebody (2003) considered the interview to be the most straightforward way of collecting information from participants because it reflects their different ways of thinking, and it distinguishes between different levels of human and cultural development. Interviews are a dynamic way of gathering a person's viewpoint because the person can expand on the reasons why they choose to answer in a particular way at a particular moment. In this study, interviews provided the opportunity for the researcher to ask participants about their cause or explanation behind a direct answer to a question. At times, what was underlying an answer was as or more important than the answer itself. Through the personal interviews, I gathered specific and idiosyncratic insights about the topic, and I noted participants' emotions as they received the questions and verbalized their answers based on their knowledge and experience.

Fowler (2013) pointed out that the interview method can be very time-consuming and costly, and it requires the interviewer to be trained and prepared. However, Fowler (2013) also noted that interviewing is one of the few methods that allows researchers to probe for more information or to seek clarity regarding any confusing responses. Additionally, the interviewer and respondent can build a relationship of trust and rapport with each other through the interview process. Verbal cues (e.g., pauses, sighs, decibels) and nonverbal cues (e.g., physical gestures) enriched verbal responses. The interviewer used clues to probe and obtain a multidimensional picture in order to deepen the interviewer's understanding of the interviewees' experiences as well as the meaning the interviewees give to their experience (Fowler, 2013; Seidman, 2006).

My first task during the interviews was to introduce myself and ensure that participants felt comfortable with the process. I asked if there was anything on the consent form (see Appendix B) they wanted to go over or had questions about. Then, I explained how interviews would be recorded, and I let them know that they could skip any question or restate their answer if they were unsatisfied with their initial response. In a few instances, participants who wanted to know how I was defining social justice were provided with the operational definition of social justice that was utilized in this dissertation. Please see Appendix C for interview scripts.

The Structured Interview

Before data collection began, I developed a structured interview protocol that had specific questions for the different groups. Each set of questions stemmed directly from the central research questions. Table 2 presents questions for school counselors, Table 3 presents questions for other school personnel (e.g., administrators, teachers), and Table 4 presents questions for counselor educator faculty. Further probing and requests for examples followed in some cases. During the last third of the data collection process, I started to ask more targeted questions based on the participants' roles and experiences. The structured interview questions still served as a guide; however, I increasingly became more attuned to the individual participants, and I worded their questions in ways that were more natural or relevant to the situation. All interviews ended by asking participants to add anything else about the topic of school counselors and the practice of social justice advocacy. Most participants took this opportunity to add a last thought or message and what they shared was generally salient. Lastly, participants were offered an opportunity to debrief, to ask any

questions about the process itself, and to provide feedback on the interview and interview

questions.

Table 2.
Questions for School Counselors

Role of the school counselor	Leadership opportunities for school counselors to be a change agent	Pandemic response	School counselors as social justice advocates
Describe your role as a social justice advocate. Give an example of a time you advocated for a student or family.	What ways have you been a leader as a change agent at your school?	Describe ways in which responsibilities in your daily activities will change or increase as a result of the pandemic?	What have been your opportunities and successes in advocating for social justice? Describe some specific situations where you needed to advocate for students, how you did that, and why that was important for you and for you to do?
How do you think you are perceived by other school personnel and by students?	What kinds of leadership opportunities are you presented with?	How have the needs of students changed during the pandemic?	Describe the barriers you encountered advocating when advocating for social justice for students and families?

Table 3.
Questions for School Personnel

Role of the school counselor	Leadership opportunities for school counselors	Pandemic response	School counselors as social justice advocates
Describe how school counselors are advocates for students and families in your school?	Describe ways in which PSCs have been leaders or taken leadership roles at your school site	How has the pandemic impacted the role of the PSC?	What part does advocating for equity play in the PSC role?
What do you think is the role of school counselors as an advocate in your school?	To better support school counselors as leaders and social justice advocates, what additional support might they need?	Describe ways in which counselor responsibilities in their daily activities may change or increase as a result of the pandemic.	What is the importance of a PSC advocating for equity?
		What do you expect will need to be done differently as students return to school?	In what ways have PSCs been successful in advocating for social justice?
			What have been the barriers for PSCs to advocate for social justice?

Table 4.

Questions for Counselor Education Faculty

Role of the school counselor	Leadership opportunities for school counselors	Pandemic response	School counselors as social justice advocates
What is the role of PSC as an advocate at a school site?	Describe ways PSCs are prepared to be leaders in a school setting?	In what ways has the pandemic changed the role of school counselors as advocates?	What are the ethical mandates for school counselors to advocate for every student?
What is the role of PSC as a leader at a school site?	What are Commission on Teacher Credentialing performance expectations for advocacy and leadership in school counselor training programs?	How might the pandemic, if anything, change the training of school counselors to be advocates and leaders?	Describe the challenges school counselors face in their role as advocates and leaders for social justice?
	How do counselor education programs assess dispositions, knowledge, and skills, for advocacy and leadership?	In what ways do you expect the profession of school counseling to change as a result of the pandemic?	Please provide some examples of how school counselors advocate for students and families and ways in which they lead in school districts.

Data Collection Equipment

To conduct the interviews, the following videorecording equipment was borrowed from the EdD Educational Leadership Program at San José State University: Panasonic AG-AC90 camcorder, lavalier lapel microphone, boom microphone, and tripod. I inserted two SD cards into the camcorder and recorded on both cards so that I would have a backup. I also used the Zoom Video Conference app to record interviews if I was unable to interview a participant face-to-face due to COVID-19 restrictions or because the participant was in another state.

Docusign was used to send electronic consent forms and receive them back with signature and date (see Appendix B). Information about upcoming interview dates, interview

format, and any identifiable data was organized in a Google Docs document. Google

Calendar invites were sent to participants once the date and time of their interview was

confirmed, with an automatic reminder being sent 10 minutes before the interview time.

Researcher Positionality

Reflexive Journaling

I journaled my impressions of the interviews intermittently so that thoughts I had during

interviews, such as ideas for early themes, adjustments to the questions, and improvements

were captured and then reflected on during analysis. The journal was a Microsoft Word

document that consisted of my insights and observations I noted during the interviews. The

journal was kept on my laptop and used solely for my own reflection.

San José State University Lecturer in the Counselor Education Department

Teaching graduate and undergraduate classes in the Counselor Education Department for

over 20 years at San José State University has given me a deep understanding of general

issues in the education field, and, in particular, those in the field of counselor education. The

supervised fieldwork course for CITs requires university faculty to guide and supervise the

experiential learning of fieldwork candidates. CITs are placed at a school site in order to

complete a specified number hours of fieldwork over the semester. The fieldwork placement

sites span the bay area ranging from Hollister to Hayward, including the Santa Clara County

Alternative Schools. When I served as a faculty supervisor, I observed how schools and

districts differed in their approach to school counselors and school counseling. I served as the

fieldwork coordinator for 3 years. This included working closely with school counseling

fieldwork candidates to help with preparing them for their site placement; supporting the

growth of school CIT as they worked with both site supervisors and faculty supervisors; streamlining processes and designing surveys to collect data; and developing relationships with site supervisors, principals, and county administrators. These experiences drove my desire to advocate for school counselors to not only be trained well in order to succeed, but also to influence school environments so that school counselors can fulfill their comprehensive roles. My employment in a university and my job title provided me with credibility to recruit participants and to further my goals as a researcher.

Although being a lecturer in the program provided me with opportunities, contacts, and resources, it also influenced how people see me as part of a research institution. A few of the school counselors I interviewed received their master's degree and PPS credential from San José State University's Counselor Education Department, and they remembered me as a fieldwork coordinator, faculty supervisor, or course lecturer. Participants' previous experiences with or impressions of the Counselor Education Department, the College of Education, or even SJSU as a whole may have been projected on to me. Because I work in academia, participants may also have provided certain kinds of answers that they believed were desirable in an educational interview.

An Immigrant's Perspective

Being an immigrant, I understand what it takes to adapt to the dominant culture in the United States and to simultaneously belong and not belong. After traveling from Karachi to Atlanta to attend college, I was shocked at the racial disparities that I observed in the private undergraduate college for women where I was enrolled. The majority of students were White women from Georgia and other southern states (e.g., South Carolina, North Carolina,

Tennessee, and Kentucky). I experienced attitudes and encountered perspectives that I did not know were racist at the time. I searched for a sense of belonging as I deeply identified with people of color as well as other international students. This was the start of feeling a bond with BIPOC. I was curious about their breadth of experiences and their many challenges as well as how they found meaning and joy.

Muslim Identity

I was raised in a Muslim household with a strong belief system, and I hold that identity as a critical part of my moral formation. Islamic values of helping neighbors, being an integral part of the community, and helping those who are neglected or oppressed was ingrained early in my life. My parents consistently dedicated much of their lives to assisting those in need, whether it was due to disability, poverty, or discrimination. Later, as a Muslim in the United States, I experienced increasing hate and surveillance directed toward myself, my loved ones, and the Muslim community, especially after the attacks on September 11th, 2001.

All these experiences were the foundation for my interest in finding ways to increase social justice advocacy through K–12 school counselors. My belief, based on study and observation, is that systemic inequity is a problem that leads to long-term consequences, such as criminalization, housing insecurity, poverty, and intergenerational trauma. The equity gap has widened as the COVID-19 pandemic has driven up prices, has disproportionately impacted low-income families and people of color, and has made health care cost prohibitive. School counselors shoulder a lot of responsibility and strain as the social–emotional and mental health needs of students become paramount. Gaining competence in affecting systemic change toward social justice adds to competency expectations for school counselors,

and it is a potent way to interrupt the cycle of continued injustice and/or poverty in which people are trapped. These views informed my data analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

Interviews were recorded either using the camcorder or using the recording option in the Zoom Video Conferencing app. One interviewee preferred to only be audio recorded. Because each interview was recorded on an SD card, I downloaded and viewed the interview to make sure the audio was clear and the video was focused. I began informally reviewing the data as they were collected, without waiting for all the interviews to be concluded. The approach was constructivist in that there is recognition that the researcher and the participants are interacting and influencing each other to understand experiences and perspectives, each coming from their own sense of reality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hatch, 2002; Trautrims et al., 2012). Interview questions were slightly adjusted for the participant, reworded, or improved on as the interviews ensued. I also noticed where there were gaps in information, and I posed questions to address those gaps.

The analysis consisted of coding interviews using inductive reasoning and acknowledging important themes as they emerged from conversations with the participants (Hatch, 2002). The many hours of raw footage and amount of data were quite overwhelming initially. It helped to look for patterns, seek repeated concepts, and acknowledge outliers (Hatch, 2002) that would accurately address my research questions. After considerable time spent actively coding data to identify themes and connections, a documentary film storyline emerged.

The raw footage was uploaded to an external hard drive. The footage in the hard drive was organized in folders and then downloaded to Adobe Premier Pro, which was the app I used to edit the footage into a documentary film. The answers from each interviewee were viewed and cut into smaller clips and put in a sequence. After making a sequence for each participant, a timeline was constructed to build a narrative or editing script based on participants' answers. The first cut was 5 hours and 30 minutes, but the goal was to shorten the film to under one hour. To shorten the film, data were further refined by listening, reviewing, and analyzing. The video clips that were selected were chosen because they best represented the themes that were identified during data analysis. An initial storyline emerged from the narrative that was outlined with guidance from the dissertation chair. The storyline was reorganized to provide a clear narrative. I ensured that the sub-clips were no more than 1–3 minutes in length, and I arranged sub-clips to create a logical flow for the narrative. B-roll footage was added to create visual interest and music was layered into specific transitional and emotional points. The complete exploratory documentary is 46 minutes in length and addresses the research questions while also having a storyline that includes a proper beginning, middle, and end. The documentary is also interesting and instructive for viewers.

Limitations

As I am not a K–12 school counselor and have never worked as one, I am not steeped in the day-to-day experiences and issues that school counselors contend with. Thus, I may have missed some nuances in their answers or important cues for follow-up questions. I know the K–12 school system as a volunteer, as a parent, and as a counselor educator faculty.

Although these roles provided an essential outsider perspective, they did not offer me the same perspective that a school counselor embedded in that particular system would have.

I obtained permission to record interviews on two school campuses; however, the COVID-19 pandemic posed an enormous barrier to entering most school buildings and filming on their campus. During the data collection period, most districts had just returned from being online, and they were contending with pivoting back to in-person schooling during the pandemic. School personnel had to navigate a variety of obstacles, including putting in place mask policies, campus visitation policies, and sanitizing policies. Administrators had to contend with teacher shortages while also supporting students who had to quarantine if they or a family member contracted COVID-19. Thus, most interviews were not conducted on school campuses where participants worked. Instead, alternate sites were suggested to the participants, such as outdoor options, study rooms in local libraries, and empty classrooms or offices at SJSU. I was limited in getting the needed b-roll video footage of the interior of school buildings, offices, and school counselors interacting with students on different parts of the campus.

Summary

Video recordings of structured interviews comprised the qualitative methodology for this research. School counselors and other school personnel from various school districts as well as counselor education faculty from two institutions participated in the research. Additionally, I was able to get perspectives from local and national organizations and from book authors who live on the East Coast of the United States. In total, I interviewed 26 participants. The resulting data are presented in an exploratory documentary film that is part

of this dissertation. The documentary film is 46 minutes in length and shared on YouTube for

educators to easily access.

Findings

The documentary film that I created, *Counseling for Social Justice* (available on YouTube), provides detailed results from the interviews that I conducted. A number of themes emerged from the exploratory documentary study.

Social Justice in School Counseling

Belief in Social Justice as an Ideal

School counseling professionals from membership organizations, researchers in the field, and counselor educators who participated in this study recognized and acknowledged the importance of social justice advocacy competencies in addressing long-standing issues of inequity in the educational system. School counselors agreed that social justice must be a part of their work. Teachers not only believed that school counselors were best suited to discern and attend to equity issues faced by students, but they also believed also that it is imperative for counselors to do so in order for students to achieve desirable educational outcomes.

Lack of Consistent Interpretation of Social Justice in School Counseling

Participants' understanding of social justice and the ways in which it can be applied to or enhance their work varied. Some participants were visibly uncomfortable with their level of knowledge of social justice advocacy competencies. When social justice was practiced by school counselors, the way in which social justice advocacy was interpreted varied from person to person and from school to school.

Challenges to School Counselors Practicing Social Justice Advocacy

School counselors reported numerous barriers to achieving goals related to social justice. First, the work of social justice advocacy cannot start until school counselors become aware

of their own biases and take steps to address them. Systemic racist practices embedded in the school system also need to be recognized—if there is no equity lens, there can be no equity work. Second, school counselors end up working in isolation. That is, the nature of a school counselor's job leads to a level of isolation from other school personnel and from other counselors. Elementary and middle schools tend to have one school counselor on campus, if at all. This means that school counselors have no professional counterparts with whom they can strive to build a school counseling program that is informed by social justice.

Third, social justice competencies need to be systematically integrated and taught in counselor training programs. Furthermore, counselors need professional development so they are sufficiently prepared to address the sociopolitical and economic dynamics that students and families in their district encounter. Fourth, school counselors have an existential awareness of the fragility of their employment. Social justice in school counseling often includes challenging the status quo, questioning long-established policies, being unafraid of offending others, and, at times, being the sole voice in the interest of equity. Thus, some counselors expressed fear of reprisal for their role as social justice advocates. In such cases, school counselors have experienced pushback, anger, and even loss of their job.

School Counselors as Social Justice Practitioners

Despite serious challenges to integrating social justice into school counseling practices, some interviewees reported that they intentionally engage in social justice practices. These practices varied depending on district, school, context, and student needs.

Counselor-Related Practices

Counselors who were integrating social justice advocacy into their work began by examining themselves deeply, thinking critically, and questioning norms and established practices. Furthermore, these school counselors demonstrate a willingness to truly listen, empathize, understand, adjust, adapt, and self-correct. School counselors often spend most of their time interpreting data, partnering with teachers, and critically examining students who are placed in advanced coursework versus those who are in remedial classes. More effort needs to be directed toward students who do not fit these criteria, thereby expanding an equity focus to all students so that they all have a chance at educational success. Finally, seeking out leadership opportunities on school boards, school improvement teams, and other such avenues are ways that school counselors can invoke social justice and apply it to the larger school system. Partnering with school administrators and counselors in other schools is a way of expanding the influence of social-justice-minded counselors.

Student-Related Practices

Concerns for transgender students and their specific needs are present in every sphere. Some school counselors are impacting long-lasting changes in school systems to address the needs of these students. The unique cultural context of each student is taken into consideration such that the student is treated with regard and with a spirit of inquiry and curiosity, rather than with assumptions or presumptions. Furthermore, social issues such as economic and health disparities, criminal justice inequalities, and climate changes are concerns to social-justice-minded school counselors. In recognizing social structures and how they impact students, these school counselors encourage and empower students to

engage with community and political entities, to join marches, write letters, and speak out against injustices. School counselors are also aware of the challenges faced by students who come from low-income families and take actionable steps to ameliorate these issues. Students from low-income families experience job instability, housing insecurity, and food insecurity. Counselors report that these students are provided the specific support they need through school and community resources.

COVID-19 Pandemic Changed School Counselors' and Schools' Priorities

School counselors, administrators and teachers indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought change on multiple levels. The social–emotional well-being of each student was recognized as paramount and trumped the previous focus on academic and college/career readiness. Participants agreed that students exhibiting and reporting depression and anxiety was commonplace both during the SIP and after returning to in-person school. Furthermore, participants indicated that they have seen higher levels of suicidality and self-harm in students that led to 3 to 4 times the number of risk assessments as compared to the number of pre-pandemic risk assessments.

It was noted that when students returned to in-person school, their social skills and maturity were underdeveloped for their age. Many students struggled with self-management, and school personnel had to find ways to address these behavioral and emotional challenges. Participants recognized that the effects of the pandemic on students were not the fault of the students, and the community as a whole must take responsibility for the deleterious fallout from COVID-19. However, school counselors reported that they were not in a position to be proactive and they instead found themselves having to react to situations arising from these

effects. Teachers and administrators looked to school counselors to find ways to cope with these unforeseen and maladaptive behaviors.

Promoting trauma-informed approaches was brought up by several participants. This seemed to highlight how school counselors need to have increased awareness of the different levels of trauma that students may have experienced. Moreover, based on school counselors' knowledge of the effects of trauma, participants reported that they found themselves disagreeing with teachers about consequences for students. Some school districts allocated funds to provide trauma informed teaching training to teachers.

Lastly, participants felt reassured that many school systems are now viewing school counseling not as an addendum but as a priority. COVID-19 increased awareness of the need to support and nurture social–emotional well-being in students, especially students who come from marginalized, underresourced, and low-income backgrounds. Since the beginning of COVID-19, more school counselors were hired for middle and high schools, wellness centers were established in districts or on school campuses, and school counseling positions at elementary schools were created.

In the next chapter, the implications of these themes are discussed and analyzed.

Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this exploratory documentary study was to investigate school counselors' perceptions and understanding of their role as social justice advocates and the extent to which they can execute this role, if at all. Of interest were the specific challenges as well as successes experienced by school counselors. School administrators, K–12 teachers, and counselor educators were also interviewed to gain their perspectives on social justice advocacy and competencies, preparation, and engagement by school counselors. The study was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the effects of the pandemic, it also made sense to explore how COVID-19 affected school counselors' efforts as social justice advocates.

The questions that guided this research were:

Q1. What is the expected role of school counselors as advocates to address social justice issues in schools according to school counselors, teachers, administrators, and counselor educators?

Q2. How are school counselors as leaders and change agents influencing school systems to be more equitable?

Q3. What has been and should be the role of school counselors as leaders and social justice advocates during the pandemic?

An exploratory documentary film method was used to collect and analyze the qualitative data. This method has been found to be a rigorous form of research that meets the essential criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Fitzgerald & Lowe, 2020). The documentary method allows for descriptive storytelling through participant

narratives, and this can potentially be impactful on the viewer. Furthermore, the documentary method is a form that stimulates social change (Kemmitt, 2007).

I selected this method so that the voices of school counselors could be heard by different stakeholders, and their stores could be elevated through the documentary as an art form. Viewers can observe interviewees' emotions as they arise in the documentary. As a researcher, I was able to engage with the data multiple times as I viewed the footage, selected sub-clips, and edited the interviews into the film. This method afforded me the opportunity to become thoroughly immersed in the data, allowing for deeper analysis (Fitzgerald & Lowe, 2020).

Many themes emerged from the exploratory documentary. In this chapter, I discuss these findings and explore implications. Finally, I make some recommendations and present final conclusions.

Summary of Interview Findings

The findings of this study are presented in the documentary film *Counseling for Social Justice.* In this section, I present the findings in order of the research questions based on interviews with 13 school counselors, three teachers, four administrators, four counselor educators, authors of the book *Interrupting Racism,* the 2022 School Counselor of the Year, and the executive director of the ASCA.

Research Question 1: What is the expected role of school counselors as advocates to address social justice issues in schools according to: a) School Counselors; b) Teachers; c) Administrators; and d) Counselor Educators?

School Counselors' Perspectives on their Role as Social Justice Advocates in Schools

School counselors' responses ranged from wishing they could fulfill the role of equity leader in their school to intentionally embedding social justice into every aspect of their job. As expressed by one school counselor, "Everything from the bulletin board to the school board is an opportunity for social justice advocacy." School counselors who did not have the opportunity to engage in social justice advocacy faced several barriers, including large caseloads, feeling powerless, the increased need to attend to crises, lacking the confidence or practical knowledge, and the absence of administrator support. Some school counselors also fall somewhere in the middle. These individuals are aware of systemic inequities, are building competencies, are interpreting school data to identify gaps, and are initiating changes based on student needs. However, they find that many challenges get in their way when providing social justice advocacy and taking actionable steps for equity.

Teachers' Perspectives on School Counselors as Social Justice Advocates

Teachers indicate that they see school counselors as important partners in the educational process. One said that "counselors are in coalition with the rest of the school personnel" and that "there is no hierarchy." Teachers rely on school counselors to support the social–emotional needs of students and to address out-of-school factors that impact students' ability to learn and succeed at school, such as poverty, trauma, family dysfunction, and immigration status.

Two teachers expressed the desire for ongoing communication with school counselors about the situations and needs of students. They said that general information would be helpful for them so they could, for example, know how they are triggering students and can

change their interactions accordingly. Teachers also rely on school counselors to identify those students who have special needs and to attend to them. One teacher stated that they depend on school counselors to identify students who are misplaced in remedial classes and students who are eligible for honors or advanced placement (AP) classes but are not taking them.

Administrators' Perspectives on School Counselors as Social Justice Advocates

Administrators indicate that they believe it is important to include school counselors' voices in administrative decisions so that counselors can represent the whole student, which includes students' academic performance, behavior, social–emotional development, and career/college readiness. Administrators recognize that school counselors are likely to understand the student as a complete individual, to know about stages of child and adolescent development, and to know about students' circumstances more than other school personnel would. School counselor input to represent the whole student is very important in order to effectively serve the student.

Counselor Educators' Perspectives on School Counselor as Social Justice Advocates

Counselor educator faculty stated that educational programs prepare preservice counselors to be "emancipatory leaders" and "transformative counselors." Therefore, counselor education classes seem to provide opportunities for CIT to experience leadership roles, anticipate resistance to changes, build alliances, and maximize the use of all resources that are available at that school and community.

Through a series of courses, school CITs are prompted to develop their vision and mission. Their career goals must include leadership and advocacy. One counselor educator

faculty noted that "listening skills are essential, however, students have to learn to be sensitive to issues related to social justice and to diversity." By the time CIT graduate, they must have a vision of how they will practice advocating for equity and demonstrate a readiness to take on these responsibilities.

One counselor educator said that being in a position of recognizing social injustices and then taking actions to dismantle them requires "knowing oneself deeply," which includes CIT identifying their own implicit biases, being aware of messages to them from the family of origin, and examining their own belief systems. Educational programs need to provide multiple avenues for counseling students to engage in reflection and self-analysis.

Research Question 2: How are school counselors as leaders and change agents influencing school systems to be more equitable?

School Counselors as Leaders and Change Agents for School Equity

"School counselors are change agents and as such they are also leaders" said one participant. Some school counselors who were interviewed aim to influence equity across school systems. The way in which they are able to do so depends on the school climate, context, dynamics, and school level of functioning. Some suggestions from the counselors include that they:

- Serve on the district course catalog committee to ensure equal access to courses for all students.
- Take steps to provide equitable access to enrollment in honors and AP classes.
- Remove students from remedial classes if they no longer need to be there.

- Help to institute programs that provide targeted supports to historically underserved students.

- Demonstrate respect and curiosity about students' various cultural beliefs and practices.

- Implement a College Admit Day so that students can apply to a 4-year university, get interviewed, and possibly admitted on the spot.

- Initiate housing a food pantry on campus so families can access food and/or make home visits to deliver groceries.

- Ensure that all families are included in the educational process.

- Create a welcoming school environment for both students and their families and treat them with respect.

- Call for changes in school policies that negatively impact transgender students.

- Facilitate a high school graduation ceremony for Black students.

- Encourage students to be their authentic selves by using the expressive arts.

These examples demonstrate that there are many interpretations of social justice in school counseling and varied ways in which counselors go about achieving their goal of influencing a school system to be more equitable.

Research Question 3: What has been and should be the role of school counselors as leaders and social justice advocates during the pandemic?

School Counselors as Leaders and Social Justice Advocates During the Pandemic

Most school counselors acknowledged a shift in their practice due to COVID-19. Some school counselors stated that the issues they are seeing have always been there, but now there

is more awareness and openness in addressing them. Other counselors saw an increase in risk assessments, crisis intervention, depression, and anxiety. When in-person classes were resumed, the situation was akin to a triage center, according to a school counselor.

School counselors pivoted to a virtual presence during the SIP by creating online counseling web pages with messages and resources for students. Because face-to-face counseling was not possible for over a year, students were encouraged to meet via video conference. However, not all students had access to Wi-fi or personal computers in order to attend school virtually. Therefore, school counselors were involved in efforts to ensure that students who needed technological resources received Google Chromebooks and applied for free Wi-fi so that they did not fall behind.

During times when students were not able to verbalize their thoughts during an online meeting with a school counselor, they could use the chat feature or text the counselor. Some counselors felt that allowing students to use multiple modes of expression was a positive shift as it was more inclusive of different communication preferences and allowed students of different cultural backgrounds to engage in counseling in ways that were comfortable for them. A few school counselors stated that they have become adept at creating online workshops for students, providing webinars to students, and learning ways to engage students in online activities. These online tools have been positive additions even after returning to in-person schooling. School counselors have added these tools to their toolbox, and they stated that such tools can be used in service of inclusivity by enabling man students to have access to information than was possible previously.

In contrast, some frustration was expressed by counselors concerning the difficulties posed by online counseling. "Working it out was taking time away from kids who needed it," stated a participant. Another counselor noted that "school counselors thrive on connecting with children and it is not the same online as students were not engaging from home due to a lack of confidentiality." Some school counselors also felt that online work was limiting, and they sought other ways to engage students.

Students returning to in-person schooling needed a lot more social and emotional support than was previously needed. The many months of social distancing and attending school online contributed to a stunting of social–emotional growth. A majority of participants described their students as lacking age-appropriate behaviors and responses due to social isolation. School counselors were addressing a host of immature behaviors as well as helping teachers to cope with such behaviors.

Relationship of Findings to Other Research

Findings Consistent with Existing Research

My findings indicate that mental health needs among K–12 students and their families, which were already on the rise, have worsened due to COVID-19. These finding echo those from other research studies (e.g., AlAzzam et al., 2021; Brennan, 2021; Czeisler et al., 2020; Douglas et al., 2020; Fegert et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2021; Levin, 2020). Additionally, my finding that BIPOC individuals and low-income families are experiencing the bulk of the negative consequences of the COVID-19 is consistent with research from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2021), Levin (2020), Lopez et al. (2021), Patel et al. (2020), and Root and Simet (2021).

Many of the school counselors I interviewed said that they are questioning, even challenging, outdated and inequitable policies in order to better serve marginalized students. These school counselors are using the kinds of skills that Lytle et al. (2018) identified from the inquiry approach, which includes introspection, reflection, analysis, and critical thinking.

English language learners and students of color continue to face severe obstacles in equitable access to resources and in educational attainment. There is a lack of equity in school budgets as well as in standardized testing. Mitchell (2017) identified the same set of problems and pointed to policies set by ESSA as the root cause. Participants in my study who represented national and local school counseling organizations recognized these educational disparities and indicated that their membership organizations were addressing concerns about the critical need for social justice advocacy and equity in schools. The ASCA (2019), CASC (2020), and CSJ (2021) offer trainings to their professional membership to address these issues.

Some school counselors in the study who had taken on leadership roles have found ways of mobilizing change by taking actionable steps that reflect their unique perspective of seeing the whole student as a multidimensional individual. They found it essential to participate in activities that build a cohesive school approach as well as to attend trainings on how to advocate at the individual, school community and policy levels. Martin (2002) and Sue and Sue (2016) have suggested these approaches for school counselors can create real and positive change. Counselor educator participants also highlighted the importance of scaffolding and developing leadership qualities in school counselors both during their pre-service counseling training as well as during their work tenure. Betters-Bubon and Schultz

(2018) and Young and Bryan (2016) expounded on the essential nature of integrating a social justice philosophy in training programs. Moreover, these researchers found that relevant strategies and skills must be taught to school counselors so that they have tools available when they are doing the hard work of changing the status quo.

The ASCA's (2019) recommendation for a student-to-school counselor ratio of 250:1 has not been achieved. School counselors interviewed had caseloads of 450 and above. Findings from Bray (2019), Goodman-Scott et al. (2018), and the U.S. Department of Education et al. (2020–2021) indicated that school counselor ratios remain high in most states, with California being amongst the highest. Fuschillo (2019) noted that doing multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS) tier 1 work with students is stymied due to the high ratio. Counselors in this study expressed some frustration that they desired to work with the majority of (or all) students, but are unable to because they must attend to the more pressing needs of students in tier 3 of MTSS. Another reason participants shared that makes it difficult for them to focus on all students is that they are often asked by administrators to take on tasks outside of their job duties, such as filling in for substitute teachers or overseeing yard duty or lunch duty. This is consistent with findings from Goodman-Scott et al. (2018) who noted that there are demands placed on the school counselor to fulfill roles that are not in their purview, such as administrative and substitute teaching.

When advocating for social justice, Bemak and Chung (2005) argued that school counselors are likely to experience pushback and resistance from administrators and teachers. Participants in my study identified fear of pushback from parents, teachers, administrators as a challenge to doing their job and working as social justice advocates. They recognized that

advocating for social justice means challenging the status quo. Furthermore, some participants explained that change may be feared by those who have become complicit by long functioning within an inequitable system and accepting it.

Findings Not Consistent with Existing Research

Steele (2011) found that age and ethnic background were related to the importance placed on social justice competencies. The participants in my study varied in both age and ethnicity, but age and ethnicity were unrelated to the importance they placed on social justice competencies. Overall, most of the school counselors in my study, who came from a range of age and ethnic backgrounds, found advocacy competencies central to their work. Of the counselors I interviewed, two admitted they had not given this topic much thought, but they were fairly new counselors, having started working 3–5 years ago. In contrast, other school counselors I interviewed with the same years of experience were more aware of the importance of social justice advocacy. It may be posited that self-selection bias may have influenced my results.

Counselor educators interviewed for this study provided examples of training CIT to develop an equity lens, to pay attention to the needs of marginalized and minoritized students, to learn to build relationships with community organizations, and to be an active part of the whole school community. One case in point is the development of the multidimensional model of broaching behavior (Day-Vines et al., 2020), which addresses steps to understand and affirm the racial, ethnic, and cultural concerns of a student or a client. This finding is different from other researchers who have argued that school counseling education has lacked avenues for students to learn about multiculturalism, intersectionality,

and racial/cultural dynamics (Killian & Floren, 2020; Sue & Sue, 2016). A number of factors can be credited for this possible development in education. COVID-19 has changed societal dynamics and increased disparities, resulting in many educational leaders calling for immediate changes in how K–12 students' concerns, specifically those of BIPOC students and students who have been historically marginalized, are addressed.

Conclusions

The embedding of social justice advocacy as foundational to the role of school counselors remains to be recognized by administrators, teachers, and, at times, by school counselors themselves. Although some school counselors have embraced their role as social justice advocates and use it to lead to actionable steps and strategies, they may do so in a school environment that could be at odds with their approach. They risk job security, censorship, and relationships with colleagues. School counselors must have the support of their administrators in order to successfully fulfill their social justice advocacy role. Those school counselors who have been fortunate enough to receive such support have initiated impactful positive changes for students, for their families, and for the whole school community.

School counselors advocating for themselves and their profession is a critical skill set that needs to be enhanced and practiced. Additionally, the unique position that school counselors inhabit in schools obligates school counselors to utilize every avenue available to serve as a voice for students, to lead as social justice advocates, and to be a change agent for equity.

School counseling organizations are promoting comprehensive school counseling programs. School counselors are encouraged to take a preventative, proactive, and data-driven approach to serve tier 1 students. Counseling organizations emphasize culturally

responsive and culturally affirming counseling, especially given the diversity in America. Moreover, counselor educators call on school counselors to claim their place as emancipatory leaders in the school system. School counselors must not only utilize an equity lens, but also work on equity at the individual, school and community levels. School counselors are expected to use data to address gaps in achievement, opportunity and resources. Performance expectations in counselor education programs address these knowledge areas through course work and practicum. Counselor education programs that embed social justice awareness and activism into their pedagogy will equip their graduates with a set of tools and resources to enable the integration of social justice into all aspects of their job.

Despite a number of challenges, school counselors are asserting themselves as leaders and change agents in schools in a variety of ways. These include empowering the individual to demand fairness as well as advocating for them, working with families directly and by connecting them to community resources, creating an inclusive and culturally affirming school culture, instituting changes in order to serve underrepresented students, and initiating organizational change to meet the needs of all students. These efforts are a testament to the commitment of school counselors who are often working with caseloads 3 to 4 times the recommended size.

COVID-19 has highlighted the immense need for mental health supports for students. Students returning to in-person schooling were struggling with anxiety, depression, isolation, suicidal ideation, and self-harm behaviors that school counselors have been addressing. Keeping students safe and enhancing their wellness is a critical need that school counselors must prioritize. However, school counselors will not be able to affect meaningful change in

the structure of their school by only evaluating policies. More will need to be done by all school personnel to change policies that perpetuate institutional racism. Additionally, to continue to be a resource to all students, school counselors will need to build alliances within and outside the school walls to ensure students and their families have sufficient access to resources.

Recommendations for School Counselors

In this section, I present recommendations for increasing social justice advocacy in school counseling. I recognize that the recommendations made will neither be applicable to every school counselor nor will they necessarily pertain to every context. However, results from this study indicate that these deserve attention.

Develop Reflexivity

The critical nature of reflexivity was explicitly stated by several participants and alluded to by others. Reflexivity is the practice of reflecting on one's own nature, values, dreams, and decisions. Training and educational programs often build in opportunities for reflexivity; however, reflexivity is cultivated over time and it is a lifelong endeavor. As school counselors develop as individuals and as professionals, they must utilize reflexivity to ensure that their actions are commensurate with their values. Reflexivity is also a way to minimize or to recognize and flag implicit biases, racist ideologies, assumptions, and presumptions.

Take a Synergistic Approach

School counselors are part of a school's student support services and professional staff. Counseling services offered to students are one aspect of a variety of supports and assistance

that may be available to a student. As such, it is both unrealistic and a disservice to expect that social justice advocacy be conceived of and carried out in a silo by a school counselor.

Build Coalitions

To get the best results and have the maximum impact, school counselors must strive to build a coalition on their campus with a vision for equity and a mission for social justice. It will take groundwork, fostering thought partnerships, and building relationship capital with school personnel in order for counselors to set social justice goals. One way school counselors can gain support for social justice initiatives from school personnel is to ensure that such goals align with the goals of the school and a school's improvement plan. In doing this, school counselors will build a process within the school system that is designed to continually disrupt racism and end the inequitable treatment of marginalized students.

Collaborate with Other School Counselors

School district leaders are urged to ensure opportunities for school counselors to meet with each other on a regular and consistent basis (e.g., monthly networking sessions). Conferring with other school counselors about important social justice issues and how those issues apply to the district and the nearby communities allows for school counselors to assess and share their knowledge about the needs of their students. Moreover, these kinds of gatherings provide an outlet to brainstorm, share outcomes, and critically consider new ways forward. Discussing one's practice with peers provides space to develop best practices and to let creative ideas germinate, leading to effective solutions to address local problems.

Local and small-scale networking is also beneficial to school counselors as it may help to prevent school counselors from burning out, to improve morale, and to help them build a

support network. School counselors may also find that this is an effective form of reflexive practice because they are appraising their own processes, actions, and biases. By sharing with others, school counselors resist being siloed as they continually find ways to grow and improve. For school counselors to avail such offerings, networking time needs to be built into the school calendar and be prioritized as an essential indirect service. The support of principals and other administrators cannot be overstated.

School counselors are also encouraged to attend state and national conferences, but that is not a substitute for small-scale and casual monthly networking opportunities.

Mentoring

School counselors who have built their professional competence and enjoyed success in their efforts for social justice can pay it forward by mentoring new school counselors. A mentoring relationship is enriching for both the mentor and the mentee. The mentor shares their experiences and decision moments. Moreover, the mentor's opportunity to reflect and assess the degree to which they were able to make change can inform the mentee about challenges and successes. The mentee also gains practical knowledge on how to integrate social justice advocacy into their practice.

Support Teacher Training

Teachers can be the greatest allies for school counselors; conversely, teachers can undermine a school counselor's equity work. School counselors may be more effective when they have teacher allies, use culturally affirming pedagogy, are trauma informed, understand equity, and are committed to social justice philosophy and practice. As one participant succinctly noted, "Once you see it (inequitable educational practices), you can't unsee it."

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School counselors can support teacher training and development in topics that will support social justice goals.

Build Relationships in the Larger Community

School counselors recognize that many of the problems students bring to school are related to larger societal issues such as poverty, immigration status, home/neighborhood violence, and discrimination/racism. More needs to be done to connect school counselors to allies in the immediate neighborhood, larger community, and city government to address these underlying problems. The first step is to know all the community resources, but that is not enough. Concerted time needs to be dedicated for school counselors to build working relationships with these entities to connect students and families to these resources in a meaningful way.

Engage with County, State, and Federal Educational Policies

I recommend that school counselors stay abreast of bills, policies, and laws. Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies (Ratts et al., 2007; Ratts et al., 2016) address the importance of seeing an individual in the context of their social–political ecosystems and engaging on the public policy level. Policies can have both an immediate impact as well as a long-lasting effect. School counselors are encouraged to be vocal about the effects of educational policies and laws on their constituents and to try to change policies that are not in the best interest of their students.

Implement the Recognized ASCA Model Program

School district administrators can be instrumental with helping school counselors to receive training on the Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) in their schools. RAMP

is a blueprint to create a data-driven comprehensive school counseling program. No two comprehensive school counseling programs will be the same because such programs are designed to reflect a school's context, student needs, and community needs. It is an iterative process of trial and error until the program fits a school's needs, supports a school's improvement program, and satisfies a school's vision for the school counselors and other personnel.

The RAMP model also provides clear directions for working with students in tiers I, II, and III students of MTSS. School counselors are asked to serve all students by providing whole classroom instruction in areas related to academic success, college/career readiness, and social–emotional development. According to RAMP, school counselors should use data, including grades, attendance records, behavioral records, disciplinary records, enrollment in AP courses, and remedial courses, to identify students who are mistakenly placed in the wrong classes or who are not getting support for their particular situation.

Training to Enhance Equity Work

My last recommendation is for CITs and school counselors to seek out degree programs, classes, and trainings that focus on the practice and application of social justice advocacy competencies. It is essential to understand that social justice work is accomplished not by chance or by accident but through intentional and brave undertakings. Therefore, tools, strategies, and models must be accompanied with behavior rehearsal, simulations, and supervised hands-on experience. Some useful tools include, for example, skills to hone critical thinking, support self-evaluation, identify implicit biases, and evaluate school climate. Counselors can seek out relevant strategies and implement evidence-based models.

Counselor education programs are encouraged to adapt and update their curriculum to provide CITs a sound foundation in the theoretical aspects of social justice work. However, the theoretical foundation is not sufficient to prepare school counselors to embed social justice in all aspects of their work. Therefore, programs must include content that identifies and offers practice in the use of specific social justice tools, strategies, and models. It is imperative that this content be updated, relevant, and identified based on best practices in the research literature regarding social justice advocacy in school counseling. Furthermore, programs are encouraged to require CITs to set goals related to social justice and to find fieldwork placement sites that will allow the CIT to put advocacy competencies into practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

The exploratory documentary film yielded from this dissertation raised a lot of issues and generated more questions than it may have answered. COVID-19 induced change faster than normal. Educational technology had a surge of new users, and it became the de facto way to learn. Educators and school personnel adopted online teaching and counseling methods, because in-person methods were impossible for 12–18 months. Students were regarded with compassion and empathy in a widespread way that had not been experienced before. Adaptability was encouraged, and new ways of learning and teaching seemed on the horizon. Standardized testing was halted for a year, and universities dropped the SAT requirement. All in all, there are some promising responses to the pandemic.

Social justice is recognized as a critical part of the work that school counselors do in an effort to ensure equity of educational resources, opportunities, and outcomes for students. However, the pandemic has increased disparities in income, employment, healthcare, and

mental health. Thus, school counselors' work has a layer of complexity and an urgency that is driving educators and policymakers to produce creative and effective solutions. Based on findings from this study, some recommendations are made for future research.

Parent Voices

Families of students are relied on to provide the optimum learning environment and home support for their students. They are tasked with ensuring their students attend school and complete homework assignments. When parents are engulfed in poverty and stressed about their next meal, the whole family can suffer. Research on the requirements of families and how they perceive school counselors in relation to social justice advocacy is needed to ascertain parents' perspectives on the efficacy of the school counselor in providing equity. Do families feel they are included in the school improvement plans? Are they provided with meaningful opportunities to voice their opinions? Are all parents welcomed to school? Do they feel important and heard? Have they been assisted in accessing equitable resources that they need? Do they believe that the school counselor is a social justice advocate for their students and at their school? All of these questions remain unanswered as parents were not included in this study. This is not because parent voices are not important, but rather because I chose to focus on school counselors, school personnel, school counseling educators, and leaders in the school counseling profession. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers in this area focus on the views, opinions, and recommendations offered by parents to further inform the work of social justice as carried out by school counselors.

K–12 Student Voices

Another stakeholder, and the most central, are the K–12 students themselves. Although they are not included in this study, it is critical to hear from them about their experiences with school counselors and whether they receive needed supports at the right time. School counselors are tasked with serving all students; therefore, students can tell school personnel whether they see the school counselor as fulfilling this obligation.

School Administrator Voices

The administrators who were interviewed for my study were a school director/principal, director of social-emotional learning, coordinator of mental wellness support services, and director of special education. More needs to be learned about the ways in which principals, superintendents, and other administrators can support school counselors in achieving goals related to social justice advocacy and fulfill their mission to advance equity.

Mentorship and Allyship

Responses from participant interviews emphasize the importance of mentorship, allyship, and thought partnership with other school counselors in order to further social justice efforts for students and their families. More research is recommended to investigate the impact of such alliances and partnerships, the length of time recommended for mentoring, and best practices of mentoring. Furthermore, examples of existing mentoring, allyship, and thought partnerships must be studied to learn how they can be effective. Lastly, evidence is needed to support that such activities and relationships will positively impact school counselors as they engage in social justice advocacy.

Supports for School Counselors to Engage in Social Justice Advocacy

Research to determine supports for school counselors so they can perform to the best of their capability in social justice advocacy is needed. It is important for educators to know what supports have worked for school counselors, how they have received them, what policies have been put in place for this to happen, and who has been in a position to enable these supports. I believe that such information will provide the scaffolding and structure for school counselors to rise to their calling as social justice advocates.

Researcher Take

I started out this study thinking that the school counseling profession needed to be reenvisioned in order to fully incorporate social justice goals and equity of outcomes for all students, not only in words but through real action. Through my research, I have found that the profession's evolution to include the aims of dismantling racist and inequitable systemic structures and of promoting social justice is making a meaningful impact on how school counselors determine their purpose. School counselors have these additional demands and expectations placed on them; however, there is not enough support in the educational system to allow for them to fulfill this role. The challenges and barriers that school counselors experience minimize the positive impact they could have on students and families.

School personnel need to be further educated about the unique and powerful role of the school counselor, especially in addressing social justice. School counseling preparation programs must provide more opportunities for making stronger connections between theory and practice. To be a changemaker and to question power structures, one needs to develop both strategy and practical know-how. Role plays, simulations, case studies, and

environments where counselors are tasked with promoting equity will allow students to develop the skills to level the playing field. This is hard work, so school counselors need to have a fertile environment, positive conditions, and deep conviction to carry a social justice torch that is both moral and ethical.

If inequities are corrected and the social–emotional and mental health needs of students are attended to, academic and career/college readiness will follow. Furthermore, poverty, language barriers, and racism that are embedded in the educational system call for school counselors to disrupt and dismantle the existing power structure and to champion the right of every student to have equal access and opportunity for achievement as anyone else. This has become the true calling of the school counselor.

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Appendix A

Letter of Invitation

Dear_____,

 I am a long-time counselor educator at SJSU, and now in the research phase of my dissertation at the Ed.D Leadership Program at San José State University. The dissertation is about the role of school counselors in promoting equity and social justice especially in light of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. An exploratory documentary method will be used and interviews recorded with school counselors, teachers, administrators, counselor educators, and parents of K–12 students. The goal is to have a 30-minute documentary as part of the dissertation.

 I would like to interview you to gain your particular perspective on my dissertation topic. The interview will be held at a location convenient to you or at SJSU. It will be one hour in length. The questions are related to the effects of the pandemic on students, and the role of school counselors as understood by various stakeholders, the work that school counselors do or could be doing to promote social justice on an individual, school, community or policy level, and ways in which they can be supported to do so.

 I have selected you as a potential interviewee because being a middle school counselor who pivoted for the specific challenges and changes wrought by the pandemic, you likely experienced first-hand the need to be innovative and creative in serving all students. Additionally, your ideas on what school counselors need to be effective advocates, and what more they could do to advance social justice is grounded in your experiences, education and professional development, and will be very relevant and pertinent to my study.

 Please let me know of your interest in engaging in this topic and being interviewed, the days and times that would work for you, as well as a convenient location. Not all recorded interviews will be part of the documentary, but will still provide data for the dissertation.

 I am available Mondays and Wednesdays after 4:00pm, Tuesdays and Fridays anytime, and Thursdays all day until 6:00pm.

 I look forward to connecting
with you. Thank you,
Amna Jaffer

Consent Form

Consent form for Professional School Counselors/School Personnel/Counselor Educators
REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Title of the Study

The Role of School Counselors in Advocating for Social Justice for All Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Name of the Researcher

Student Investigator: Amna Jaffer, MA, TEP
Lecturer, Department of Counselor Education at San José State
University Doctoral Student, Ed.D Leadership Program at San José
State University

Principal Investigator and Dissertation Chair: Robert Gliner, Ph.D.

Introductory statement: Having been a counselor educator for the past 15 years, I am particularly interested in advancing the school counseling profession by underscoring the role of school counselor as social justice advocate. It is essential that the voices of school counselors be heard, and experiences shared, in order to envision the future of school counseling. Thank you for participating in this study.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences of school counselors as they meet increased mental health demands due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to identify whether they challenge implicit and explicit racist practices and policies in their work, and if so, how. Additionally, the study will explore how school counselor efforts in social justice advocacy can be further supported and enhanced.

Procedures

Participants will be asked to provide up to one hour of their time in order to answer a series of questions that have been pre-determined by the researcher. The researcher may rephrase some questions and ask for clarification. A camcorder and mic will be used to record audio and video of the participant answering the questions.

Potential Risks

Participants are not required to answer all questions in order to participate. In the event that a question triggers a painful memory or discomfort, participants will be provided with options to pause, reschedule, or stop the interview. The researcher will offer time post-interview, for participants to debrief.

Potential Benefits

Some potential benefits to participants will be the opportunity to engage in dialogue about the topic, and to learn about relevant and updated school counseling related professional standards. Sharing experiences may benefit other school personnel and counselor educators. There is also the possibility that participants may help contribute ideas to inform new professional development programs, counseling strategies, and creative ideas for student advocacy.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participation.

Confidentiality

Participants will be identified unless they indicate they want to remain anonymous. In both the documentary film and in the dissertation, participants will be identified by their formal position and/or school level. For instance, 'High School Counselor'. Names of participants will not be used in either the documentary or the dissertation unless the participant is representing a national organization, an author, or is a special 'guest' and would like to have their name stated in the documentary.

Participant Rights

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with San José State University. You also have the right to skip any question you do not wish to answer. This consent form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you choose not to participate, and there is no penalty for stopping your participation in the study.

Questions or Problems

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, please contact Amna Jaffer at
  amna.jaffer@sjsu.edu or by phone at (408)924-3652

- Complaints about the research may be presented to Dr. Bradley Porfilio at
  bradley.porfilio@sjsu.edu or by phone at (408) 924-3566

- For questions about participants' rights or if you feel you have been harmed in any
  way by your participation in this study, please contact **Dr. Mohamed Abousalem,
  Vice President for Research & Innovation**, San Jose State University, at 408-924-
  2479 or irb@sjsu.edu

Signatures

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to be a part of the study, that
the details of the study have been explained to you, that you have been given time
to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will
receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

I give the researcher permission to conduct audio or video recordings

| Yes | | No |

I agree to be identified by my professional title

| Yes | | No |

Participant Signature

_____

Participant's Name (printed)   Participant's Signature   Date

Researcher Statement

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent   Date

Appendix C

Script for Interviewing Participants

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my study. My name is Amna Jaffer.

I have been a lecturer in the Department of Counselor Education for the last 20 years. I am now a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at SJSU. My work as a counselor educator in the Counselor Education Department and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to my interest in the central question of my study which is "What are your observations and experiences of the impact of the pandemic on equity for all students, and how might this have affected the way in which you advocate for social justice as a school counselor at your school site?"

I have a set of questions in a structured interview format and you may skip questions, present other information you deem relevant or terminate the interview at any time. I will be using a video camera to record the interview. The interview may last from 30-60 minutes. Video clips will be edited thematically into a narrative into a documentary film which is to be used for educational/instructional purposes.

Thank you once again for your participation. If you have questions or concerns, I can be reached at 510-501-4831 or you may email me at amna.jaffer@sjsu.edu.