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Development and Validation of an Instrument to Assess Activism toward Social and Environmental Sustainability in Career Counseling

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Abstract

Considering the recent attention to challenges regarding sustainability in the field of career counseling, this study aimed to provide the development and initial validation of an instrument entitled, "Activism toward Social and Environmental Sustainability for Career Construction" (ASESCC). ASESCC can be used in career counseling and research activities to assess activism toward social and environmental sustainability. With this aim, two different studies were carried out. In the first, we developed items, assessed content validity, and tested the factorial structure and reliability of the scale. The second study tested the convergent and discriminant validity of the ASESCC with measures of propensity to sustainability in making decisions about one's future (convergent validity), career adaptability (discriminant validity), and life satisfaction (discriminant validity). Results showed good psychometric support for the scale for Italian workers. Moreover, the findings indicated that the ASESCC total score was related yet distinct from other measures, suggesting that Italian workers that reported a greater propensity to activism toward social and environmental sustainability also were characterized by higher levels of career adaptability, an inclination to sustainability in making decisions about their future, and life satisfaction.

Keywords: Sustainability, Activism, Career counseling, Assessment measure.

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Development and Validation of an Instrument to Assess Activism toward Social and Environmental Sustainability in Career Counseling

Extreme social inequalities and environmental emergencies strongly characterize the so-called Anthropocene age, a time in history characterized by the fact that human actions have the absolute control and ability to modify the ordinary flow of events but also, paradoxically, to threaten human security (Asayama et al., 2021; Morrissey, 2022; Nota et al., 2020). Regarding the first phenomenon, Oxfam International (2022) highlighted that we are living in times characterized by extreme inequalities with enormous wealth owned by few people, while the majority of the population lives in conditions of precariousness, poverty, hardship, and difficulty (Hoyt et al., 2018). The World Inequality Report (2022) also indicated that the richest 10% of the global population owns 52% of global income, while the poorest half of the population owns 8.5% of it. Furthermore, global wealth disparities are even more noticeable than income differences, with the richest 10% of the global population owning 76% of all wealth. According to Polacko (2021), income inequality has been largely driven by many political factors related to neoliberal reforms such as privatization, deregulation, and tax and welfare reductions. With neoliberal reforms, labor precariousness has intensified; labor market institutions have weakened as unions have lost power; and public social spending has begun to shrink, which has not compensated for the vulnerabilities created by the process of globalization and technological development.

With respect to environmental emergencies, climate change and other forms of environmental degradation are considered among the defining challenges of the present time. As reported by Montt, Fraga, & Harsdorff, (2018), humanity is using more resources and producing more waste compared to the speed at which nature can absorb and regenerate resources. This is causing unprecedented rates of biodiversity loss, soil degradation, changes to global biogeochemical flows, and more extreme climatic conditions. Moreover, this is connected to the disruption of the hydrosphere, such as the melting of ice in polar regions and on mountain summits (Kerényi & McIntosh, 2020; Montt et al., 2018; Nota et al., 2020). This also has been illustrated by the recent experience connected to the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has been linked to poor ecosystem management (Capua, 2020).

Islam and Winkel (2017) stressed the strong connection between these two global challenges, namely social and environmental. They argued that a self-reinforcing vicious cycle exists, where climate change acts as a risk multiplier for pre-existing social inequalities. Islam and Winkel (2017) discussed the need for further studies and research that, considering the strong connections between social inequality and climate change, can examine how to reduce inequality.

The urgency to address these global challenges underscores the importance of developing career counseling interventions and assessment instruments that help individuals design their career future in ways that take into account and contribute to sustainable development (Guichard, 2022). The International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) in its 2023 Communique emphasized that sustainability should be at the core of the emergence of career counseling and that "this requires educational and vocational guidance to consider ecological, planetary, and social foundations (p. 2)." Thus, the current study aims to develop and validate a measure to examine activism toward social and environmental sustainability that can be used in career counseling and research activities.

Activism Definitions and Theoretical Framework

Activism is widely recognized as a group of actions aimed to generate social or political change. Dono, Webb, & Richardson (2010) described activism as the consequence of the behaviors meant to promote new social directions, from entering socially engaged groups that defend a noble purpose to taking part in collectively important political actions, to organizing sensibilization activities on socially relevant topics such as demonstrations, signature-collection, etc. Curtin and McGarty (2016) discussed its temporal feature, affirming that, to talk about activism, the behaviors must be performed with perseverance and for a certain period of time.

Other scholars (e.g., Fielding McDonald, & Louis, 2008; Holahan & Lubell, 2016) highlighted that said actions must have as their final objective changes on a political, social, and economic level, to the benefit of society, keeping in mind that there are individual consequences (that can be social, economic, and sometimes even related to work) to manage and tolerate.

To describe activism behaviors, many scholars mentioned classical social theories that tried to define human behavior within groups and communities (e.g., Fielding et al., 2008; Jew & Tran, 2020; Holahan & Lubell, 2016; Wilkinson & Sagarin, 2010). As suggested by Jew and Tran (2020), among these classic conceptual perspectives, there is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action, TPB has been used to describe activism behaviors (Torres-Harding, Siers, & Olson, 2012; Wang, 2020). In the TPB, the direct element establishing the person's actual behavior is behavioral intention. The latter is determined by three independent components: attitude (i.e., an individual's positive or negative evaluation of the adoption of a particular behavior), subjective norms (i.e., societal pressure that a person perceives before determining whether or not to adopt a particular behavior), and perceived behavioral control (i.e., the level of difficulty that a person perceives to execute an action in light of available resources, opportunities, abilities, etc.) (Ajzen, 1991).

Although the TPB has been used extensively in the literature on activism, some scholars (e.g., Agyeiwaah et al., 2021; Cho & Richardson Walton, 2009) have claimed that this theory is limited when considering affective influences on behavior because the three components (i.e., attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control) are based on cognitive beliefs. The TPB does not include the affective aspects and the complex interactions among individual thoughts, feelings, and actions. For example, specific feelings can lead to behaviors based on the connection they reveal between people and their context. This causes a particular action to cope with the feeling (Feldman & Hart, 2016).

According to Feldman and Hart (2016), affective variables (emotions, feelings, or drives) are relevant for activism behaviors. Anger is an intense negative emotion that seems to combine with cognitive components in the prediction of online activism (Feldman & Hart, 2016). Several studies also have focused on the emotion of indignation (e.g., Castells, 2015; Knops & Petit, 2022) emphasizing its importance, especially when situations of discrimination arise. Indignation plays an important role in triggering people to take actions aimed to produce positive changes.

As pointed out by Agyeiwaah et al. (2021), the limitation of the TPB about activism was taken into account in the Tricomponent Attitude Theoretical Model (TATM; Rosenberg, et al, 1960). Agyeiwaah et al. (2021) argued that activism involves three elements: cognition, affect, and behavior. The cognitive component involves the principles, opinions, and information individuals have about the object. The affective component includes the emotional reactions or feelings toward the object. Finally, the behavioral component is the behavioral intention or behavior directed toward the object. Thus, the research in this field should focus on the cognitive, behavioral, and affective components of activism.

Activism for the Construction of an Inclusive and Sustainable Career Future

Activism targeting social and environmental sustainability in the career counseling field has been recently discussed in the literature (e.g., Cadenas & McWhirter, 2022; Guichard, 2022; Nota et al., 2020). For example, Plant (2014) introduced the term 'green guidance' when referring to career counseling approaches that stimulate individuals to consider social and environmental challenges when thinking about their career future. These approaches contrast with more traditional ones, which focus on stimulating individuals to make career decisions based solely on their aspirations, attitudes, and interests.

Among the paradigms in career counseling, Life Design recently has advocated for the need to prepare people to think of a working life that actively contributes to equitable and sustainable development (Guichard, 2022). Thus, Life Design counseling promotes reflection and reflexivity on sustainability, with the goal of supporting career-life projects that contribute to the protection and well-being of the environment and society (Rochat &

Rossier, 2023). According to the Life Design paradigm, workers and young people can be encouraged to have a greater awareness of global challenges, to question their contributions to promoting sustainable development, and to have a broader ecological or social purpose in their career decisions (Guichard, 2022; Nota et al., 2020).

Workers also can be persuaded to think about roles or new occupations in professional fields that aim at sustainable development (Baumgartner, 2014; Nota et al., 2020). Additionally, they should be invited to implement changes in organizational policies and practices that may represent an opportunity to influence society in favor of a greater focus on the issue of sustainable development (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016).

Becoming aware of these global challenges can stimulate workers to become 'activists' within their organizations, instigate social change, or attempt to delegitimize the status quo in their professional contexts (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016). This can be done by offering new templates for organizationally acceptable decision-making and by creating sociocultural spaces that can be translated into entrepreneurial opportunities. Workers can be reinforced to engage with their peers, take part in group actions, and work within their organizational system. Furthermore, individuals can be motivated to access institutionalized channels of influence, such as senior executives, or they can exert pressure on the organization through collaborative efforts. Workers' understanding of the informal social structures, values, culture, and routines within their organizations can be instrumental in promoting a change of action in professional contexts. Consequently, this knowledge can empower them to influence stakeholders and the wider public, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable environment (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016).

Due to the importance of social and environmental activism in career counseling, specific assessment instruments are needed to help workers reflect on their career-life projects in relation to the world's needs.

Instruments to Assess Activism

Numerous self-reports have been developed to evaluate activism toward social or environmental challenges. In their international review on actions to benefit social justice, Fietzer and Ponterotto (2015) considered the Activism Orientation Scale (AOS; Corning & Myers, 2002), the Social Issues Advocacy Scale (SIAS; Nilsson et al., 2011), the Social Issues Questionnaire (SIQ; Miller et al., 2009), and the Social Justice Scale (SJS; Torres-Harding et al., 2012). The most recent measure, the Social Justice Scale (Torres-Harding et al., 2012), based on the TPB, consists of 24 items that saturate four sub-scales: social justice attitudes, perceived behavioral control toward social justice, social justice subjective norms, and behavioral intentions toward social justice. Responses to all four sub-scales were found to be negatively correlated with symbolic racism, neo-sexism, and a global belief in a just world. However, as noted by Fietzer and Ponterotto (2015), all four instruments had certain weaknesses, particularly concerning the absence of test-retest reliability, validation on more diverse samples, and the utilization of more robust confirmatory methods, such as confirmatory factor analysis.

Regarding the instruments to evaluate environmental activism, the most commonly used is the self-report Activism Scale (Seguin, Pelletier, & Hunsley, 1998). This measure is comprised of six items solely reflecting past environmental activism behaviors without considering cognitive and affective components. The items include participation in events organized by ecological groups, financial support of an environmental group, circulating a petition demanding improvements in government policies on the environment, taking part in protests against current environmental conditions, voting for a government that advocates environmentally conscious policies, and writing letters to firms that produce harmful products.

There are other limitations of the instruments just briefly discussed. First, they focus on social or environmental challenges alone without considering the strong relationship between global challenges (i.e., social and environmental), as suggested by Islam and Winkel (2017). Currently, based on our knowledge, no scale assesses activism toward both social and environmental sustainability. Second, the existing measures seem to only consider the behavioral component of activism, casting aside the cognitive and affective components that strongly contribute to the prediction of behaviors (Cho & Richardson Walton, 2009; Feldman & Hart, 2016). And

finally, the main content contained in these scales is relevant to individuals involved in activist groups, students, or members of the community; the content does not address workers who are thinking about their future careers.

Research Goal

Our study addressed the aforementioned limitations by developing an assessment instrument entitled, "Activism toward Social and Environmental Sustainability for Career Construction" (ASESCC), to determine its usefulness to evaluate the propensity toward both social and environmental activism. This scale also considers the strong relationship between cognitive (thoughts and beliefs toward such challenges), affective (e.g., anger, indignation) variables, and specific behaviors performed to respond to social and environmental challenges. Lastly, this instrument examines workers' activism toward social and environmental activism in career counseling activities.

Two studies were performed. The first, using two independent samples of Italian workers, aimed to test the appropriateness of the items and the factor structure of the new scale by performing Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA), Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA), and reliability analyses. The second study examined the convergent and discriminant validity of the ASESCC. Convergent validity was investigated by correlating the responses to this scale and the propensity to sustainability in making decisions about one's future, assessed by the "Goals for Future Design of the 2030 Agenda" measure (Santilli et al., 2023). Discriminant validity was tested by examining responses to the ASESCC with career adaptability, and life satisfaction.

Based on the TATM (Agyeiwaah et al., 2021; Rosenberg, et al, 1960), we expected that the instrument's factorial structure represented the three central components (first-order factors) of activism toward social and environmental activism (second-order factor) in career counseling. These are (a) a cognitive component (i.e., the propensity to consider issues connected to social and environmental sustainability as something interesting and valuable); (b) an affective component (i.e., the propensity to feel emotions of hope and indignation when exposed to threatening and/or discriminatory events and contexts for the safeguard of the environment); and (c) a behavioral component (i.e., the propensity to implement activism actions that are linked to social and environmental sustainability). Moreover, we predicted the first-order factors and the second-order factor to achieve internal consistency indices of at least .70 since this is considered an acceptable reliability coefficient (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Finally, taking into account the relevance that activism toward social and environmental activism may have in career counseling (Guichard, 2022; Nota et al., 2020) and in influencing individuals life satisfaction (Klar & Kasser, 2009; Kushlev et al., 2020; Nassani et al., 2013), we tested the correlation between responses to the ASESCC and career adaptability (i.e., psychological skills useful to consider environmental eventualities to proactively adjust them to necessities and values in a career path) (Massoudi et al., 2018), the propensity to sustainability (i.e., the tendency to consider systemic challenges related to sustainable development in making decisions about one's future), and life satisfaction. We hypothesized weak correlations between the responses to ASESCC, career adaptability, and life satisfaction, and a moderate to strong correlation between the responses to ASESCC and the propensity to sustainability in making decisions about one's future.

Study 1: Item Generation and Validation of Factor Structure

Method

Item Development

Following the suggestions of Clark and Watson (1995), items were generated by two expert researchers in the field of career guidance and activism in career choices (second and fourth authors) from a review of the scholarly literature on instruments that assess behaviors of activism toward social and environmental challenges (e.g., Corning & Myers, 2002; Fietzer & Ponterotto, 2015; Torres-Harding et al., 2012). The ASESCC was designed

to contain items corresponding to each of the three different components of activism: cognition, affect, and behavior. Specifically, based on the TATM (Agyeiwaah et al., 2021; Rosenberg, et al, 1960), a list of 18 items was developed to assess the three different components of activism in career counseling: (a) the propensity to consider issues connected to social and environmental sustainability as something interesting and valuable (6 items: cognitive component); (b) the propensity to feel emotions of hope and indignation when exposed to threatening and/or discriminatory events and contexts for the safeguard of the environment (6 items: affective component); and (c) the propensity to implement activism actions that are linked to social and environmental sustainability (6 items: behavioral component).

To test the readability of the 18 items, we developed a pilot study with 10 Italian workers in the socio-educational field, such as teachers and educators (M_{age} = 37, *SD* = 9.45). The scale was administered in Italian. The analysis of the comments reported by the participants involved in the pilot study showed that for all participants the items were comprehensible.

Participants

Based on Goretzko, Heumann, & Bühner's (2021) recommendations about an adequate sample size, 960 Italian workers in the socio-educational field (e.g., teachers, educators) were recruited. They ranged in age from 23 to 63 years old (*M* = 38.48, SD = 10.02), and 843 (87.81%) were women and 117 (12.19%) were men. Participants were randomly assigned to two subgroups: sub-sample A that was used to conduct an EFA and sub-sample B that was used to perform a CFA. Sub-sample A was composed of 480 workers (427 women and 53 men) with a mean age of 38.87 years (*SD* = 8.66), while sub-sample B was comprised of 480 workers (416 women and 64 men) with a mean age of 38.09 years (*SD* = 11.15). Between the two sub-samples, no gender [$\mathcal{X}^2$ (1) = 1.178, *p* = .324] and age [*t* (479) = -1.219, *p* = .223] differences were found, confirming no bias in the groups as a result of random assignment.

Procedure

Through the collaboration of various socio-educational institutions (e.g., schools, educational centers) in the Veneto region located in the northeastern part of Italy that shared participants' contact details, the research team contacted a pool of workers in the socio-educational field by email to ask if they wanted to participate in the study. Specifically, participants were invited to take part in a study about "workers' reflections on career futures, thoughts, emotions, and actions taken toward forms of injustice and discrimination experienced by individuals or groups, as well as threats to the environment and the planet." They also were told that they could receive a personalized report on their responses to the scales they completed. Participants volunteered for the study and did not receive any payment for their time. They completed an online informed consent form and they were then invited to complete the ASESCC questionnaire in Italian - using Google Forms®.

All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards involving human participants as outlined by the Italian Society of Vocational Guidance (SIO) and the Italian Association of Psychology.

Measure

ASESCC. All participants were asked to complete the ASESCC. Respondents were instructed to read and indicate the extent to which each item described their current way of thinking, feeling, and behaving in relation to various topics focused on people, society, and the environment, including issues such as injustice, threats to the environment, and threats to people and their dignity, in the context of their career role. Participants were invited to express their views on a 5-point Likert scale (*1 = It describes barely at all my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; 5 = It perfectly describes my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors*).

Data Analysis

With sub-sample A, in the first step, a preliminary analysis was carried out to test the items' distribution (e.g., skew, kurtosis) and inter-item correlations. Then, based on Goretzko et al.'s (2020) recommendations, we conducted a series of EFAs (principal-axis) to assess the underlying basic factor structure of the scale and to identify any potential items to delete. A direct oblimin rotation was conducted, as responses to all the underlying domains were expected to correlate with each other. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sample adequacy test and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used as indicators of adequacy for the EFA.

The scree plot (Cattell, 1966) and the Kaiser-Guttman criterion (retaining factors with eigenvalues equal to or greater than 1.0; Guttman, 1954; Kaiser, 1960) were employed to determine the appropriate number of factors to retain. In addition, we conducted a parallel analysis, comparing the eigenvalues from the observed data with those extracted from 1,000 random data sets for the current study. This process, with an equivalent number of cases and variables, aided in selecting an adequate number of factors. Items with primary factor loadings below .40 and/or cross-loadings on other factors exceeding .25 were deleted (Pett, Lackey, & Sullivan, 2003). Cronbach's α was used to determine the internal consistency of the scale and the factors.

To continue examining the factorial structure of the ASESCC questionnaire, CFAs were performed involving the sub-sample B. Specifically, we tested three different structural models: (a) the second-order-factor model (Model 1), having the 16 items clustered into three first-order factors and these combined into a single second-order factor; (b) the three-factors correlated model (Model 2), having 16-items loading in three correlated factors; and (c) the one-factor model (Model 3), having all 16-items loading on a single factor.

Different indexes and criteria were used for the assessment of the models' fit. Specifically, we used the Chi-square statistics, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR). Indicators of a good model can be considered with CFI and NNFI values greater than .95 and RMSEA and SRMR values greater than .08 (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003). Moreover, the $x^2\Delta$ test and the CFIΔ test were used to compare the three different factorial structure models analyzed.

Cronbach's α was also used to determine the internal consistency of the scale and the factors.

Results

EFA (sub-sample A). The preliminary analysis showed skew, kurtosis, and an adequate correlation index ($r < .80$). No items were removed during this phase. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < .001$) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (.90) suggested that the 18 items were appropriate for EFA. All the criteria we considered resulted in deciding that an initial three-factor solution should be examined through an EFA with an oblique rotation. A total of 2 items from the emotions' subscale were deleted due to cross-loading.

The Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) analysis on the three-factor oblique solution with 16 items accounted for 61.26% of the total variance (see Table 1). The first factor involved 6 items, accounted for 26.29% of the variance, and referred to the cognitive component. One example of an item is "It is important and interesting to be informed on socially relevant issues and know more about their causes, consequences, etc." The second factor consisted of 6 items, accounted for 21.19% of the variance, and captured the behavioral component. One example of an item is "I demonstrate with other people against injustice or to the benefit of higher equity." The third factor contained 4 items, accounted for 13.78% of the variance, and encompassed the affective component. One example of an item is "It happens to me to feel discomfort when I witness the indifference toward." Factor loadings ranged from .61 to .94 and the communality values were greater than .40 for all the items. The inter-factor correlations ranged from .22 to .68. Items, factor loadings, and commonalities are presented in Table 1. Cronbach's α internal consistency reliability for the total score of ASESCC was .88, the cognitive component was .91, the affective component was .80, and the behavioral component was .89.

Table 1

ASESCC Items, Component Loadings, and Communality Estimates.

Items	Factors[1]			
	1[1]	**2[2]**	**3[3]**	**Communality**
1. It is important and interesting to be informed on socially relevant issues and know more about their causes, consequences, etc.	**.94**	-.01	-.15	.71
2. It is important and interesting to try to understand the consequences of discrimination, lack of respect for rights, etc.	**.90**	-.05	.00	.79
3. It is important and interesting to analyze and reflect on injustice, threats to the environment, to people and their dignity, etc.	**.78**	.02	.11	.76
4. It is important and interesting to search for ideas and suggestions on what could be done to reduce injustice and the threats to the environment or people.	**.77**	.05	.08	.72
5. It is important and interesting to reflect and discuss with other people about actions and ways to safeguard common goods, what belongs to us and future generations.	**.72**	.03	.11	.65
6. It is important and interesting to give contributions and propose reflections and ideas to promote social changes to the benefit of the community.	**.69**	.02	.12	.63
17. I demonstrate with other people against injustice or to the benefit of higher equity.	-.10	**.85**	.08	.71
15. I join informative or awareness-raising events organized by associations or groups of socially committed activists.	.04	**.78**	-.01	.63
16. I sign petitions, manifestos, and calls to action (e.g., change.org etc.).	-.01	**.74**	.00	.54
13. I organize events to protest something or to demonstrate to promote something.	-.02	**.72**	-.14	.49
14. I circulate videos, messages, and posts about the sensibilization of social commitment topics.	.03	**.69**	.02	.50
18. I get involved to report discrimination, the lack of respect for rights, etc.	.10	**.68**	.10	.56
8. It happens to me to feel discomfort when I witness the indifference toward oppression, violence, and arrogance.	-.09	-.04	**.92**	.72
7. It happens to me to feel indignant in presence of injustice.	.07	.03	**.65**	.51
9. It happens to me to feel reassured and hopeful observing that unity is a strength to improve the society we live in.	.14	.00	**.61**	.51
10. It happens to me to feel that it is possible to do something for the benefit of all and to reduce injustice and inequalities.	.15	.09	**.48**	.39

Note: [1]Factor 1 was named Propensity to consider issues connected to social and environmental sustainability as something interesting and valuable (cognitive component); [2]Factor 2 was labeled Propensity to implement activism actions that are linked to social and environmental sustainability (behavioral component); [3]Factor 3 was named Propensity to feel emotions of hope and indignation when exposed to threatening and/or discriminatory events and contexts for the safeguard of the environment (affective component).

CFA (sub-sample B). The CFA generated identical good fit coefficients [$x^2_{(101, 480)}$ = 373.651, $p < .001$; CFI = .966; NNFI = .959; RMSEA = .075 (CI90 = .067–.083); SRMR=.054] for the second-order-factor model (Model 1) and three-factors correlated model (Model 2). For both models, we found that factor loadings were significant ($p < .001$) and ranged from .60 to .87. Moreover, R^2 values were greater than 20% and ranged from .49 to .76. Standardized loadings of the first–order factors on the second-order factor were 1.14 for the cognitive component, .68 for the affective component, and .25 for the behavioral component. Finally, the one-factor model (Model 3) revealed low fit indexes: x^2(104, 480) = 1835.254, $p < .001$; CFI = .792; NNFI = .760; RMSEA = .232 (CI90 = .224–.239); SRMR = .178. Moreover, the x^2 difference test suggested that the second-order-factor model (Model 1) and the three-factors correlated model (Model 2) improved the fit compared with the one-factor model (Model 3) $\Delta\chi^2_{(3)}$ = 1461.60, $p < .001$. Moreover, using the CFIΔ test, the CFI changes were .174 between the second-order-factor model (Model 1) and the three-factors correlated model (Model 2) compared with the one-factor model (Model 3). Thus, the second-order-factor model (Model 1) and the three-factors correlated model (Model 2) were found to be better supported.

Cronbach's α internal consistency reliability for the total score of ASESCC was .87, the cognitive component was .90, the affective component was .78, and the behavioral component was .89.

Discussion

Using two independent sub-samples, the first study was conducted to develop and evaluate the appropriateness of the ASESCC items, examine the factor structure of the ASESCC using EFA and CFA, and evaluate its reliability. The preliminary analysis carried out to test the appropriateness of the items revealed that the original 18 items were appropriate and comprehensible. Moreover, the EFA provided additional support for the quality of the items, and yielded three different factors: the propensity to consider issues connected to social and environmental sustainability as something interesting and valuable (cognitive component, 6 items); the propensity to feel emotions of hope and indignation when exposed to threatening and/or discriminatory events and contexts for the safeguard of the environment (affective component, 4 items); and the propensity to implement activism actions that are linked to social and environmental sustainability (behavioral component, 6 items).

The three-factors model was supported also by the CFA, which generated good fit indexes for the second-order-factor model with the three factors combined and the three-factors correlated model. Moreover, considering that three first-order factors were significantly saturated on the second-order factor, we can affirm that the second-order-factor model was more plausible because of the common variance shared by the three first-order factors. These results are in line with the TATM (Agyeiwaah et al., 2021; Rosenberg, et al, 1960), suggesting that cognitive, affective, and behavioral components can be considered as indicators of a global dimension reflecting the propensity toward activism regarding environmental and social sustainability. Lastly, all Cronbach's α indexes were adequate and provided support for the ASESCC's reliability.

Study 2: Convergent and Discriminant Validity

Method

Participants

G* Power 3 (Faul et al., 2007) was used to identify the minimal sample size for Study 2. We specified a correlation *p* of .03, a power of .80, and a significance level (α) of .05. A total sample of 84 participants was needed. Thus, 110 Italian workers in the socio-educational field (e.g., teachers, educators), aged from 23 to 65 years old (*M* = 37.35, *SD* = 10.182), including 101 women (91.8%) and 9 men (8.2%), participated.

Procedure

A similar procedure to Study 1 was utilized in this study. Participants were contacted by email, informed about the research goals, and invited to voluntarily participate in this study by completing an online research form. Specifically, they were informed that this study examined workers' propensity for social and environmental activism, their inclination toward sustainability, their attitudes towards their career future and job market, and life satisfaction. No specific instructions were given to participants other than the request to answer all items as accurately as possible. All scales were administered in Italian in the same order as presented below. All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards involving human participants as outlined by the SIO, and AIP.

Measures

In addition to the ASESCC, the following measures were used.

The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS)-Italian Form (Soresi, Nota, & Ferrari, 2012) was utilized to assess career adaptability. Specifically, this scale is composed of 24 items saturated in four sub-scales of 6 items each: concern (e.g., "Thinking about what my future will be like"), control (e.g., "Taking responsibility for my actions"), curiosity (e.g., "Observing different ways of doing things"), and confidence (e.g., "Solving problems"). The CAAS-Italian Form possesses adequate internal consistency estimates (Cronbach's alpha for the four subscales were .80, .74, .77, and .85, respectively) and a coherent multidimensional structure (the fit indices were RMSEA = 0.058 and SRMR = 0.049; see Soresi et al., 2012 for more details about the scale's construct validity), in line with the fit indices for the CAAS-International model (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Higher scores denote higher levels of career adaptability. In the current study, the analyses confirmed the factor structure of the scale $\chi^2(248) = 476.380$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.082, 90% CI 0.070–0.95, CFI = 0.93, NNFI= 0.92. Good reliability indexes also were obtained (Cronbach's alpha for the four subscales were .83, .82, .80, and .85, respectively, and .93 for the total score) in the current study.

Goals for Future Design of the 2030 Agenda (Santilli et al., 2023). This scale was used to analyze the tendency to consider systemic challenges to attain sustainable development. Specifically, this scale is composed of 17 items that refer to the 17 goals presented in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015) document. An example item is: "In the future, there will certainly still be much to do to ensure employment and decent work for all… How could this topic of promoting decent work influence your career design?" Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *almost not at all,* 5 = *very much*), participants rate how much they think that every goal can affect their career. The analyses conducted by Santilli et al. (2023) revealed good fit indices or construct validity for the four-factor first-order structure $\chi^2(200) = 102.503$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.058, 90% CI 0.038–0.078, CFI = 0.970, TLI = 0.91. The four factors were social/health (2 items), environment/nature (6 items), human rights and equal economic development (7 items), and policy and democracy (2 items). A total score for the 17 items indicates the propensity for sustainability in making decisions about one's future. Good reliability indices also were obtained by Santilli et al. (2023): Cronbach's α internal-consistency reliability for the factors were social/health .70, environment/nature .91, human rights and equal economic development .75, and policy and democracy .79. In the current study, the analyses confirmed the factor structure or construct validity of the scale $\chi^2(115) = 208.406$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.084, 90% CI 0.066–0.103, CFI = 0.959, NNFI= 0.93. Good reliability was obtained as well; in the current study Cronbach's alpha for the four factors were .67, .94, .84, and .77, respectively, and .91 for the total score.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) was used to assess life satisfaction. It consists of five items. An example of an item is "I am satisfied with my life." Participants were asked to rate how much each statement describes them on a 7-point scale. Higher scores denote higher levels of life satisfaction. The Italian adaptation of the scale confirmed the mono-factorial structure or construct validity, accounting for 55.73% of the total variance, and good internal consistency (α = .80) was discovered as well (Di Maggio, 2014). In the current

study, the analyses confirmed the factor structure of the scale $\chi^2(5) = 10.233$, $p = 0.05$; RMSEA = 0.050, 90% CI 0.038–0.095, CFI = 0.997, NNFI = 0.99, and yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .89.

Data Analysis

The convergent validity of the ASESCC scale was analyzed by performing correlations between the responses to the measure's total score and the propensity to sustainability in making decisions about one's future (social/health, environment/nature, human rights, and equal economic development). Discriminant validity was assessed by correlating responses to the ASESCC's total score with career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence), and life satisfaction.

Results

As shown in Table 2, significant positive correlations were found between the responses to the ASESCC total score and the propensity to sustainability in making decisions about one's future subscales (*r's* .313-.424, $p < .01$) providing support for the scale's convergent validity. Moreover, significant, positive, and weak correlations were found between the responses to the ASESCC total score with the career adaptability subscales (*r's* .247 - .318, $p < .01$), and life satisfaction ($r = .268$, $p < .01$) offering support for the measure's discriminant validity.

Discussion

The second study was conducted to examine the convergent and discriminant validity of the ASESCC. As expected, the results obtained through correlational analyses revealed positive correlations between the responses to the ASESCC total score and the propensity to sustainability in making decisions about one's future demonstrating support for the scale's convergent validity. This result could be due to the fact that both constructs, albeit distinct, focus on engagement toward sustainability in career-life projects. Moreover, as hypothesized, the responses to the ASESCC total score were positively and weakly correlated with the responses to the four CAAS-Italian Form sub-scales of career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) and its total score, and also life satisfaction providing support for the discriminant validity of the ASESCC. These results are in line with other studies that reported that activism – also social and environmental sustainability – was associated with higher career adaptability and greater life satisfaction (Klar & Kasser, 2009; Kushlev et al., 2020; Nassani et al., 2013). As suggested also by Klar and Kasser (2009), engaging in activism could lead individuals to greater consistency between their values, thoughts, and behaviors, thereby reducing cognitive dissonance and increasing their levels of well-being and satisfaction.

General Discussion

Considering the recent attention to social and environmental challenges regarding sustainability in the field of career counseling (e.g., Guichard, 2022; Nota et al., 2020), the current research was designed to develop and validate a scale to examine the propensity toward both social and environmental activism in career counseling. Specifically, considering the instruments currently available in the literature to assess activism related to social and environmental sustainability (e.g., Corning & Myers, 2002; Fietzer & Ponterotto, 2015; Torres-Harding et al., 2012), we set out to create a measure that was able to assess activism in terms of its cognitive, affective, and behavioral components related to sustainable development in a single scale.

The combined results of our two studies provide strong psychometric support for the ASESCC scale with Italian workers. The factor analyses yielded a three-factor structure that can be useful in evaluating the propensity to consider issues connected to social and environmental sustainability (cognitive component), the propensity to feel emotions of hope and indignation when exposed to threatening and/or discriminatory events and contexts for the safeguard of the environment (affective component), and the propensity to implement activism actions that are linked to social and environmental sustainability (behavioral component).

Table 2

Correlations between the responses to the ASESCC, Career adaptability, Life Satisfaction, and Propensity to sustainability in making decisions about one's future.

	Career adaptability total score[1]	Concern[2]	Control[2]	Curiosity[2]	Confidence[2]	Life Satisfaction[3]	Propensity to sustainability in making decisions about one's future Total Score[4]	Social health[4]	Environment/ Nature[4]	Human rights and Equal economic development[4]	Policy and Democracy[4]
Propensity toward activism regarding environmental and social sustainability (ASESCC Total score)	.318**	.281**	.249**	.319**	.247**	.268**	.474**	.313**	.414**	.424**	.377**
Cognitive Component	.432**	.371**	.318**	.420**	.391**	.244*	.508**	.287**	.427**	.475**	.461**
Affective Component	.329**	.270**	.232*	.266**	.378**	0.156	.446**	.335**	.330**	.453**	.383**
Behavioral Component	.091	.095	.094	.125	-.008	.193*	.230*	.163	.233*	.173	.14

Note: [1]CAAS-Italian Form Total Score; [2]CAAS-Italian Form Subscale; [3]Satisfaction with Life Scale; [4]Goals for Future Design of the 2030 Agenda.

*** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.*

The CFA, considering both the three-factors correlated model and the second-order-factor model (with the three first-order factors subordinated to a single second-order factor), produced consistent and adequate fit indices. This indicates that the ASESCC can be used with Italian workers for separate assessments of each component (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) as well as for analyzing a general dimension reflecting a positive propensity toward activism regarding environmental and social sustainability. Correlational analyses confirmed that the responses to the ASESCC total score were weakly related to career adaptability (discriminant validity) and life satisfaction (discriminant validity) and moderately related to the propensity to sustainability in making decisions about one's future (convergent validity). This suggests that workers with a greater propensity toward activism regarding social and environmental sustainability exhibited higher levels of career adaptability and life satisfaction and a greater propensity to sustainability in making decisions about their future (Klar & Kasser, 2009; Kushlev et al., 2020; Nassani et al., 2013).

Limitations of the Study. Several limitations of this project should be considered. First, in this research, no objective measures were used to verify if self-reports are correlated with the frequency of activism people actually perform in their work context. Second, the test-retest and the predictive validity of the ASESCC were not addressed. Third, although the items were generated to evaluate the three components of activism, in accordance with the TATM (Agyeiwaah et al., 2021; Rosenberg, et al 1960), individuals' proficiency or perceived competency in activism was not considered. Fourth, only Italian workers in the socio-educational field were involved in the research, where the gender distribution is generally unequal (with a greater prevalence of women; OECD, 2017). Finally, this research was a cross-sectional analysis, therefore, causal relationships were not assessed (Setha, 2016).

Implications for Practice. The results of the two studies support the use of the ASESCC scale in career counseling and research activities to examine Italian workers' activism toward social and environmental sustainability. Specifically, in career counseling, the ASESCC can be utilized by career counselors to stimulate workers' thoughts and beliefs toward social and environmental challenges, emotions of anger and indignation toward situations of discrimination and environmental violations, and behaviors that can be undertaken to support social and environmental sustainability. In addition, the ASESCC can be used in the pre- and post-test phases of career education programs to evaluate its effectiveness in training workers on the topic of social and environmental sustainability and to stimulate reflections on their career and professional future from a sustainable perspective (Guichard, 2022). Lastly, it can be useful for research activities involving workers in order to examine the relationships between activism toward social and environmental sustainability and other psychosocial constructs in the field of career counseling.

Implications for Future Research. The limitations of the current project present several avenues for future research. Future researchers could include both self-report and objective measures to assess activism behaviors in the work context and they also can consider the relationship between responses to the ASESCC and individuals' proficiency or perceived competency in activism. Additionally, future studies should explore the test-retest reliability of the ASESCC and investigate its predictive validity. Furthermore, research on the ASESCC should include a larger sample of males, and workers from diverse countries and in various professions and occupations.

Conclusion

Unlike other assessment measures found in the literature, the ASESCC is a psychometrically sound scale to assess the propensity toward both social and environmental activism, particularly for Italian workers. Moreover, based on the TATM (Agyeiwaah et al., 2021; Rosenberg, et al, 1960), the ASESCC can be used to assess a general dimension and three components (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) of activism related to social and environmental sustainability. It can be utilized in career counseling to measure workers' propensity to activism in work contexts, and this assessment may stimulate the workers to have greater awareness of social and environmental challenges leading to their enhanced willingness to promote sustainable development.

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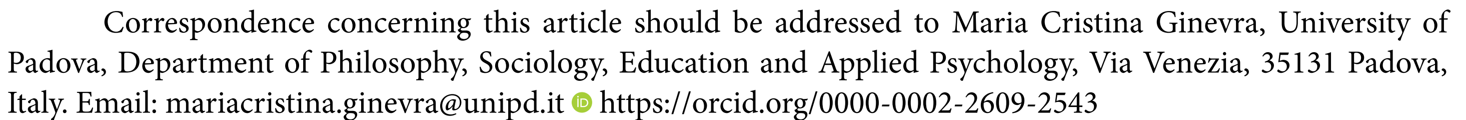

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest in relation to this work.

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Counselors as Social Justice Advocates: Experiences Addressing Systemic Marginalization

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Abstract

A phenomenological study was conducted to determine how counselors are experiencing engagement in social justice advocacy. Participants included seven (N = 7) licensed clinical counselors in the United States. Several themes emerged from the data: social justice advocacy as part of counselor professional identity, experiences of emotional discomfort and gratification, advocacy in action on a micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level, skills utilized to be effective advocates, identity impacting advocacy efforts, challenges faced, and advocacy successes. Results highlighted advocacy action steps that counselors can take to support clients. Skills needed to be effective advocates included gaining knowledge of systems, self-awareness of bias and privilege, intentionality and strategies linked with advocacy actions, and use of common counseling skills such as compassion and managing challenging responses. Four main elements were identified for the potential training of counselors: (1) establishing a clear professional identity/role around social justice advocacy, (2) teaching advocacy competencies, (3) education about what advocacy practice looks like, and (4) building skills frequently utilized in advocacy practice.

Keywords: social justice advocacy, counselors, phenomenology

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Counselors as Social Justice Advocates: Experiences Addressing Systemic Marginalization

The United States (U.S.) continues to have sociopolitical systems in place that afford power and privilege to some identities while oppressing others. Individuals who experience discrimination due to having a marginalized identity or identities (e.g., based on race, disability status, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) are at risk of developing both mental health and physical health issues, including posttraumatic stress disorder or related symptoms (Bird et al., 2021; Carter et al., 2019; Kirkinis et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2012), anxiety and depression (Bower et al., 2013; McLaughlin et al., 2010; Takeda et al., 2021; Weeks & Sullivan, 2019), and substance use disorders (Kcomt et al., 2020; López et al., 2022; McLaughlin et al., 2010; Wray et al., 2016). Marginalization is linked to lower household incomes (U.S. Census, 2018), substandard living conditions, and increased risk of homicide and domestic abuse (Equality and Humans Rights Commission, 2020). Marginalization also has been connected to higher adverse childhood experiences (LaBrenz et al., 2020), which has a relationship to lower health and well-being outcomes throughout the lifespan (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.).

Given the aforementioned impacts of discrimination, it is not surprising that for decades, leaders in the counseling profession have called for counselor engagement in social justice advocacy (see Crethar & Winterowd, 2012; Greenleaf & Bryant, 2012; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018; Smith et al., 2003; Toporek et al., 2009; Vera et al., 2003). The American Counseling Association's (ACA) Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) defined justice as "treating individuals equitably and fostering fairness and equality" (p. 3). Crethar and Winterowd (2012) stated, "In the field of counseling, social justice is both a goal and a process for counselors who believe in developing an increasingly socially just world…" (p. 3). Advocacy is one way to target social justice issues in counseling and some consider social justice counseling the "fifth force" of the field (Ratts, 2009). As stated by Lee et al. (2018), counselors have a responsibility to assist in supporting work against cultural, economic, and social barriers that impede psychosocial development, whether directly with the client, or through advocacy efforts that challenge harmful traditions or biases.

In addition to calls for action, the ACA leadership has endorsed competencies related to advocacy (Toporek & Daniels, 2018) as well as multicultural and social justice competencies (Ratts et al., 2015). These endorsements demonstrate increased expectations within the profession for counselors to engage in advocacy work and incorporate a multicultural and social justice lens into their clinical practice. While the competencies exist, there is little published knowledge regarding the extent to which counselors implement or understand social justice advocacy in practice (see Crumb et al., 2019; Kozan & Blustein, 2018; Singh et al., 2010). Because we know that experiencing discrimination and social injustice can impact individuals in numerous ways, it is important for counselors to engage in continuous learning and to understand how to advocate and support their clients most effectively.

Purpose of Study

Given the significant impacts of oppression on individuals and the call for counselors to engage in social justice advocacy, the purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to explore counselor experiences with social justice advocacy and factors that influence these experiences. Results can highlight current advocacy practices and barriers faced by counselors, serving to inform recommendations for training counselors as social justice advocates. The following research questions were investigated: 1) How do counselors perceive their role as social justice advocates? 2) How do counselors experience being social justice advocates? 3) How do issues related to marginalization influence advocacy in counseling? and 4) What challenges and successes do counselors experience in social justice advocacy engagement?

Conceptual framework

To best address these research questions, a conceptual framework was utilized to guide the development and implementation of the study. Maxwell (2005) defined a conceptual framework in qualitative research as "the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research" (p. 33). Such a framework provides a study with a strong foundation, and we adopted the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2015) to serve as our foundation. Originally developed by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis in 1992, the revised competencies in 2015 offer counselors a meaningful structure to implement multicultural and social justice competencies in their practices. Four developmental domains serve as the catalyst to lead to competence in the MSJCC framework: (1) counselor self-awareness, (2) client worldview, (3) counseling relationship, and (4) counseling and advocacy interventions (Ratts et al., 2015). Additional aspirational competencies exist within the first three domains of the MSJCC: attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action. Counselors can refer to these competencies to assist with implementing multiculturally competent and social just ways to serve their clients (Ratts et al., 2015). Given the study's purpose was to explore counselor experiences with social justice advocacy, we believe the MSJCC framework aligns well with this purpose as we sought to understand the challenges and successes counselors experience.

Method

Research Design: Descriptive Phenomenology

A descriptive phenomenological design was used for this study as it aimed to "determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experiences" via their descriptions, so that "general or universal meanings" can be found (Moustakas, 1994, p.11). Qualitative methods suited this study, as this approach leads to insights about meaning, context, and process (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher applied the constructivist paradigm when formulating this study, as it represents the idea that personal experiences drive the way that people construct knowledge and understand the world (Adom et al., 2016). Thus, this paradigm was quite useful to conceptualize a study designed to research the experiences of counselors and their understanding of their role as advocates.

Positionality Statement

The research team included three individuals. The primary researcher is a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor with experience as a clinician, counseling supervisor, and counseling educator. This researcher personally believes in the importance of social justice and equity. This researcher also is a White female. The power dynamic associated with being a lead researcher and a White individual may have influenced participants involvement and thus were considered as potential influences in this project. When meeting with participants, the primary researcher verbally acknowledged her power as the researcher and noted the participants' power to choose what to share and how to participate in the study. The analysis portion of this project included a coding team of two colleagues who both identify as White females and are also licensed counselors who believe in addressing social justice issues. Both were Ph.D. students in the same program as the primary researcher and completed training in qualitative research and analysis. One of the team members has dedicated time to learning more about and participating in anti-racist practice and has focused her own research on this concept in substance use treatment education. The other team member has committed time to better understanding the impact of counselors' racial identity when working with marginalized populations. These experiences influenced their desire to be involved in this study. Their role on the coding team was to identify descriptors as codes and categorize these codes based on their similarity.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Participants in this study included seven (*N* = 7) clinical mental health counselors in the U.S. who met the following criteria: 1) have a master's degree in clinical mental health counseling, 2) have been clinically active

(working directly with clients) under a license in the last 10 years, and 3) self-identify as having experience engaging in social justice advocacy on behalf of their clients or community on a local, state, and/or national level. After obtaining university IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval, participants were recruited using purposive (criterion) sampling and snowball sampling procedures (Goodman, 1960; Robinson, 2014). Participants were found via a search of counseling professionals in the field who may have published, presented on, or were involved in organizational work related to social justice advocacy or who identified as social justice advocates in their clinical practice or through referral by other counselors. This search was conducted via psychologytoday.com, looking for authors who had published or presented on topics related to social justice advocacy in the counseling field (by viewing topic related articles and conference schedules), and by recommendations via snowball sampling.

Potential participants were provided with an IRB-approved information sheet which included content about the purpose and logistics of the study, privacy, risks/benefits, and procedures to withdraw from the study. The recruitment email and information sheet explained that the purpose of the study was to learn about participant's experiences engaging in social justice advocacy, including successes and challenges in order to inform how counselors are trained to be advocates. Interviews were conducted within 45 days of individuals' agreement to participate. In total, 32 individuals were invited to participate; 18 individuals did not respond, 14 responded with interest. Of the 14, six individuals did not meet the criteria, leaving eight participants who met the criteria and were willing to participate. Seven interviews were completed as one person was unable to be scheduled due to their availability. Data saturation was reached after the seventh interview was conducted, and therefore, no further recruitment was needed. Saturation was determined when no new themes were identified in the data during the coding/data analysis process (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017).

Participant Demographics

Demographic information was gathered for each participant (see Table 1 for this information). The demographic form also included several questions regarding participants' training experiences. Four of the participants *(n* = 4, 57%) reported they were taught about advocacy in their master's program. Similarly, four of the participants *(n* = 4, 57%) stated they felt prepared to do advocacy work after graduating. Only four participants answered the question about attending training on the topic of social justice advocacy and all four *(n* = 4, 100%) indicated attending training experiences that were not included in their master's programs.

Data Collection

The primary researcher used an open-ended, semi-structured interview structure when conducting one-on-one interviews with each participant via Zoom. The researcher scheduled interviews for one and a half hours each. The average length of the interviews, however, was 59 minutes. The interviews included the use of pre-written questions (see Appendix A), with flexibility to ask spontaneous questions to gain more understanding. In addition to the interview data, the researcher gathered demographic information, asked questions to screen participants, and posted several follow up questions about training topics and educational experiences. As stated earlier, screening was necessary to ensure participants met the criteria to be included in the study. Interviews started by reviewing the purpose of the study, discussing participants' consent to take part in the study, and by gaining their consent to record the interview. No participants requested to withdraw from the study, and no follow-up interviews were scheduled. Each participant was provided with a $50 visa gift card for their participation.

Data Analysis

The primary researcher edited the Zoom recorded transcripts, as Zoom's transcription procedure is not fully accurate/edited upon completion. Then, each participant's transcript and the initial codebook was sent to them as a first form of member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Participants were given two weeks to request corrections to their transcripts and were asked to include any follow up information or new thoughts that they had while reading the transcript or since the interview occurred (Moustakas, 1994). Five *(n* = 5) out of seven

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

Categories	*n*	%
Gender		
Female	5	71%
Male	2	29%
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African American	3	43%
White	4	57%
Educational Level		
Master's Degree	1	14%
Doctorate Degree	6	86%
License Type		
Dependent	3	43%
Independent	4	57%
Years Practicing		
3-5 years	4	57%
6-10 years	1	14%
11-13 years	2	29%
Work Setting[1]		
Community Agency	2	29%
Private Practice	6	86%
Other	6	86%
Client Population		
Children/Adolescents	2	29%
Adults	3	43%
Older Adults	1	14%
General Population	1	14%

Note. $N = 7$; [1]Some participants noted several work settings so the totals will not equal 100%.

responded to the member checking of transcripts. No participants requested edits, and one participant clarified an answer as was requested by the researcher. No participants commented on the initial codebook shared.

Thematic analysis is a process in which qualitative data can be coded and themes identified for the purpose of identifying patterns and meaning (Clarke & Braun, 2015) and was used as an analysis process in this research project. The researcher used first- and second-cycle coding methods (Miles et al., 2020) employing the coding software MAXQDA (Verbi, 2023) as this software provides a system to collect and store created codes. Two colleagues were on the coding team as a method of investigator triangulation (Carter et al., 2014) and the emerging themes were discussed with both of these members. The coding team was trained to code in a Ph.D. qualitative research course, and they were provided the researcher's codebook for coding and were told they could, if they thought necessary, add new codes to the book. Analysis started with first-cycle coding, including descriptive, in-vivo, concept, and emotion coding (Miles et al., 2020). Both descriptive and concept coding used participant verbiage or descriptions/summaries of concepts. In-vivo codes were short, direct quotes from participants, while emotion coding included the emotions that were being verbally shared by the participants. The purpose of the first-cycle coding was to retrieve and categorize data that was similar so that it could easily be

extracted and summarized. Second-cycle coding was used to further group the data from the initial codes into smaller categories and themes using pattern codes (Miles et al., 2020). A final codebook and table with themes and sub-themes discovered were sent to participants with a request that they share whether they felt the themes captured the experience they reported and whether any important components were missed. One participant responded that it "looked good." Another requested further information on how to provide feedback. The primary researcher responded to this request with information on how to review the themes to see if they represented their experience, however, the participant did not end up sending any feedback. An additional participant responded that they would look at the shared analysis, however, they did not respond with any feedback. The other four participants did not respond to the request.

Ethics, Validity, and Trustworthiness

Ethical considerations regarding communication, respect, consent, and confidentiality were ensured in the study. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) indicated the necessity of providing accurate communication about the intent, assuring participants have consented to participate, protecting the participants' information, and avoiding exploitation for the researcher's personal gain. The primary researcher used the following bracketing methods to increase trustworthiness and ethics in this project: frequent memo writing, discussion with the coding team to uncover themes that hindered the process, as well as maintaining a memoing journal throughout the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2010). The researcher also consulted with a counselor educator to explore biases and address research issues. These considerations were included in the research process to ensure ethical research was conducted and that the dignity and privacy of participants was prioritized. The primary researcher focused on validity and trustworthiness by using some of the common techniques offered by Whittemore et al. (2001) including: design considerations (i.e., sampling decisions, giving voice), data generating (i.e., articulating data collection decisions, providing verbatim transcription), and analytics (i.e., member checking, using computer programs, memo writing, articulating data analysis decisions) (retrieved from Table 2).

Researcher bias (how the researcher's own beliefs or expectations could influence the project) threatened the trustworthiness of this study and was combatted by including a positionality statement, member checking, writing memos, having discussions with a university advisor, and using a coding team for investigator triangulation (Carter et al., 2014). The main biases experienced by the primary researcher included the beliefs/assumptions that advocacy is highly challenging work and that those engaging in advocacy may not be treated well by others due to the potentially confrontational nature of the work. This bias showed up in the first interview when the primary researcher asked a leading follow up question about whether the challenges of bringing awareness to others on certain topics led to any consequences for the individual (in a negative way). The researcher reflected on this after the interview so as not to assume negative outcomes and use leading questions when interviewing future participants. However, the follow up question did lead to valuable sharing about the participant's experience with negative feedback when doing advocacy work. As additional interviews occurred, the challenging nature of the work continued to be emphasized, further reiterating the primary researcher's assumptions. Nevertheless, the researcher continued to memo after each interview and consult with her academic advisor throughout the project to discuss how to avoid leading questions in future interviews based on assumptions and what benefit or risk came from the instance when the leading question was asked. The coding team were only asked to descriptively code using the coding procedures previously described and no interpretation was involved, thus potential for bias on their part was thought to be minimal.

Results

The six main themes identified in this study included (1) professional identity, (2) emotional experiences: discomfort and gratification, (3) advocacy in action (on a micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level as well as skills utilized), (4) identities impact advocacy, (5) advocacy challenges, and (6) advocacy successes. A description of the themes and any emerging sub-themes can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme/Sub-theme	Definition
Theme 1: Professional Identity	Social justice advocacy is perceived as being an integral part of the counseling role. Advocacy work goes beyond 1:1 sessions and should incorporate ACA competencies as a framework.
Theme 2: Emotional Experiences: Discomfort and Gratification	Social justice advocacy work is challenging and often leads to uncomfortable emotions and experiences, yet the outcomes can be very gratifying.
Theme 3: Advocacy in Action	Social justice advocacy actions were classified as micro-, mezzo-, or macro-level as participants shared about the ways in which they engaged in advocacy work. Categories were identified based on ACA Advocacy Competencies.
Sub-theme: Micro-Level	Client/Student Empowerment, Client/Student Advocacy
Sub-theme: Mezzo-Level	Community Collaboration, Systems Advocacy
Sub-theme: Macro-Level	Public Information, Social/Political Advocacy
Sub-theme: Skills Utilized	Knowledge of systems, self-awareness, intentionality and strategy, use of common counseling skills.
Theme 4: Identities Impact Advocacy	Personal identities and life experiences impacted participants 'advocacy focus.
Theme 5: Advocacy Challenges	Challenges that impact engagement or success in social justice advocacy, including discomfort, not knowing what to do, and lack of awareness/support/action.
Theme 6: Advocacy Successes	Success looks like progress: increased attention and support towards issues of injustice, implementation and continuation of support programs, positive impact on clients/populations, change within systems.

Professional Identity: "This is part of what we do"

Professional identity was the main theme that arose when participants discussed their role as social justice advocates. All participants ($N = 7$) spoke about social justice advocacy being part of their professional identity and defined role as a counselor. Sierra described counseling and social justice advocacy as going "hand in hand" and stated, "I don't think it's something that should be, uh, an option for folks." This was a frequent sentiment amongst participants; James stated, "we can't really do effective work without acknowledging the role that those, um, that the lack of social justice or the lack of advocacy play in the lives of our clients." Participants discussed going beyond one-on-one sessions and stepping outside of the office to be advocates with or on behalf of clients. Marcus spoke to the inherent privilege of being a counselor with a higher education degree and identified how he can use that power to "directly address issues that the client is experiencing, that they may not, uh, have sort of the power, developed empowerment, um, to address and navigate themselves."

Four of the seven participants spoke about the ACA adopted counseling competencies (i.e., MSJCCs and Advocacy Competencies) as being an important framework or guide for counselors to drive social justice advocacy engagement. Four participants used the language of "values" and "ethics," or both; such as noting that it is an important values commitment to do social justice advocacy work. When defining the role of being a social justice advocate, some of the following verbiage was used: fight for people with less power, build bridges to equitable opportunity, stepping beyond direct client care, comprehensive look at client experiences, navigate barriers, using power to address changes, ensuring client access to resources, and using an ecological standpoint to acknowledge how social injustices effect everyone (including the counseling profession). Lynn defined the role of social justice advocate as, "being alert in our environment to those things that need to be changed from a social justice perspective. So, kind of being aware, and also then, of course, taking action." Many participants recognized that the counseling profession has progressed in being more social justice minded.

Emotional Experiences: Discomfort and Gratification

All participants ($N = 7$) used different emotional vocabulary to describe their experiences doing social justice advocacy work, but the main emotions described fell within the themes of discomfort and gratification. While advocacy work was often tied to challenging emotions (i.e., worry, frustration, intimidation, isolation, disappointment, dismissed, exhaustion, etc.), the experience of gratification was noted when success is found after engaging in this demanding work. Discomfort was often linked to others' lack of awareness or care of social justice issues, seeing a lack of change, and witnessing social injustice while engaging in advocacy. Marcus shared, "I've come to expect to, um, see racism, sexism, and, um, homophobia and transphobia like pop up very quickly." Several participants spoke about the fact that challenging systems can anger people who want to uphold the current system. Lynn stated, "I'm not making any friends." However, she noted that doing this work, "makes people stronger" and described that strength in herself as, "I'm more able to speak the truth than I was before." Several participants discussed the inherent risks of participating in social justice advocacy, sometimes from a safety perspective. Elizabeth pointed out that when she is doing advocacy work, she must "just recognize it as a risk every time that there could be a chance that a person could, um, I could receive backlash for it."

While feelings related to discomfort were shared more than feelings of joy or gratification, all participants ($N = 7$) spoke to the gratification that comes with seeing progress and successful outcomes. Flossy shared about successes within several community programs and trainings she has participated in and stated, "watching people in training, sort of go 'aha!' is pretty gratifying," and "sitting in the presence of people getting to tell their story in a way, in a place, that they perhaps haven't gotten to do that before" was also a positive aspect. Ayesha reported experiences with a peer support group, stating, "just having even like one person saying like this felt really helpful and I'm really glad to connect with people, and I'm glad to hear I'm not the only one struggling; um, that feels really cool." Sierra revealed that helping others and seeing progress "feels really good."

Advocacy in Action: "We really need to have those fires in our bellies"

All participants (*N* = 7) discussed the social justice advocacy engagement they had participated in (see Table 3 for a full list). Each of the advocacy actions reported were categorized into micro-, mezzo-, or macro-level advocacy based on the ACA Advocacy Competencies' (Lewis et al., 2002) domains to enhance understanding. Advocacy skills utilized by participants also were included to shed light on the skills participants used to find success in their work.

Micro-Level Advocacy: Client empowerment/advocacy

Micro-level advocacy actions were typically expressed as actions conducted directly with or to empower the client (see Table 3). All participants (*N* = 7) identified access to services, resources, and/or information as an issue faced by many individuals/clients. Elizabeth described how access is a basis of privilege, "when you think about discriminatory bias, they technically withhold access related to something of the discriminatory bias." Thus, participants discussed a focus on connecting people to needed services. Flossy discussed access through the lens of cost of counseling services noting that her practice accepts Medicaid insurance and uses a sliding scale fee to try and increase access for individuals to obtain counseling services; an important consideration given that counseling can be costly.

Participants also spoke of diverse ways to engage in micro-level advocacy, including directly challenging individuals/clients or their families. Marcus reported how he tries to externalize client's internalized oppression, "I'm empowering them to like, really dispel or shake off, um, internalized oppression, um, and beliefs that were kind of, seem like adopted from larger society." Elizabeth shared an example of challenging clients directly when she experienced a client using a derogatory term in session:

> ...so, I gently confronted it, and sometimes that takes, say, depending on our clinical styles, it takes maybe a pause, or something, or being able to say, 'Let's go back to this' um, because I did. I said, 'Hey, um, just want to pause and maybe go back to the statement that was made...'

Lynn spoke about helping to advocate for a client's change in identified pronouns and name when family members were struggling to accept the change.

Empowering clients to make changes for themselves was mentioned by three participants. Sierra revealed her efforts to create an egalitarian relationship with her clients as she recognized the power differential in the room due to her own educational and career status. She stated that she does this by, "...letting them have say on a lot of things, um, and encouraging that, you know, encouraging them to use their voice." Elizabeth discussed client empowerment in different terms; "I'll give parents like all resources related to whatever topic that they're hoping to advocate for. Um, so that in the future they can do it on their own."

Mezzo-Level Advocacy: Community collaboration/systems advocacy

The main components of mezzo-level advocacy included offering education/training and community partnerships (see Table 3). Flossy discussed incorporating social justice trainings into her private practice, stating her practice is, "doing a quarterly series on social justice and equity, offering continuing education hours for those classes, and, um, that feels like a really important way not only to serve our field, but to serve our community." Connecting with community members became a direct way for participants to disseminate information to increase awareness about issues and educate people about problems facing the community or certain groups. For example, Marcus described his efforts to get out of his office and be a face within his community so that he could speak on panels about mental health and wellness and incorporate a trauma lens to help inform the public. Sierra shared about the service work she had engaged in with her community, such as participating in a training for youth about mental health and ways to cope and speaking on a college campus to different groups to increase awareness of service options. Ayesha discussed her participation on a crisis response team that was connected to her local police department where she helped to assist with and de-escalate individuals who may be in crisis when 911 was

Table 3

Advocacy Actions Shared by Participants

System Level	Actions
Micro-Level Advocacy	Connecting clients to resources/services
	Increasing access
	Working around client needs
	Recognizing/addressing factors impacting client lives
	Empowering clients to self-advocate
	Challenging internalized oppression
	Challenging isms directly
	Making counseling services accessible (cost)
	See the need, develop support
	Advocate for client needs in community
Mezzo-Level Advocacy	Community partnerships to meet community needs (i.e., connecting formerly incarcerated fathers with their children, speaking to youth about mental health in schools)
	Support businesses with diverse owners
	Model advocacy in front of others
	Speak on panels about mental health/social justice issues
	Provide education within systems (i.e., businesses, court, schools)
	Provide training to counselors
	Attend and speak at conferences on topic
	Engage in research to support change
	Provide diversity trainings
	Connect with local organizations working toward change
	Assess community needs (do not assume)
Macro-Level Advocacy	Connect with national organizations working toward change
	Participate on service committees (i.e., government relations, social justice, advocacy)
	Email/call/speak to legislators and/or legislative aids
	Vote for individuals who support social justice legislation/mental health access
	Offer written testimony
	Attend protests
	Collaborate with individuals in other fields
	Publish research/topics
	Promote counseling profession (to increase access to services)

called. Ayesha also was able to provide education to police staff by helping them understand that "a lot of people have mental health concerns."

Several participants spoke about attending counseling conferences to speak on social justice topics or providing trainings within non-counseling work settings, such as diversity or equity and inclusion trainings. Other participants discussed their role in offering support groups within their communities. For example, Flossy shared about partnering with two local organizations to help fathers with a history of incarceration to connect with their children and the mothers of their children. She also reported on a writing group for women that she facilitates, which focuses on providing a space where women can have a voice. Participants often spoke about the benefit of connecting with community members and creating partnerships to provide support from a mental health perspective.

Macro-Level Advocacy: Collective action/social political advocacy

Participants who engaged in macro-level advocacy spoke about a variety of ways in which they could engaged with systems to work towards bringing change (see Table 3). Examples included: working to change laws (by speaking to legislators and sharing research to support the change), connecting with national organizations to plan for and disseminate information (including participating on committees, such as government relations or advocacy committees, or taking leadership positions within organizations), sharing research with those in power to make change (i.e., legislators), getting media attention on issues, publishing on important topics, and attending advocacy events (such as ACA's Legislative Advocacy Day). We want to note that a difference between the master's and doctoral level participants was discovered for macro-level advocacy. The main difference was that the doctoral level participants talked about also engaging in advocacy through conference presentations and research, which made sense given the expectations in academia for scholarship and research productivity. This was the only significant difference in what was shared by these two groups.

Of the entire sample, six participants discussed the importance of connecting with counselors and/or other individuals/organizations who cared about the same issues to expand the group working for change. Ayesha stated how it is important to, "get other people on board with you, because you can't do advocacy work by yourself. We can, but you're not gonna get very far." James shared his experience with linking organizations (inside and outside of the counseling field) that were focused on the same issues to bring together groups working for the same cause.

Working with legislators was a large component of macro-level advocacy. James discussed his work with legislative advocacy to bring change to a law that would impact his clients. He stated, "using research for social justice advocacy was like a really major light bulb," as he was able to engage in research that supported the legislative change that he was trying to impact. This allowed him to share data with legislators that showed why the change in the law was needed. Several other participants identified research as a benefit to advocacy work to factually support necessary changes in systems. While letter writing was mentioned by several participants to connect with legislators, Marcus and Sierra both spoke about their doubts concerning the impact of letter writing. Sierra revealed behind-the-scenes knowledge of policy work and stated that she prioritized building relationships and having conversations with policy workers as opposed to writing letters that may be ignored.

Advocacy Skills Utilized

Participants identified the skills needed to engage in social justice advocacy action (see Table 4), including gaining a knowledge of systems, self-awareness, narrowing focus, and using common counseling skills (i.e., compassion, listening, managing challenges). Six participants discussed the need to have knowledge/education and/or an understanding of systems as systems can be complicated and challenging to navigate. Ayesha described this as, "knowing when to voice things" and "how to effectively voice things." James discussed the need to acknowledge what others care about and connect advocacy issues to others' interests or passions. He described this as, "crafting ways of articulating your message that are likely to be received favorably." Marcus related this to "playing the game of the system" so that he can "generate some power, then generate some change" which can

Table 4

Advocacy Skills Utilized

Component Area	Skills
Knowledge of systems	Knowledge of community
	Knowledge of laws/client rights
	Identify needs of client/community
	Learn about issues/educate self on topics
	Recognize various levels of advocacy
Self-Awareness	Explore own culture and identities to increase awareness
	Reflect on own biases
	Let go of pre-conceived notions
	Willingness to step into discomfort and manage discomfort
Narrow Focus	Operationalizing work
	Strategic thinking/planning
	Critical evaluation
	Refine advocacy message
	Set goals
Counseling Skills	Non-judgmental positive regard
	Gentleness
	Compassion/care
	Willingness to listen
	Curiosity
	Patience
	Self-preservation/self-care
	Creating an open/safe space for dialogue
	Accept feedback
	Build relationships
	Consultation/collaboration with others
	Gentle confrontation/challenge others
	Motivational interviewing
	Have difficult/honest conversations
	Model advocacy

be done by connecting the issues with something the system values. Lynn shared about consulting with school counselors when she needed to understand the legal rights of students who identify as transgender when engaging in advocacy for a transgender client.

Three participants noted the importance of engaging in personal self-reflection to gain awareness of one's own biases and/or identity. Flossy stated, "I'm just willing to step into these uncomfortable places" to gain some understanding of the oppression others experience. Marcus reported he engaged in self-reflection on how he might be perpetuating oppressive systems himself. Understanding one's own emotional and physical reactions when doing this work also was highlighted as a key component.

Social justice issues are widespread, so it can be a challenge to identify where to spend time and effort and how to enact change. Five participants discussed the importance of narrowing their focus as it is impossible to engage in advocacy work for every issue that needs attention. Lynn discussed how her passion is connected to this, "I've worked in the settings that I'm most, most passionate about, just because there's only so much of me to go around." Narrowing a focus was directed by personal passions or identified needs within the community.

All participants ($N = 7$) discussed general counseling skills used when engaging in social justice advocacy work, including responding with compassion and curiosity, and listening to and challenging individuals. Participants verbalized the need to approach this work with compassion, openness, unconditional positive regard, gentleness, and care. They spoke about setting aside pre-conceived assumptions and creating an open and safe space that is non-judgmental for effective dialogue to occur. Participants also highlighted the ability to confront behaviors or aggressive responses and a willingness to listen to others' viewpoints. Ayesha noted that she tried to approach conversations with the intent to understand rather than persuade and was open to hearing feedback from others. Flossy shared that she was, "not here to save or to fix, I'm here to stand by someone's side with an open heart and with compassion."

Some additional skills reported included self-care for the purpose of self-preservation, remembering why you are doing the work, not internalizing when other people respond with an attack, pushing others to think critically about issues, modeling advocacy, broaching topics of culture in conversations, finding an advocacy mentor, and being willing to be uncomfortable and/or vulnerable. All the skills shared were used to help participants engage in advocacy work, but also to find success in that work.

Identities Impact Advocacy: "It influences the population that I primarily serve"

Participants were able to speak to the ways in which their own identities had shaped the advocacy work they engaged in. Six out of the seven participants spoke directly about their own identities having a significant impact on their work and the identities reported were part of a marginalized status (i.e., person of color, low socioeconomic status upbringing, female, experiencing mental illness). Most participants shared that it can be an overwhelming challenge to try and focus on too many issues needing advocacy at once, so personal identity and life experiences drove the ways in which participants chose to focus their time and energy. For example, Lynn shared growing up in a part of the U.S. where there was significant poverty; this impacted her interest and passion to engage in social justice advocacy for individuals who experienced low socioeconomic status. One participant revealed, "being a Black man definitely, uh, directs a lot of my advocacy; a lot of my advocacy tends to, uh, focus on anti-Blackness and also, uh, just systemic racism in general." Ayesha claimed poor experiences when dealing with her own mental health, leading her to focus on helping individuals with mental illness to receive needed support that took their life circumstances into account.

Life experiences also led to an advocacy focus. For example, Sierra and Flossy shared that service work was part of their upbringings, so they learned to engage in this work from an early age. James did not claim having a marginalized identity or identities, but noted that his experiences with clients suffering from systemic issues led to his advocacy work. While personal identities and experiences often drove an advocacy focus, Elizabeth noted that a person does not need to relate to someone else's identities or experiences to provide support to them, "I do

have minoritized identities that influence my social justice advocacy, but I also keep an openness to know that my lens is not the only lens." She also added, "I get frustrated in hearing that if people haven't had the experiences or they haven't, or they don't have the identities, that they're unwilling to help." Several participants also discussed their privileged identities and how this can impact advocacy work. Elizabeth spoke about the privilege of being a counselor: "we have the privilege to be able to really help people shift their thinking." Marcus discussed privilege that comes from identifying as a male and having a high level of education which he can use to advocate for change. If counselors find themselves to be struggling with identifying a place to start with social justice advocacy, looking at their own personal identities and experiences was a common way for our participants to find areas of passion that led to their advocacy work.

Advocacy Challenges: "A lot of mental health work is hard"

Several challenging components were revealed about advocacy work, including discomfort, uncertainty with how to engage in this work, as well as other challenges, such as lack of awareness, support, and/or action. In line with our research question about experiences engaging in advocacy, uncomfortable experiences were often identified as a challenge. While some participants spoke to the privilege of being an educated, licensed professional, Lynn shared how she had often been categorized as the "softy, crazy, liberal counselor" when trying to challenge systems. Some participants *(n* = 4) also reported moments when they received aggressive or defensive reactions when engaging in diverse types of advocacy actions. James compared working with people in power to make change like working with challenging clients.

Identifying effective ways to participate in social justice advocacy was another theme in the challenges identified by participants. Participants often spoke to the challenge of trying to bridge the gap from knowledge and discussion about issues into actual advocacy action. James and Marcus both described this as a struggle to operationalize or plan how to do advocacy work in an effective way. Ayesha noted that sometimes the struggle was in answering the question, "what do we actually do?" She added that sometimes people have good intentions and desire to make change, but in her experience, the discussion or plans "trickled off."

Lack of awareness, support, and action were other commonly voiced challenges. Flossy described feeling frustrated with "the lack of knowledge, the lack of willingness" for people to participate in standing up for oppressed populations. Others shared the experience of facing an unwillingness to change by those participating in oppressive systems, leading to some of the pushback and discomfort revealed in the participants' advocacy experiences. Lack of support, awareness, or understanding by those in power often posed a barrier. Marcus discussed facing challenges with people who did not value collective wellness and therefore were unwilling to change, or who show performative support, but then would stop when personal benefits ended. He claimed,

> ...I wish they would, uh, spend a little more time and thought in is like setting aside like personal advantage, uh, personal privilege, personal power, and being more so guided by like, um, maybe a moral point or philosophy, or something, some guiding principle. For me, that's, um, just kind of like collective wellness.

James described the challenging work of social justice advocacy as sometimes feeling like "trying to work on what felt like an immoveable object."

Some additional challenges noted by participants included: lack of time or credit/payment for advocacy work, dealing with the vast amount of social justice needs, having only so much time to spend on this work, and the fact that progress was often slow. Elizabeth also noted a concern with promoting shame:

> ...if we're not careful with it being such a delicate work, you could cause a person to give up on even wanting to change by sending them some type of message that strikes a chord with them and lets them know that they don't belong.

Advocacy Successes: "Success is progress"

Participants most often spoke about successes occurring when change happened (i.e., change in law/policy, change for client) and when attention to, awareness of, and concern for social injustices was gained. Six participants spoke about an increase in support or awareness of issues feeling like a success. Marcus described success through his own self-growth as well as the growth and attitudinal changes in others. Two participants discussed creating support programs that were successfully implemented and continued beyond their personal facilitation. For example, Lynn implemented a crisis response plan for youth, which was successfully implemented by staff to help with suicide prevention and non-suicidal self-injury. Ayesha stated her program continuation, "feels like a huge win, because we kind of, we made that seed." Elizabeth shared happiness about moments when she would see a client/family successfully advocate for themselves based on her guidance. Marcus noted feeling he was successful when he would see people begin to change their attitude and language around a certain topic, showing growth in awareness and understanding. Sierra stated, "but it's nice to be able to, to see folks make the progress that they maybe never thought they could make."

Discussion

The goal of this study was to explore counselor experiences with social justice advocacy to learn what advocacy looks like in action, how the work is experienced by counselors, and factors that enhance or diminish a counselor's ability to engage successfully in this work. To gain this knowledge, the primary researcher interviewed seven clinical counselors across the U.S. who had experience engaging in social justice advocacy with or on behalf of clients. The MSJCCs guided the conceptualization and implementation of the study (Ratts et al., 2015). Results indicated that advocacy was an integral part of the professional identity of participants and there were many ways that counselors could engage in social justice advocacy on a micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level.

The first research question aimed to learn how counselors identify their role as social justice advocates. Consistent with the counseling literature (Crethar & Winterowd, 2012; Lee et al., 2018, Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018; Vera et al., 2003) participants believed that engaging in social justice advocacy was part of their professional identity as counselors. Ratts and Greenleaf (2018) claimed that, "some client issues...require intervention that goes beyond talk therapy alone" (p. 79), which was a sentiment reflected by the participants in this study who believed that advocacy must extend beyond the counseling relationship. All participants (N = 7) voiced that counselors should be considering environmental factors impacting clients to inform the advocacy work needed to improve their client lives. Currently, the ACA (ACA, 2014) and The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2015) have adopted a stance that counselors should be incorporating advocacy into their clinical practice, further supporting the incorporation of this role into the professional identity of counselors. Additionally, several participants (n = 4) spoke about the ACA counseling competencies that should guide counselor's work as advocates (i.e., the ACA Advocacy Competencies and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies), which was also discussed by Lown (2015).

The second research question looked at understanding counselors' experiences engaging in social justice advocacy. Participants shared their experiences of both discomfort and gratification when being social justice advocates. Advocacy work was frequently described as being challenging, and at times overwhelming, leading to feelings of frustration and loneliness, yet all participants also spoke about the joy and gratification that is experienced when progress occurs, making the challenging work appear to be worth it. Participants' experiences of advocacy in action included micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level activities. These advocacy levels were categorized based on the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Toporek & Daniels, 2018) and reflected recommendations within the competencies. The components of attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action in the MSJCCs (Ratts et al., 2015) also were reflected in the results of this study. Similar advocacy actions shared by our participants have been reported in prior studies, including encouraging client self-advocacy (Crumb et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2010), having knowledge of systems, connecting clients with resources (Crumb et al., 2019; Kozan & Blustein, 2018),

and educating others, such as through community trainings and awareness building (Crumb et al., 2019; Kozan & Blustein, 2018; Singh et al., 2010). Initiating difficult dialogues, being intentional with relationship building, and using research data to share information (Singh et al., 2010) also have been noted in the advocacy literature. Furthermore, participants in the current study discussed the importance of collaborating within communities, which has been highlighted in the literature as well (Constantine et al., 2007; Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009; Lown, 2015; McDonald & Chang, 2022). Further, the advocacy actions reported by our participants are supported by recommendations that were articulated in the conceptual counseling literature (i.e., Constantine et al., 2007; Lown, 2015; McDonald & Chang, 2022; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009; Toporek et al., 2009).

While it is necessary to understand the steps counselors can take to engage in social justice advocacy, it is critical to know what skills they use. Participants described skills they utilized in advocacy action, including gaining a knowledge of systems (through research and collaboration), being intentional and strategic about advocacy plans (including how to refine the message so that it is accepted), and displaying foundational counseling skills such as compassion, gentle confrontation, and listening strategies. Similar skills were discussed by Lee et al. (2013), including communication skills to speak and write in political systems and having knowledge about systems such as lobbying rules and how government structures work.

The third research question sought to find out whether issues of marginalization impacted advocacy. All seven participants' personal identities (e.g., gender, race, etc.) as well as their life or professional experiences influenced where they spent their time and energy engaging in advocacy. Overall, six participants shared identifying with a marginalized identity and indicated that their life experiences tied to these identities impacted their advocacy focus. Outside of counseling research, Williams et al. (2021) highlighted how the social class of college students can impact advocacy development, such as through on-campus advocacy work focused on improving college experiences for low-income students.

The final research question aimed to understand the challenges and successes that arose when engaging in social justice advocacy with or on behalf of clients. Overall, participants discussed the lack of awareness, support, and/or action by individuals to enact beneficial change, the uncomfortable experiences of doing this work, and the difficulty of knowing what to do to be effective. Success was most often described as seeing change. Experiences of change included changes in attitudes/beliefs (i.e., increased awareness and support on an issue), changes in systems (i.e., decisions that impact clients in a positive way), changes in access (i.e., clients gaining access to needed resources or services), and successful implementation and continuation of programs that supported clients. Kozan and Blusteins' (2018) participants indicated that a lack of support in institutions was often a barrier to engaging in advocacy work, while participants in the current study noted general challenges faced from a lack of support.

The components of attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action in the MSJCCs (Ratts et al., 2015) were discovered in the results of this study. Participants spoke about a need to reflect on their own biases and place of power and privilege and to have a knowledge and understanding of client/community needs and systems. The use of certain skills to be effective as advocates (i.e., compassion, gentle confrontation, refining your message, managing discomfort), as well as ways to engage in direct advocacy action to enact change (i.e., increasing client access to needed services, challenging individuals engaging in –isms, providing trainings on social justice topics, creating partnerships to develop needed programs, speaking to legislators, and speaking to the public about important topics related to mental health) also were tied to what is noted in the MSJCCs.

Implications for Counselor Education and Practice

Given the results of this study, there are several implications for the counseling profession, including counselor education programs and practicing counselors. Counselor education programs can focus on better preparing counselor trainees to be effective advocates. Four main elements are recommended in this regard: (1) establishing a clear professional identity/role around social justice advocacy, (2) teaching advocacy competencies, (3) education about what advocacy practice looks like, and (4) building skills frequently utilized in advocacy

practice. Given the theme of professional identity found in this study, it is recommended that counseling programs focus on establishing a clear understanding of the role that counselors play in being social justice advocates and how this role connects with the ACA (2014) Code of Ethics to develop a strong professional identity by trainees. This can include incorporation of the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Toporek & Daniels, 2018) and the MSJCCs (Ratts et al., 2015) as frameworks and can lead to discussion about advocacy in practice. Lown (2015) and Donald and Moro (2014) also recommended the incorporation of competencies into counseling training to improve advocacy competency. It is generally recommended to infuse topics related to social justice and multicultural counseling in training programs, such as the facilitation of discussion around power, privilege, culture, and issues related to social justice (Chung & Bemak, 2013; Cook et al., 2015; Cook et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 2017; Goodman et al., 2018; Killian & Floren, 2020). Including these topics in counseling supervision also can positively impact student training in this area (Cook et al., 2015, Cook et al., 2016; Goodman et al., 2018).

Additionally, programs should focus on providing practical examples of what is involved in engaging in social justice advocacy and relying on the MSJCCs can assist with this. Teaching trainees what actions are included on a micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level may increase the likelihood of students engaging in those practices. This assumption is supported by Decker (2013) and Peterson (2021) who both found that training in social justice predicted higher engagement in social justice advocacy, as well as Tanner (2021) who discovered a relationship between self-perceived competency and social justice self-efficacy for school counselors. Incorporating case studies and examples can provide trainees with a clear understanding of what advocacy looks like in practice. Furthermore, infusing advocacy projects (Chang, 2022; Cook et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 2017; Farrell et al., 2020; Goodman et al., 2018; Killian & Floren, 2020; Winkeljohn Black et al., 2022) into the curriculum can offer a hands-on and practical way for trainees to prepare to be social justice advocates through the practice of advocacy activities. As an example, Chappman-Hilliard and Parker (2022) suggested inclusion of a social justice curriculum that uses topic related theoretical frameworks (i.e., critical history and liberation pedagogy) paired with service-learning projects focused on community-based advocacy needs.

Inclusion of skills used to be an effective advocate also should be addressed in training programs, so that trainees have an opportunity to learn and practice skills that will aid them in being effective social justice advocates. Participants in this study identified a variety of necessary skills, including how to speak about and present information on advocacy related topics, how to challenge –isms and injustices directly, how to respond to individuals who may respond aggressively or defensively, how to collaborate and get involved with others to strengthen advocacy, how to engage in self-care to prevent advocacy fatigue, and how to manage discomfort in doing this work. It seems that a general willingness to be uncomfortable is necessary when engaging in social justice advocacy given the challenges that arise with this work. James equated this to working with challenging clients; something that counselors are usually trained to do. If we can view advocacy work similarly, we can adapt our approaches to creating change in systems as we do in guiding change for clients. Participants in this study also spoke about challenges and successes, which can be used to help prepare counselor trainees. For example, if trainees discuss potential barriers they may face when engaging in advocacy efforts, they can problem solve and practice how to overcome those barriers.

In addition to offering recommendations for training counselors, licensed counselors also could benefit from further education via continued education units (CEUs) to increase and/or improve their advocacy efforts. The results of this study suggest that licensed counselors may benefit from connecting with organizations (within or outside of the counseling profession) that are engaging in advocacy efforts to learn more about the process and join forces on specific social justice issues. This can be a starting point for counselors who may be uncertain about what to do to be effective advocates. The action steps and skills shared by our participants also can be adopted by practicing counselors to engage in social justice advocacy with or on behalf of the clients they serve.

Limitations and Future Research

Qualitative research has long been criticized for not being generalizable to large populations due to smaller sample sizes utilized, although some scholars have argued that with rigorous methods, qualitative research findings can be generalizable (Guenther & Falk, 2019; Prabhu, 2020). While the number of participants interviewed in this study (*N* = 7) was within the acceptable range for qualitative studies (Kumar et al., 2020), in the broader view of research it remains small. Including a quantitative component to this study or in future research could increase the number of participants and potentially increase generalizability. Additionally, our participants were not randomly selected, thus selection bias may have occurred based on the recruitment procedures used. Participants likely carried bias about the importance and necessity of incorporating social justice advocacy into their counselor professional identity, influencing their decisions to participate in this study and leading to potential self-selection bias. Furthermore, the demographics of the participants did not vary as widely as is found in the counseling profession. White identity represented 57% of the participants, and some aspects of identity were not included on the demographic sheet (e.g., sexual orientation). Additionally, only one participant was a master's level practitioner while the other six were doctoral level, which was not as representative of the field. Having a larger range of participant diversity would have strengthened the external validity of the findings.

Future research could examine the advocacy actions of a more diverse sample of counselors, given that limitation in this study. This could include a broader range of master's level clinicians, and larger diversity in clinicians' identity. The perspectives of counselors who do not value advocacy work or who do not engage in advocacy from a social justice lens could also be explored in future research to gain insights into beliefs about, or barriers to, abstaining from social justice advocacy action. Additionally, future research focused on learning about the direct impact of counseling based social justice advocacy on client outcomes could further strengthen the argument that advocacy work is necessary in our field.

Conclusion

Discrimination and oppression are highly likely to negatively impact the lives of many clients who seek support in counseling. Yet, advocacy work can require an immense amount of, typically unpaid, time, energy, and skill to be effective. This descriptive phenomenological study sought to learn about how clinical counselors engage in social justice advocacy and their experiences with this work. Seven (*N* = 7) participants shared their perspectives on social justice advocacy, how they experienced engaging in advocacy work, what advocacy action they took, how their identities might impact their work, and what challenges and successes they experienced. Results indicated that counselors engaging in social justice advocacy believed this was a crucial part of their professional identity and their experiences were both uncomfortable and gratifying when doing this work. Participants expressed engaging in micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level advocacy and found value in using skills such as gaining knowledge of systems, refining their message, having self-awareness of their own biases and privilege, and using foundational counseling skills. The results of this study can inform how counselor education programs focus training on social justice advocacy and help current practitioners engage in this work to potentially impact the outcomes and quality of life of their marginalized clients in a positive way.

If counselors can use the insights gained from hearing about the experiences of counselors who are directly involved in social justice advocacy, larger scale change may occur more often. This research highlighted direct action that can be taken as well as the skills we as counselors can use to experience success with our advocacy efforts. Further training could be useful to increase counselors' confidence to engage in social justice advocacy. This article's focus did not include a review on how mentorship could be employed to further increase advocacy action. However, supervision and observation have long been successful training methods in the counseling field indicating that mentorship from an active advocate could provide a higher level of practical knowledge and understanding of this role. While it can be difficult for a few individuals fighting for a cause to bring about change, we imagine what larger groups could achieve. Beyond this, an increased number of counselors doing this work

could minimize the individual time and energy cost needed to do advocacy work, which could increase counselors' motivation or willingness to invest their time to do this work. We believe there is no question that counselors care about their clients. Nevertheless, we are missing a critical component of wellness in our clients' lives if we ignore clients' experiences of social injustice and the impact these experiences can have on their lives.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in relation to this work.

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Appendix A

Research Interview Questions

1. Please tell me how you perceive or would define your role as a social justice advocate as it relates to your role as a professional counselor.
   a. Is social justice advocacy valued in your line of work? If so, describe how you know it is valued.
   b. To what extend do you believe counselors should be engaging in social justice advocacy?
2. Let's talk about your experiences with social justice advocacy. In what ways have you engaged in social justice advocacy work on a local, state, and/or national level?
   a. How have you experienced engagement in social justice advocacy?
3. How do your own identifies influence your perception of and involvement with advocacy work? If you have membership in a marginalized group, does that impact your experience when advocating?
4. How have these experiences with advocacy engagement affected you? What feelings and thoughts were generated by the experience?
5. What challenges have you faced when trying to engage in social justice advocacy with or on behalf of your clients?
6. In what ways have you found success as an advocate / what does success look like?
   a. What skills did you use that led to your success?
7. What do you think people get wrong about social justice advocacy?
8. Please share anything else you believe is significant with reference to the social justice advocacy experiences you have had.

Searching for Social Justice: Examining Counselor Educators' Training and Implementation

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Abstract

Counselor educators in CACREP programs are mandated to include social justice in their training of counseling students. However, we contend counseling preparation programs have failed to adequately train counseling professionals to understand and implement social justice frameworks. Using an exploratory mixed methods design, we investigated counselor educators' educational and training background in social justice concepts as well as their teaching experiences infusing social justice throughout their Master's level CACREP core curriculum. Strategies counselor educators use to seek knowledge about and incorporate social justice in their praxis are presented. Furthermore, we studied the relationship between counselor educators' racial identity and their practice of implementing social justice frameworks into their teaching.

Keywords: counselor education, social justice, racial identity, training and development

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Searching for Social Justice: Examining Counselor Educators' Training and Implementation

The underrepresentation of individuals of color at all levels of counseling programs (faculty, students, counselors, and clients) (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2018; Hammett-Webb, 2015; Hannon et al., 2023) and the minimal training students receive in working effectively and competently with diverse client populations limits both traditional and social learning around effectively understanding and engaging with diverse populations. Thus, 58.1% of students who complete counseling programs are white (CACREP, 2022), and likely lack the cultural competence and skills to serve underrepresented populations (Counselors for Social Justice, 2020). Furthermore, most programs consolidate the core required foundational knowledge focused on social and cultural diversity into a single class (Donald & Moro, 2014; Dong et al., 2015; Pieterse et al., 2009).

We argue that the current education and training process continues to produce underprepared counselors and counselor educators alike. This lack of training is exacerbated in doctoral programs, as training around incorporating concepts of multiculturalism, social justice, and anti-racism in teaching is either minimal or non-existent. Thus, new faculty entering the field are ill-prepared to teach these concepts in their assigned courses and address social justice related issues as they arise in class. Although faculty of color only make up about 26% of counseling faculty (CACREP, 2022), they are often charged with teaching sociocultural and social justice courses due to their white counterparts feeling ill-equipped to attend to this content in class (Ahluwalia et al., 2019). This may result in professional and personal challenges for faculty of color due to the inherited responsibilities as a gatekeeper and facilitator given the importance and intensity of the subject matter (Ferguson et al., 2023). The additional labor faculty of color endure as opposed to white faculty often results in racial battle fatigue and burnout (Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Additional challenges include having to contend with students who may lack receptivity to topics related to social justice.

Students of majority identities may be resistant to the necessary introspective and experiential activities that bolster knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness for counselors in training in a sociocultural and social justice course (Medvide, 2022; Seward, 2014; Torino, 2019). This resistance may be linked to the lack of incorporation of multicultural and social justice components into other graduate courses in counseling programs. It is our stance that despite only one course being accepted by CACREP, sociocultural and social justice should be at the foundation of all counseling programs and be intentionally incorporated throughout the curriculum. Although the multicultural social justice counseling competencies (MSJCC) highlights the necessity for integration, there remains a dearth of knowledge about how faculty are incorporating these concepts into their curriculum (Ratts et al., 2016; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). As such, the purpose of this study was to understand the extent counselor education faculty implement multicultural and social justice competencies across the Master's level CACREP core curriculum and to identify strategies they use to do so. Additionally, we sought to understand if racial identity influenced counselor educators' incorporation of social justice competencies into their courses.

Literature Review

Since its inception, counseling has always included an advocacy component; from supporting immigrants in obtaining employment in the early 20th century to more recently naming social justice as the fifth force driving the profession (Hannon et al., 2023; Lee & Gomez, 2011). Despite this, the counseling profession continues to lag in its ability to prepare and produce counselor educators and counselors who can define, apply, and integrate social justice in their work as educators and clinicians (Dong et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2020). This lack of social justice integration and training persists in counseling and psychology programs alike (Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Vera and Speight (2003) fervently called on the profession to move beyond multiculturalism and abandon models that are insufficient in addressing oppression. They further argued for a social justice framework that included

critical thinking, critical consciousness, and a commitment to praxis that leads to social change not only for our clients, but within every area of the profession (i.e., teaching, research, and counseling). Unfortunately, counselors and students in counseling and counseling psychology programs largely remain unable to delineate the difference between multiculturalism and social justice or describe social justice advocacy as it relates to their roles (Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Even when counselor educators and counseling professionals can articulate social justice advocacy, many lack confidence, competence, or even motivation to engage in this work (Donald & Moro, 2014; Lee & Gomez, 2011; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Below we discuss social justice across the Master's level counseling curriculum based on the limited literature available.

Social Justice and Counseling Curriculum

Within the CACREP accreditation *Social and Cultural Diversity* Master's level standard, the following content areas are specifically mentioned as necessary knowledge for students: 1) theories and models of multicultural counseling, cultural identity development, and social justice and advocacy, 2) the effects of power and privilege for counselors and clients, and 3) strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination (CACREP, 2016). As such, social justice is fundamental to a CACREP accredited Master's counseling program curriculum and a foundational component to being a counselor (Pieterse et al., 2009). Yet, the majority of CACREP accredited Master's level counseling programs continue to use one course to address all components of multicultural counseling, which is supposed to include concepts such as social justice, advocacy, power, privilege, and oppression (Donald & Moro, 2014; Dong et al., 2015; Pieterse et al., 2009). Despite a clear edict to incorporate social justice into the counseling curriculum, little literature exists detailing how to do so. Furthermore, the limited attention to social justice across the counseling curriculum has resulted in minimal research designed to explore its implementation (Chapman-Hilliard & Parker, 2022).

In their review of 54 syllabi focused on multicultural and diversity related topics, Pieterse et al. (2009) found that only seven syllabi included ways to enact social justice advocacy. Given that most programs have continued the practice of using one core course (e.g., Multicultural Counseling) to meet the CACREP standard, it is unsurprising that social justice is frequently omitted or addressed as a footnote. Furthermore, confusion around distinguishing multiculturalism from social justice has resulted in a focus on cultural competence as the goal instead of a foundation in preparation for social justice advocacy. In fact, authorities on cultural competence have asserted that, without attending to dynamics of power and oppression, cultural competence is ineffective in disrupting racism and other forms of oppression (Chapman-Hilliard & Parker, 2022; Sue & Sue, 2016). Moreover, counselors and counselor educators are unclear about ways to translate social justice advocacy from theory to practice (Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011; Wilcox, Shaffer, Reid Marks, Hutchison, & Hargons, 2023), and consequently are unable to teach emerging counselors how to do so.

Although the one course model is the existing standard across programs, several scholars have argued that social justice should be integrated throughout the Master's level counseling curriculum (see Donald & Moro, 2014; Medvide, 2022; Motulsky et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2010; Taylor & Trevino, 2022) as it supports students developmentally in integrating social justice into their professional identity and allows multiple opportunities to engage in advocacy at the micro and macro level. Additionally, counseling students desire a real commitment from programs to infuse social justice throughout their programs in action and not solely in words (Donald & Moro, 2014; Singh et al., 2010; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). While some programs have been able to integrate social justice concepts throughout their entire curriculum (Paisley et al., 2010), it is likely pivotal to consider the intentional implementation of the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016) in how counselor educators curate course curriculum and cultivate social justice practices within CACREP-accredited Master's level counseling programs. The multicultural and social justice praxis offers insight to providing culturally responsive counseling from counselor to client and

may be applicable in helping counselor educators deliver a culturally enhanced curriculum across the counseling program (Ratts et al., 2016).

The Impact of Whiteness on Incorporating Social Justice

Given the deep roots of white supremacy in the counseling field (Counselors for Social Justice, 2020; Hannon et al., 2023) we must acknowledge how the culture of whiteness continues to influence the profession (Counselors for Social Justice, 2020: Shure et al., 2023). Since social justice has a focus on eliminating oppression of all forms (Pieterse et al., 2009), it is often viewed as an issue affecting minoritized groups. As such, faculty of color are frequently called upon to teach these concepts and respond to issues of oppression within and outside of the classroom (Ferguson et al., 2023; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). This exacerbates the racial trauma that faculty of color experience, especially in historically white spaces (Ferguson et al., 2023; Taylor & Trevino, 2022).

Therefore, it is important that all faculty, including white faculty, teach the designated multicultural course and infuse social justice frameworks throughout the curriculum. For faculty to effectively address issues of power and oppression in their courses, it is essential they have engaged in the necessary self-reflection and embodied work to situate themselves appropriately within the conversation (Chapman-Hilliard & Parker, 2022). As such, an examination of their racial identity development would seem necessary to help faculty examine their approach, understand their privileged and oppressed identities, and reconcile how their identity development informs their pedagogical practices (Helms, 1995).

In this research study, we sought to understand the extent counselor education faculty implement multicultural and social justice competencies across the Master's level CACREP core curriculum and identify strategies they use to do so. We also aimed to understand if racial identity impacted the extent to which counselor educators incorporated social justice competencies into their courses. Therefore, the guiding research questions for this study were: 1) what are the experiences of counselor education faculty with implementing multicultural and social justice competencies across the Master's level CACREP core curriculum, and 2) is there a relationship between counselor educators' racial identity development and their implementation of multicultural and social justice competencies across the Master's level CACREP core curriculum?

Methodology

To answer the research questions, we employed an exploratory mixed methods approach (Sherperis et al., 2023). That is, our primary approach to data collection was through qualitative research methods. However, we also incorporated quantitative methods to supplement the qualitative findings.

Participants and Procedures

Following IRB approval, purposeful and criterion-based participant sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) were utilized to collect data. The inclusion criteria for this study were 1) identify as a faculty member and 2) have taught at least one course as instructor of record in a CACREP accredited counseling program. The recruitment flyer was shared via listservs with a high probability of reaching counselor educators (i.e., CESNET, and membership lists from divisions of the American Counseling Association, such as Counselors for Social Justice). The recruitment flyer highlighted the need for participation from counselor educators teaching in CACREP accredited programs and directed potential participants to a REDCap survey that included in the following order screening methods, a demographic survey, both the author-created MSJCC survey and the Cross Ethnic-Racial Identity Scale-Adult (CERIS-A), and a request to participate in the qualitative interview. All participants who completed the REDCap survey were placed into a drawing to win a $25 gift card (five gift cards were awarded). Additionally, all participants who completed the interviews were awarded a $20 gift card.

A total of 50 people interacted with the REDCap survey. However, only 35 people completed the survey in its entirety and were included in the quantitative analysis (n = 35). Demographics of the sample were skewed across multiple identities, including being 71% female identified, 62% White identified, and little to no representation of

transgender and gender nonconforming persons or persons identifying as Middle Eastern or Native American, Pacific Islander, or Native Alaskan. Additionally, 71% of the survey participants identified as being 35 years of age or older (*M* = 44; range = 49), all acquired graduate degrees, and just under 60% of participants were equally represented from the Mid East and Southeast regions of the United States (as defined within the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [n.d.]). Twenty-two participants expressed interest in engaging in the qualitative interview and eleven interviews were conducted. Interviewee demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Interviewee Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Racial	Rank	Years Teaching	Gender	Education Level
Adrian	Black	Adjunct	2 years	Male	Doctoral Degree
Alyssa	White	Core Faculty	2 years	Female	Doctoral Degree
Bluebird	White	Full Professor	30 years	Female	Doctoral Degree
Casey	White	Assistant Professor	2 years	Female	Doctoral Degree
Fatima	South Asian	Assistant Professor	3 years	Female	Doctoral Degree
Fernando	White	Associate Professor	9 years	Male	Doctoral Degree
Henry	Black	Assistant Professor	3 years	Male	Doctoral Degree
Jenny	White	Associate Professor	8 years	Female	Doctoral Degree
Kady	Asian-American/White	Full Professor	21 years	Female	Doctoral Degree
Laurel	White	Associate Professor	10 years	Female	Doctoral Degree
Buckshot	Black	Associate Professor	9 years	Male	Doctoral Degree

Qualitative Methods

To increase our understanding of how counselor educators implement the MSJCCs within their teaching, we utilized a phenomenological (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) framework to gather and analyze the data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the authors of this article, who all have extensive knowledge and doctoral-level training in qualitative research. Additionally, the interviewers debriefed with all members of the research team to discuss reactions to and responses within the interviews to attend to potential bias. For example, one bias held by all researchers was that participants would have received minimal to no training regarding incorporating social justice praxis into curriculum. Although this assumption was supported by prior research, it was important to acknowledge and attend to this bias to ensure we were open to all potential outcomes. Our coding process allowed us to engage in reflexive processes while interpreting, organizing, and structuring data in a systematic manner to accurately represent the voices of participants as a collective.

The interview protocol consisted of nine overarching questions and multiple prompts to encourage participants' deep reflection on their education and training in teaching multicultural and social justice practices in counseling, as well as their experiences incorporating the MSJCCs into their teaching. Interviews lasted between 40-82 minutes and were recorded via Zoom and uploaded into a password protected database. Interviews were initially transcribed using OtterAi, and then a graduate research assistant reviewed the transcripts and edited them for accuracy. The nine interview questions were: 1) In your own words, can you describe the counseling department at your institution? 2) Tell us about your teaching experience as a counselor educator? 3) How have your racial and ethnic identities informed your lens as a counselor educator? 4) How much training did you receive on incorporating multiculturalism and social justice into your teaching? 5) How did/do you manage

difficult conversation(s) about culture and social justice in the classroom? 6) How has your institution, if at all, supported you in incorporating multicultural and social justice competencies in your curricula? 7) How do you, if at all, assess learning outcomes following the incorporation of difficult conversations in the classroom? 8) Is there anything else you would like to add that you think would contribute to this study? and 9) Can you provide us with a pseudonym for this interview should your words be used in a future publication?

Quantitative Methods

To further examine the extent counselor education faculty members implemented multicultural and social justice competencies across the Master's level CACREP core curriculum and to examine the potential role of racial identity therein, we utilized two self-report questionnaires. The first questionnaire was created by the authors to collect data on participants' self-reported implementation of the MSJCC within their curriculum. The author-created questionnaire included a section for the collection of basic demographic information (7 questions) followed by 18 questions focused on participants' familiarity with and utilization of the MSJCC. Questions focused on participants' use of the MSJCC included specific probes regarding their incorporation of the four developmental domains (i.e., counselor self-awareness, client worldview, counseling relationship, and counseling and advocacy interventions) and embedded aspirational competencies (i.e., attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action); all questions pertaining to the MSJCC were accompanied by a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., strongly disagree to strongly agree).

The second self-report questionnaire that was administered was The Cross Ethnic-Racial Identity Scale-Adult (CERIS-A; Worrell et al., 2019). The CERIS-A is a 29-item assessment that measures ethnic and racial identity across seven subscales of different attitudes including *assimilation*, *miseducation*, *self-hatred*, *anti-dominant*, *ethnocentricity*, *multiculturalist inclusive*, and *ethnic-racial salience. Assimilation* refers to the extent to which individuals adopt a nationalist identity over an ethno-nationalist identity (i.e., American instead of African American). *Miseducation* captures the level of stereotype endorsement individuals have about their own racial/ethnic group. The subscale *self-hatred* reflects the level of dislike individuals have toward their own racial/ethnic group, while the *anti-dominant* subscale captures the extent to which individuals dislike the dominant group in society. *Ethnocentricity* refers to the degree to which individuals feel their ethno-racial values should inform their lives. The *multiculturalist inclusive* subscale measures both the level of connection individuals have toward their own racial/ethnic group and their willingness to engage with and value the perspectives of other cultural groups. Finally, *ethnic-racial* salience measures the importance of individuals' race/ethnicity to their self-concept (Worrell et al., 2019). Each subscale is comprised of 4 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., strongly disagree to strongly agree) and one item of the CERIS-A is not used in deriving subscale scores. Scores on each subscale range from 1-7 and are derived by summing the four items and calculating the mean. The final CERIS-A items were developed based on the expanded Nigresence model (Cross & Vandiver, 2001) and the Cross Racial Identity Scale (Worrell, Vandiver, Cross, & Fhagen-Smith, 2004). Results of a confirmatory factor analysis with the robust weighted least squares means and variances adjusted estimator (WLSMV) demonstrated structural validity for the final CERIS-A item pool. Internal consistency (α) for all subscales is acceptable ranging from .79-.89 (Worrell et al., 2019).

Data Analysis

Following data collection, qualitative and quantitative data analysis occurred. For the qualitative portion of our study, we engaged in an inductive coding process in which we developed our codes from the data (Saldaña, 2021). Initial coding was conducted by the lead researcher and a graduate research assistant with prior training in data collection and analysis. The lead researcher reviewed coding procedures with the graduate assistant before analysis began in a two-hour research team meeting. The lead researcher and research assistant completed the first round of coding via open coding, in which excerpts were highlighted throughout each transcript followed by discussions to ascertain alignment among the codes (Saldaña, 2021). Discrepancies that occurred were largely

around language given the research assistant and lead researcher were trained in different disciplines. However, discussions occurred to ensure the resulting themes reflected both the lead researcher's and research assistant's interpretations of the data. Additionally, some codes seemed redundant, thus discussions around delineating codes occurred. Only one inconsistency required further discussion and was presented to the larger group for discussion and consensus. After the first round of coding, we engaged in structural coding in which we grouped various responses under one heading (Saldaña, 2021). Those codes were reviewed by the third author of this article for feedback. After this, all the researchers met to discuss the codes and finalize the codebook. Our third round of coding was focused coding, using the codebook, in which final themes were decided along with the descriptions of the themes (Saldaña, 2021). This was a consultative process, as themes were developed together to ensure the data was captured accurately. The second author served as the auditor of the proposed final themes and, thereafter, we presented our final themes to the entire research team. During this meeting, the results were discussed and ultimately agreed upon. In this final meeting, no issues arose, however, discussion occurred to provide clarification. The inclusion of four unique rounds of coding was intentional to address biases and inconsistencies, and bolster the integrity, trustworthiness, and validity of our findings.

The first stage of quantitative analysis included assessing correlations across the demographic data (i.e., racial identity, age, and sex/gender) with the developmental domains and aspirational competencies of the MSJCC, and the attitudes of the CERIS-A. As an exploratory mixed methods study, the quantitative data was primarily used to supplement the qualitative data (Sherperis et al., 2023). Additionally, the sample size was not sufficient for statistical power, limiting the utility of the quantitative results in the absence of the qualitative results. The second stage of quantitative analysis occurred in conjunction with the qualitative data. That is, the resulting significant correlations were viewed through the lens of the qualitative findings to contribute additional potential meaning to the thematic analysis.

Results

Through the qualitative analyses described above, four major themes were identified: *Normalization of academic racism, searching for social justice, risk-free advocacy, and making room for social justice. Normalization of academic racism* refers to the white values espoused in the professional identity of counselors (notions of objectivity, counselor as tabula rasa, etc.); theorists deified as canons in the curriculum, and the perpetuation of white ideas of wellness and student, counselor, counselor educator, and client behavior. For example, when asked, "*how has your institution supported you in incorporating the multicultural and social justice competencies into the curriculum?* Adrian, responded,

> "They haven't done a damn thing to support me, the institution itself. The specific program has certainly done things to support, such as, offering some opportunity for me to be paid to do, like, racial trauma education, kind of work. But the institution itself has been a very large obstruction, where, like, a certain person with a lot of power, and someone who could create a lot of fear, like, actively inhibited two sort of social justice initiatives that I was involved with and that I would've involved students in and would have been helping lead faculty members in as well."

When discussing accountability, another participant, Bluebird, stated,

> "I have chaired a committee where we rewrote discipline code for the university with varying degrees of success. One of the issues was accountability. Um, and unfortunately that accountability is the system protects tenured people in spite of evidence that they are acting in ways that are abusive and racist. Um, but the system does not hold faculty accountable for the way they treat students. I'll leave it at that."

Several participants mentioned CACREP standards, and ways it impacted their program's ability to incorporate social justice into their curriculum. Fatima, when describing her department reported,

> "it's very hierarchical, um, and somewhat archaic terms of, it's a counseling department that's existed for a long time. Um, I believe since the 80's? And I believe that they've had CACREP accreditation for that entire time. And, therefore, I think there's kind of an unwillingness to adapt and change um, as, as is needed by the current, you know, climate and also the students' interest."

In sharing her philosophical stance around social justice, Bluebird revealed,

> "And one of the most important things about that needs to be understanding decolonizing our educational system, K through doctorate all the way. And so, you know, I believe that that's what we are morally, ethically, spiritually, and always, we are called to do that work, to do that social justice work, and we have not as a profession, we have not done that. We have not lived that path. We bought into accreditation that compresses creativity that defines white norms as the very, very narrow box in which we must operate."

Searching for Social Justice

This theme refers to counselor educators having to look for knowledge around social justice and advocacy on their own because they received minimal to no training regarding incorporating these concepts into their teaching practices. Participants repeatedly claimed their training around incorporating multicultural and social justice frameworks and concepts was virtually non-existent, aside from discussions which occurred solely in their one required multicultural course. Thus, as they entered the field, they had to seek out information on their own. For example, Alyssa stated,

> I think a lot of it has been, I have to seek that out, and it's there. It's available in our profession mostly as like CEs or, you know, conversations, um, with folks but mostly I've found that you kind of have to seek it out. So, you have to be self-motivated to really get to the place where I think counselor educators need to be to be successful.

Buckshot echoed this sentiment saying,

> Because of things like systemic values that may be oppressive to people who aren't in the majority, um we have to take it upon ourselves to seek the additional training to seek the additional learning opportunities by way of professional development that will feed our curiosities, our clinical curiosities our research curiosities. Because we cannot rely on our programs to do all of it …We have to be committed to pushing ourselves while in our programs, after our programs for our own professional development for our own clock hours to be like, I'm going to learn about this, I'm going to engage in this, um so that, I can be in position to be the right kind of help for my clients, to be the right kind of help for students in the classroom.

Although the majority of participants shared they were not prepared to effectively and competently engage students in discussions around multicultural and social justice concepts, a few participants discussed the benefit of having professors in their doctoral programs who were well-versed in this topic, and how it shaped their ability and confidence to address culture in their courses. Laurel shared,

> So, I would say in my Master's program, I had the very basic, you know, multicultural counseling course. But what happened was, I had Dr. Cirecie West-Olatunji as my professor, and she really opened my eyes to a lot of things. I mean I was pretty unaware of institutional systemic racism at that point... So, I went back to (named university), and I got my PhD with her, and I would say she was really the crux of my training.

Regardless of preparation, each participant acknowledged the importance and necessity of incorporating multicultural and social justice competencies into their curriculum. Furthermore, instead of giving into the status

quo, they reported seeking out sources and support to ensure they were able to competently incorporate content into their teaching and engage with students.

Risk-Free Advocacy

This theme refers to counselor educators picking and choosing when to advocate or speak up based on potential consequences. Participants discussed avoiding advocacy efforts that came with a cost such as low course evaluations, isolation from fellow faculty, or being seen as incompetent by students. Considering the MSJCC and the quadrants that focus on the privileged counselor and the marginalized counselor, it became evident that counselor educators' social positioning impacted the level of advocacy in which they were willing to engage. This positioning included their race, gender, faculty rank, and length of time at the institution. Participants openly revealed they may shy away from opportunities to engage in advocacy if they felt the costs were too high. However, several participants reported that once they had more power, they were more likely to engage in advocacy. For example, Bluebird stated,

> For the first part of my professional life as a counselor educator was, you know, seeking tenure, which brought out all the people-pleasing and conforming parts of my identity. And so, it wasn't until I, you know attained tenure that I developed a little more of a spine relative to standing up for issues that needed to be stood up for.

Henry, who shared he garnered a reputation over time for consistently advocating claimed,

> I have to acknowledge that sometimes that means that people have already anticipated that I'm going to come in with a particular agenda. And, for the most part, they right. I'm going to usually tell somebody about this. It will be very gentle, and it will be loving, and it will be kind. Um, but I will correct you when you say things that are very racist and very wrong. Um, and I think that has not always been the case for me. I've not always had that voice.

Though positioning played a role in the level of advocacy participants engaged in, there was a developmental component as well. Seemingly, as counselor educators' professional identity grows and they acquire more knowledge and experience, they may feel more able to competently engage in advocacy.

Making Room for Social Justice

This theme refers to the ways in which counselor educators use class assignments, discussions, textbooks, and co-curricular activities to foster awareness and engage in advocacy work. This theme also acknowledges that social justice is seen as an add-on and not integral or core to the curriculum. Participants provided insight into ways in which they made room for social justice through assignments and across the program. Adrian shared,

> I would be very intentional about using current literature in class and require readings around current hot topics, particularly race-based trauma, police violence, looking at AAPI hate, things like that. More recently bringing in sort of Roe v Wade with the potential of that being overturned, and really things like that that I feel like sometimes get called social justice issues, and they're thought of as separate from mental health.

For Adrian, it was important to make room in his courses for social justice by being intentional around the required readings and incorporating current social issues into his teaching. Furthermore, he highlighted the importance of connecting social justice issues to mental health, and not seeing them as separate.

As stated in the literature review presented earlier, some counseling programs infuse multicultural and social justice competencies throughout their curriculum. In fact, Alyssa highlighted her program's commitment to integrating social justice throughout their program by making it a core area and ensuring assignments include social justice concepts. She reported,

> We have program learning outcomes in the eight core areas but we also have a ninth social justice program learning outcome that we try to make sure that we hit that in all of our classes as well. Um, and so, most of our assignments feature some component of either, uh, directly addressing that and that the assignment is more or less structured around looking at diverse populations around how would you correct this forming a plan, um, an actual intervention plan to address it.

Although Laurel ensured CACREP standards were met, to make room for social justice she chose to modify some of the classroom assignments. She claimed,

> I still end up using a lot of the CACREP standards. And what I've done is I've modified a lot of the required assignments, um, which are attached to our, you know, the standards that we're assessing our key performance indicators, you know, all that good stuff. I've modified a lot of those assignments, to be service-learning assignments.

As stated above, participants did not receive adequate training on infusing social justice into their teaching and therefore, had to seek information and training on their own through professional development opportunities, mentorship, or other resources (i.e., readings, videos, etc.). Yet, this perpetual absence of social justice within educational programs did not deter participants from making sure it was included. Whether on their own accord or by their counseling program's design, participants made concerted efforts to integrate social justice concepts across various courses.

Exploratory Mixed Methods Analysis

Turning to the results of the quantitative analyses, multiple significant correlations were discovered, each of which potentially enriches the qualitative results. Foremost, racial identity was found to be correlated with multiple attitudes assessed by the CERIS-A. Specifically, lower scores on the CERIS-A attitudes of Assimilation ($r = -.41$, $p < .05$) and Self-Hatred ($r = -.39$, $p < .05$) were correlated with identifying as a person of color. Thus, participants of color were more likely to identify with their ethnonational (e.g., African American) identity than their national (e.g., American) identity and less likely to dislike their own ethno-racial group (Worrell, Mendoza-Denton, & Wang, 2019). Thus, faculty of color may implicitly connect with the value of multicultural and social justice education, as their rejection of a Eurocentric identity and racial/ethnic stereotypes are both central to their teaching. Lastly, the CERIS-A attitude of Ethnic-Racial Salience was positively correlated with self-reports on incorporating the MSJCC aspirational competency of Knowledge ($r = .334$, $p < .05$) within their pedagogy. Thus, participants who viewed race as important to their self-concept were more likely to report teaching components of knowledge to increase awareness of their own identities and the role of power, privilege, and bias within the counseling context (Ratts et al., 2016; Worrell et al., 2019).

Discussion

In this study we sought out counselor educators who intentionally implement multicultural social justice competencies into their Master's level curriculum. Although CACREP includes these competencies in their standards, there is no standardized set of pedagogical methods to guide the facilitation of students' preparedness to engage in social justice advocacy. In addition to understanding how faculty integrate social justice into the curriculum, we explored the impact racial identity may or may not have on their willingness, ability, and practice of doing so.

Our findings reiterate the gap in the literature regarding foundational knowledge and standardization around effectively teaching multicultural social justice competencies in Master's level counselor preparation programs (Chapman-Hilliard & Parker, 2022; Wilcox et al., 2023). The *normalization of academic racism* theme further highlighted the intersection between white supremacy, academia, and counselor education (Ferguson et

al., 2023; Hannon et al., 2023). That is, participants shared how the existing culture of academia is grounded in historical values that prioritize whiteness and discourage inclusion and effective social justice pedagogy. The themes *searching for social justice, risk-free advocacy, and making room for social justice* helped to explain the current obstacles that counselor educators who are devoted to this work face. Specifically, there is not enough attention or action in counseling programs to ensure the preparedness of educators and students alike (Chapman Hilliard & Parker, 2022; Dong et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2020; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Additionally, those who are intentional about this work, consequently, forge their own paths in building their competency in teaching this material secondary to social justice pedagogy not being prioritized within the counseling curriculum (Chapman Hilliard & Parker, 2022). Lastly, prioritizing social justice at the core of counselor identity and education requires risk because it goes against the status quo of the profession (Hannon et al., 2023, Ferguson et al., 2023).

Embedding social justice and advocacy in the counseling profession throughout all its components (clinical practice, teaching, supervising, etc.) requires the profession to look inward (Donald & Moro, 2014; Medvide, 2022; Motulsky et al., 2014; Pieterse, 2009; Singh et al., 2010; Vera & Speight, 2003). Similarly, the *making room for social justice* theme captured participants beliefs about the importance of intentionality when incorporating social justice work in counseling pedagogy. Just as we argue that counselor educators must do internal work to effectively train students to become change agents in our society, the counseling profession must look inward to challenge and restructure the ways it perpetually limits actual change and progress. This includes interrogating the very foundation of our theories and their lack of a multicultural and social justice lens and being willing to eliminate certain theories in favor of frameworks that more effectively serve our clients (Hannon et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2010; Wilcox et al., 2023). Searching for social justice is both an actionable and a philosophical stance. This is operationalized in the efforts we make to infuse social justice literature in the materials we teach, the way we conceptualize our clients' cases, and the treatment strategies we employ. It is a state of being, not an afterthought, and must be embodied in everything we do (Taylor & Trevino, 2022). If as counselors the work we do is in dismantling and eradicating systems that are detrimental to our clients' wellbeing, then part of our work as counselors must be a constant search for those areas of inequities and social injustices. Thus, searching for social justice serves as an action-oriented engagement for counselor educators to bolster their knowledge around social justice issues, and a call to the profession to infuse social justice throughout their praxis. This is necessary in advancing the goal of social justice as counselor educators who have received social justice training have reported self-efficacy around incorporating social justice in their professional and personal lives (Taylor & Trevino, 2022).

Lastly, the quantitative findings revealed the connection between one's ethno-racial identity and the desire or likelihood to incorporate social justice and multiculturalism in one's teaching. Individuals with a strong sense of their ethno-racial identity had a stronger inclination to engage in multicultural and social justice practices. This underscores the significance of racial identity development (Helms, 1995) and the incorporation of multiculturalism throughout one's pedagogy. Counseling programs that are committed to training a new generation of counselors who are social justice and multiculturally oriented may do well to consider these findings.

Implications for Future Research

This study lays the foundation for more in-depth work in examining the multicultural and social justice practices of counselor educators and the degree to which they feel competent in teaching social justice advocacy in doing said work in their own practice. Using an exploratory mixed methods approach, the quantitative results were explored solely in conjunction with the qualitative data (Sheperis et al., 2023). Gathering more comprehensive data may highlight additional trends in who is (or is not) teaching the principles of the MSJCC in counselor education. Further, deeper exploration of other identities may illuminate important findings. To this point, while this study focused primarily on race, the authors uncovered correlations between gender identification and age with multiple CERIS-A attitudes. Therefore, just as racial/ethnic status may relate to the practice of implementing the MSJCC into teaching, age and gender identification also may impact one's ability to integrate multicultural and

social justice pedagogical practices. Moreover, we encourage the replication of this study with a larger sample size that could enhance the reliability and validity of the current results.

Additionally, participants in this study echoed barriers to social justice implementation that were noted in the literature. For example, lack of institutional and program support, inadequate training, fear of consequences, and lack of efficacy remain obstacles to infusing social justice in counseling programs (Taylor & Trevino, 2022). As such, we encourage researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies institutions and programs implement to support the advancement of social justice and support faculty engaged in this work. One way to do this is to duplicate the work of Pieterse and colleagues (2009), examining syllabi across counseling programs to understand what, if any advancements have been made regarding counselor educators enacting social justice advocacy in their courses. This is important to understand our areas of growth and deficits as a profession.

Limitations

Though the findings of this study are valuable, there are limitations. Foremost, the samples for both the qualitative and quantitative portions of this study were predominantly white (i.e., 55% interviewees and 63% of survey participants). While this racial skew may be roughly aligned with the profession of counselor education, the data lacked voices of people of color overall and especially specific races/ethnicities. Additionally, as with all qualitative research, the authors and readers should exercise restraint in generalizing the results presented herein. The qualitative findings highlight the depth of some counselor educators' experiences in teaching multicultural and social justice competencies in their coursework. Although connections can be drawn between our findings and the experiences of counseling professionals across the spectrum, these results should be utilized to foster further research and not interpreted as representative of the entire profession. Further, the themes extracted were solely developed by the researchers based on the data, without participant feedback. However, given the four rounds of coding in which we engaged, we feel strongly we captured participant narratives accurately. Another limitation is that we chose to specifically focus on counselor educators engaged in social justice implementation. Thus, the voices of counselor educators who do not engage in this work were absent. It may be useful to investigate these voices to understand the obstacles, barriers, or intentional practices that impede social justice praxis.

The quantitative findings were partially conducted via an unpiloted survey that has not yet been tested for reliability or validity. While the tenets of the MSJCC are endorsed by the American Counseling Association and all the MSJCC developmental domains and aspirational competencies were shown to be strongly, positively correlated with each other, with coefficients ranging between .65 to .90 ($p < .01$), the lack of reliability and validity for the survey that was employed must still be considered. Lastly, it should be acknowledged that this study was developed, and data were collected prior to the release and implementation of the 2024 CACREP Master's level standards. While the 2024 CACREP standards increased the inclusion of terms such as social justice and advocacy, it remains unclear whether substantive programmatic change in Master's level counselor training will develop. Further, we are hopeful the current research supplements the increased focus on social justice in the standards by identifying barriers and strategies currently experienced by counselor educators. Despite these limitations, this study offers an informative and initial look at how counselor educators incorporate the MSJCC into their pedagogy, provides unique insights into their experiences, and highlights the need for additional research on the counselor education profession.

Conclusion

Social justice is a foundational component to the education of counseling students (CACREP, 2016), core to the professional identity of counselors (American Counseling Association, 2014), and necessary in ensuring the dismantling of oppressive forces in clients' lives (Chapman-Hilliard & Parker, 2022; Killian & Floren, 2019; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). As such, we must prepare all practitioners and educators in our profession to understand and integrate social justice into their work. Continuing to accept one course as the standard in educational programs,

limits the amount of time educators dedicate to the topic, and continues to silo social justice as adjunctive instead of core (Killian & Floren, 2019; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Moreover, given the lack of adequate training in this area, counselor educators at the margins continue to be forced to lead the way solely based on their lived experience. If social justice is core to our professional identity, our commitment through action, and not just words, must be evident (Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Elevating our standards to integrate social justice throughout our counseling programs will then demand adequate training of counselors and counselor educators alike, removing the need to have to search for justice, and demonstrating that social justice is not an exception, but the rule.

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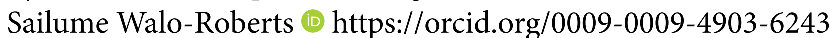
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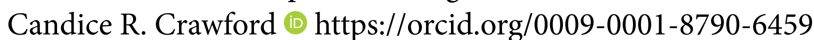
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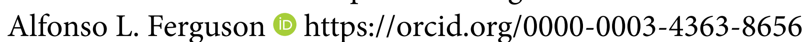
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Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in relation to this work.

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Christian privilege and experiences of oppression among people with a non-Christian background in Northern Ireland

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Abstract

The article aimed to provide insight into how people with a non-Christian background experience Christian privilege in Northern Ireland (NI) and to consider implications for the counseling profession. The current qualitative study was located in a transformative paradigm; it intended to advance a social justice agenda in counseling. Data were collected in five mini focus groups and one individual interview from 15 participants with a non-Christian background. Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyze the data, focusing on semantic level content. Analysis of data led to one overarching theme and five related themes. The overarching theme Outsiders captured how non-Christian participants often experienced the normalization of Christianity as the dominant worldview as oppression; they frequently felt they were treated as strangers who did not belong. Related themes included: Systemic Invisibility, Different and Alienated, Treated as an Enemy, Demeaned, Attacked, and Under Threat, and Attempts to Force Religious Conformity. The urgent need for the counseling profession in Christian hegemonic societies to critically engage with the phenomenon of Christian privilege was discussed.

Keywords: Christian privilege, oppression, counseling, Northern Ireland, social justice

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Christian Privilege and Experiences of Oppression Among People with a Non-Christian Background in Northern Ireland

McIntosh (2010) characterized privilege as the automatic unearned psychological and structural advantages granted to individuals based on their actual or assumed dominant social group membership. Christian privilege can be understood as the "seemingly invisible, unearned, and largely unacknowledged array of benefits accorded to Christians" (Blumenfeld, 2020, p. 2391). Christian privilege arises from Christian hegemony, an overarching power structure that confers certain advantages to Christians through a society's "unacknowledged and/or unconscious adherence" to a Christian worldview (Joshi, 2020, p. 4). In such societies, Christian beliefs, practices, and values are the norm providing people with a Christian background significant privileges relative to those without a Christian background. This study defined Christian background as an individual raised in a family or household that identified with a Christian denomination, notwithstanding their present religious beliefs or lack thereof. Unbelief does not eliminate the advantages arising from a religion of origin's foundational role in shaping value systems and understanding of religious norms (Edwards, 2018; Joshi, 2006). The benefits of Christian privilege will vary significantly according to a person's multiple other social group memberships, denominational affiliation, and relationship with Christianity (Blumenfeld, 2009; Collins, 2000; Edwards, 2018). The unearned advantages of privilege are often invisible to those who benefit from them; many people may be entirely unaware of how their lives are shaped by Christian privilege (McIntosh, 2010). As non-Christians are often denied the advantages of Christian hegemony, the current study sought to explore how people with a non-Christian background experience Christian privilege in Northern Ireland (NI), a society traditionally dominated by Christian norms.

Christian Privilege, Oppression, and the Cost of Dominant Group Membership

Although the causes of oppression are complex and multi-faceted, Christian privilege might nevertheless be one of the most extensive yet concealed contributors to the marginalization of non-Christian people (Blumenfeld et al., 2009; Case et al., 2013). Blumenfeld et al. (2009) considered Christian privilege and religious oppression to have a "symbiotic relationship" (p. xiv). When a Christian worldview is accepted as normal, universal, and superior, non-Christian perspectives tend to be relegated to abnormal, different, and inferior. This form of oppression can arise from the daily practices of a contemporary liberal society; cruelty or intent is not required (Young, 1990). The intricacies of religious oppression have not been comprehensively explored (Jordanova et al., 2015) and are likely shaped by an individual's various other group identities (Collins, 2000; Joshi, 2020). A deficit of research addressing religious oppression has possibly concealed the prevalence of Christian privilege (Accapadi, 2009).

Whilst it cannot be equated with the oppression experienced by non-Christian people, the interconnectedness of humanity is such that systems of Christian privilege can exact a price from those who have a Christian background and otherwise avail of its benefits. As stressed by Goodman (2011), there is often an intellectual, material, moral/spiritual, psychological, and social cost to dominant group membership. This can include heightened feelings of guilt and fear, disconnection from those who are perceived as different, and ignorance of one's own culture and history. Dismantling manifestations of Christian privilege could, therefore, not only promote equality for non-Christians encountering oppression but could potentially enable people with a Christian background to live a more fulfilled and authentic life.

It is important to acknowledge that Christian privilege does not prevail in every society and in certain countries people with a Christian background encounter widespread oppression. It is estimated that around 365 million Christians are persecuted for their faith globally, across 160 countries and territories (Open Doors, 2024; Pew Research Centre, 2024). Christians in Eritrea, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, and Yemen potentially endure the most extensive suffering including death, imprisonment, harassment, and intimidation (Open Doors, 2024). Even in Christian hegemonic societies, some people with a personal Christian faith consider themselves to be disadvantaged compared to non-religious groups. Research in Britain and NI indicated that a significant number

of self-identified Christians with a personal faith believed they were sidelined in an increasingly secular society (Christian Institute, 2009; Evangelical Alliance, 2024; Mitchell et al., 2015). Some Christians felt their freedom of religious expression was eroded by what they perceived to be unbalanced equality legislation, a hostile media, and intolerant social climate. The oppression arising from Christian privilege is therefore nuanced, historically dependent, and geographically situated.

Christian Privilege and the Counseling Profession

In the last decade or so, there has been a significant and emerging body of multi-disciplinary research on Christian privilege; these studies predominantly focused on the socio-political context of the United States (U.S.) (e.g., Aronson et al., 2021; Blumenfeld, 2009; Blumenfeld & Jaekel, 2012; Ferber, 2012; Joshi, 2020; Markowitz & Puchner, 2018; Todd et al., 2020; Walls & Todd, 2014). However, within the field of counseling, religion continues to be an "often neglected" multi-cultural concern (Mintert et al., 2020, p. 2). To date, research on Christian privilege tends to be located within progressive counseling movements in the U.S. (Chan et al., 2018; Ratts & Geeenleaf, 2018; Singh et al., 2020). Christian privilege has been largely overlooked in the counseling professions of the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland. Whilst issues of equality are gaining traction in these contexts, a culture of social justice is only beginning to emerge (Winter & Hanley, 2015).

Perhaps due to a deficit of studies on Christian privilege, Christian hegemony has had an enduring impact on counseling; it is arguably a profession embedded with many Christian norms (Mintert et al., 2020; Schlosser, 2003). These invisible norms tend to be shaped by the culture of the U.S. Despite comprising less than 5% of the world's population, the U.S. is the primary producer of psychological research (Arnett, 2008). As Christians are the dominant religious group in the U.S., Christianity often informs the religious standards to which non-Christian people are compared. This comparison can result in the pathologization of certain non-Christian practices (Al'Uqdah et al., 2019; Blumenfeld, 2006; Schlosser, 2003). In counseling, pathologization can include practitioners misinterpreting certain gender roles within Islam as oppressive (Laird et al., 2007; Mintert et al., 2020), misconstruing the tendency of some Sikh people to discuss issues in a philosophical manner as avoidance (Singh & Gubi, 2012), or mistaking an emphasis on selflessness within Hinduism for insufficient personal boundaries (Navsaria & Peterson, 2007).

A further possible manifestation of Christian privilege in counseling is the generalization of Christian norms to diverse populations (Blumenfeld, 2009). The assumption that the Christian experience is universal and applicable to all might have contributed to the counseling profession's tendency to disregard non-Christian perspectives (Al'Uqdah et al., 2019; Flasch & Fulton, 2019). The experiences of Muslims and Sikhs are vastly under-represented in counseling research (Ahluwalia & Zaman, 2010; Al'Uqdah et al., 2019; Tarabi et al., 2020). Hindu conceptions of mental health are not widely understood (Avasthi et al., 2013). The body of literature pertaining to Jewish clients is sparce (Flasch & Fulton, 2019; Weinrach, 2002). The needs and experiences of non-religious people have been given scant attention (Brewster et al., 2014). Weinrach (2002) stressed that significant harm can be inflicted on non-Christian people when they are treated as invisible by the counseling profession.

Non-Christians might, therefore, avoid counseling, or experience hesitancy, for fear that their religious beliefs could be misunderstood or overlooked. Mistrust of practitioners can be a meaningful obstacle to non-Christian clients availing of mental health services (Rassool, 2016; Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010). Whilst research examining the use of counseling by specific religious groups is limited (Hussain, 2009), existing studies suggest that non-Christian people underuse mental health services (Mir et al., 2019) and report lower overall satisfaction (Mahmud, 2024; Moller et al., 2019). Although generalizations cannot be made about the appropriateness of counseling for non-Christians and multiple factors likely shape experiences in therapy, scrutinizing Christian norms would nonetheless appear vital to ensure the oppression that can arise from Christian privilege is not enacted through the possible pathologization of non-Christian practices and neglect of non-Christian people. In

a profession that espouses to be ethically committed to equality and the pursuit of social justice, there is an urgent need for action to address the inequity that tends to result from unexamined Christian privilege.

Christian Privilege in NI

Exploring Christian privilege in the geographic context of NI is a complex and challenging endeavour. Since the formation of NI in 1921, many people living in this part of the world have endured considerable segregation, inequality, and suffering. NI was established following the partition of the island of Ireland when, following centuries of British colonization, the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland secured independence from British rule whilst the six northern counties remained part of the UK. From the outset, NI was controlled by a Protestant ruling class who maintained power through the political and economic oppression of the Catholic population (McGarry, 2002). In response to this injustice, from approximately 1968 to 1998, there was a violent conflict, resulting in over 3,500 deaths, between those who wished to end the division of Ireland and those who wanted to maintain the union with the UK (Thornton et al., 2004). Whilst widescale violence has ceased and NI is generally considered a post-conflict society following the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, significant tensions and societal divisions still remain. Broadly speaking, support for NI's union with the UK continues to reside in Protestant, Unionist, or Loyalist (PUL) communities, whereas support for the reunification of Ireland is generally found in Catholic, Nationalist, or Republican (CNR) communities.

Due to the historic prevalence of Protestant political hegemony within NI, critical differences exist between the experiences of Protestant and Catholic people in their experience of Christian privilege. However, whilst Protestants traditionally held greater degrees of control, the traditions, symbols, and beliefs of both Christian denominations are deeply embedded in institutions of power. Christian, to many differing degrees, is therefore a privileged identity due to historical factors, numerical dominance, and political affiliation (Blumenfeld, 2006). Most people who live in NI avail of Christian privilege; in the 2021 census, 80% of the population described their current religion as Christian, with 89% identifying their religion, or religion of upbringing, as Christian (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency [NISRA], 2022).

Throughout Ireland's history, Christianity has had an extensive influence on social and political life, with both Catholic and Protestant church leaders assuming an authoritative position in society. There is an enduring presumption in NI that politics and Christianity should converge. Christian morality is frequently espoused by the main political parties when legislating on social issues (Evans & Tonge, 2018). On becoming NI's First Minister in 2016, Arlene Foster declared that she made "no apology" for the Democratic Unionist Party's "very strong Christian values" (McBride, 2016, para. 1). Although there has been recent separation on issues of abortion and marriage equality (Evans & Tonge, 2018), Sinn Féin, presently the largest party in NI, has traditionally enjoyed a close and intertwined relationship with Catholicism (Evans & Tonge, 2013). The years of violent conflict in NI have entrenched the public dimensions of Christianity; genuine multi-culturalism has often been impeded by the tendency to consider NI only in terms of a Protestant Catholic dichotomy (Montgomery, 2013).

Whilst deeply divided between Protestant and Catholic, NI's education system overwhelmingly privileges Christianity. Most children with a Protestant background attend a state-controlled school. Under an arrangement from the early 20th Century, the main Protestant denominations have significant and enduring rights of representation in state-controlled schools through their mandatory placement on school governing boards (Transferor Representatives' Council, n.d.). Most children with a Catholic background go to a school managed by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, an organization committed to delivering education in the ethos of the Catholic Church. Primarily under obligations arising from the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, a daily act of collective worship is mandatory in schools; in practice this has an "essential Christian character" (Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, 2015, p. 32). Religious Education (RE) is a further legislative requirement; the curriculum for children aged four to 11 years old focuses exclusively on Christianity. In 2022, the High Court ruled that RE for children in this age group was not conducted in a sufficiently "objective,

critical, or pluralistic manner" (Judicial Communications Office, 2024, p. 3). This ruling was upheld in 2024 following an appeal by the Department of Education (Judicial Communications Office, 2024).

Despite the dominance of Christianity in NI, there are multiple long established non-Christian communities. In the 1870s, the first Jewish synagogue was founded. A Muslim place for prayer was built in Belfast, NI's capital city, over 100 years ago (Belfast Islamic Centre, 2023). Large scale migration from the 1960s onwards led to the foundation of NI's Chinese community, many of whom follow the practices of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism (Gallagher, 2007). 1950 saw the creation of the Local Spiritual Assembly for those of the Bahá'í faith (Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Belfast, n.d.). Belfast presently has two Hindu temples, with Hindu people moving from Punjab and Southern India from the early 1900s (Marshall, 2018). However, whilst the recent census indicates that increasing numbers of people with a non-Christian background are making NI their home (NISRA, 2022), the freedom to practice a non-Christian religion does not necessarily equate with societal acceptance or endorsement.

As stated earlier, this study aimed to explore how people with a non-Christian background experience Christian privilege in NI. It attends to an overlooked form of privilege in counseling; one that has been largely absent from academic discussion in the profession. Unlike previous studies which have typically focused on the U.S., this study contributes to the development of theory by providing novel insight into Christian privilege in NI's systems of power. Embracing a social justice perspective to understand the issues facing non-Christian people in NI provides an opportunity to improve counseling services and consider systems-level interventions that could help build a more inclusive society. The results of the study were part of a Ph.D. thesis and were used to generate a descriptive account of Christian privilege that served as a stimulus to facilitate counselors with a Christian background to explore their perceptions of religious privilege.

Methods

Researcher Positionality

I, the first author, collected and analyzed all the data. I identify as a White, presently middle-class, cis-gender, able-bodied, heterosexual woman. Although I do not align with any religious group and would describe my worldview as agnostic, I consider myself to be a beneficiary of Christian privilege having been raised in a culturally Protestant family in NI. Recognizing how I personally benefited from Christian privilege was instrumental in the conceptualization of this study; I wanted to leverage my privileged identity and become an ally to non-Christian people in NI. Ally behaviour is critical in the movement toward social justice in counseling; it can help prevent responsibility for activism resting solely with those who are enduring oppression (Lister et al., 2020; Perrin et al., 2014).

Whilst I am presently employed in Higher Education, I worked as a social worker and counselor for many years in communities encountering widespread socioeconomic disadvantage. Working in these settings informed my understanding of mental health not solely as individualized occurrence, but as a symptom of unjust socio-political realities. My belief that "social action is inextricably linked to healing" was foundational in this study's social justice orientation (Bartoli et al., 2015, p. 249). Throughout this study I did not try to eliminate or bracket my social justice values, rather I sought to recognize and integrate this bias through transparent and careful reflection (Todd and Abrams, 2011).

Research Paradigm

This study is located within a transformative paradigm; it places a priority on social justice and seeks to evoke reflection and change in counseling (Mertens, 2009). The research adopts a largely constructionist perspective as it contends there are multiple versions of reality shaped by context, but it diverges from a purely constructionist standpoint by emphasizing the role of power in governing what is considered real (Mertens, 2009; Ponterotto, 2005). Over time, societal values have created "crystallized" realities that are assumed to be "natural

and immutable"; these realities privilege dominant groups (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Transformative research endeavors to confront this status quo in the interests of equality (Ponterotto, 2005).

Recruitment

For this qualitative study, 15 people with a non-Christian background were recruited. A sample of this size provided a manageable amount of data to develop a "rich story" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 56). In response to an email advertising the study, 10 people were recruited from community organizations affiliated with a range of non-Christian worldviews and five were recruited from Higher Education. In this initial email, I outlined the criteria for participation, explained I was interested in exploring what it was like to live as a non-Christian person in NI, and indicated that participation would involve taking part in a small group discussion. An additional information sheet was attached providing further details on the voluntary nature of participation, the potential risks and benefits of taking part, the role of confidentiality, complaint procedures, the specific steps involved in focus group participation, and the intended use of the results. This information sheet also explained that the overall purpose of the research project was to explore how counselors in NI view Christian privilege and discussed how the experiences of non-Christian participants would be used to develop a description of Christian privilege that would be given to counselors as a reflective aid. Connecting with a contact person in a community organization was a successful method of engaging non-Christian participants; each contact person personally recruited several participants. Trust between the researcher and a marginalized group can be enhanced by the endorsement of community figures (Amer & Bagasra, 2013).

Consistent with the experiences of other researchers (e.g., Blumenfeld & Jaekel, 2012; Case et al., 2013), I received several objections to the exploration of Christian privilege based on the alleged bias it exhibited toward people with a personal Christian faith. I responded to each person who expressed concern by clarifying that the study did not intend to critique personal theology or belief but was interested in exploring how Christianity functioned in society from the perspective of social justice and inclusion.

Participants

Each participant had been brought up in a family or household that identified as non-Christian, was English-speaking, 18 years or older, and lived in NI at the time of data collection. Four participants identified as having a Hindu background, three a Jewish background, four a Muslim background, three a non-religious background, and one a Pagan background. One participant described their ethnic background as Egyptian, four as Indian, two as Jewish, three as Pakistani, and five as White. Five participants identified their gender identity as female and ten as male. The youngest participant was 20 years old, and the oldest was 74 years old. The mean age of participants was 38 years old.

Procedures

Focus groups were selected to collect the data for this study because of their empowering and consciousness raising potential; they can offer a greater sense of agency than individual interviews by shifting the balance of power toward participants (Wilkinson, 1998). Five mini focus groups were conducted, each with a minimum of two and a maximum of four participants. Mini focus groups provided time for an in-depth discussion of a sensitive topic (Braun & Clarke, 2013). One participant, Ada, asked if she could take part in an individual interview. At Ada's request, her interview was held in the company of other participants, thereby retaining the collective nature of a focus group.

At the beginning of each focus group, participants were provided with an opportunity to ask questions, or voice any concerns. Ground rules for safe group interaction were then agreed. Participants were asked to share their experiences as a non-Christian person living in NI. A semi-structured interview guide was used as a framework for discussion (See Appendix A for the protocol). The interview guide was developed from themes in extant privilege literature. These themes included media portrayal, political representation, education, sense of societal belonging, and, if appropriate, experience of observing religious practices. Open questions around these areas

were used as prompts to facilitate interaction among participants. The mean focus group length was 58 minutes, the shortest group lasted 33 minutes and the longest 80 minutes. I recorded and later transcribed the interviews, with participant consent. Whilst time consuming, transcribing the interviews myself helped develop familiarity with the richness of the data. I listened to the recordings several times to check the accuracy of the transcriptions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the university Ethics Filter Committee. Confidentiality was embedded throughout the research process. To safeguard participant anonymity, data were securely stored, and all identifying details removed. In advance of signing consent forms, participants were provided with detailed information explaining key aspects of the study (e.g., the overall purpose, what participation would involve, confidentiality, right to withdraw, possible advantages and disadvantages of taking part, and the anticipated use of the results). Consent was actively negotiated throughout; it was not viewed as an isolated incidence. Due to the potentially distressing research topic, the emotional safety of participants was considered a priority. As a counselor, I have professional skills that aid the exploration of sensitive issues. However, to avoid any potential confusion, appropriate boundaries were maintained between the role of researcher and counselor. All participants agreed their data could be used in future publications. To avoid the possibility of coercion, no financial or other incentives were offered to participants.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis (TA), a qualitative pattern-based method of analysis. Reflexive TA was selected for its capacity to produce accessible, rich, and intricate patterns in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Results that are accessible, particularly to a non-academic audience, can amplify a study's transformative impact (Mertens, 2009). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, analysis involved: familiarization with data, creation of initial codes, theme development, review of themes, and defining and naming of themes. Analysis focused on sematic level codes which examined explicit or surface content; this form of coding acts as a "mirror for participants' language and concepts" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 207). Semantic codes were considered the most effective way to recognize participants' experiences of oppression as legitimate versions of reality. Data were considered significant if it addressed the research question; value was not determined by frequency of occurrence. In the presentation of results, terms such as frequently, most, many, some, or all are used to denote the consistency of a theme across participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Each participant was asked to review a summary of the themes; the seven who responded expressed support and did not suggest any changes.

Cultural Competence

Throughout the research process, to address any of my potential biases toward non-Christian people, I placed a priority on developing cultural competence, which I understood to be my ability to "accurately represent reality in culturally complex communities" (Mertens, 2009, p. 89). Cultural competence necessitates a researcher engage in extensive self-reflection to recognize the power imbalances that can occur between them and the groups they are researching (Mertens, 2009). During the conceptualization of this study, my journey involved prolonged engagement with a range of social justice organizations committed to the rights marginalized groups, critical self-reflection in relation to my personal experiences of privilege and contact with non-Christian religious institutions. In the course of data collection, I focused on creating a respectful and honest relationship of trust that positioned participants as experts on their lived experience. To enhance transparency, I shared my positions of privilege, professional standing, and motivations for the study with each participant (Mertens, 2009). Throughout data analysis, I maintained a detailed reflexive journal and engaged in frequent, in-depth discussions with the project supervisors around the potential impact of my Christian background.

Results

Outsiders

Analysis of data led to one overarching theme and five themes. The overarching theme, Outsiders, captures how, in the experience of participants, they were treated as outsiders from the dominant Christian majority. Outsiders is developed through five themes: Systemic Invisibility, Different and Alienated, Treated as an Enemy, Demeaned, Attacked, and Under Threat, and Attempts to Force Religious Conformity.

Systemic Invisibility

This theme considered how participants perceived their non-Christian backgrounds to be disregarded in NI's systems of power. Many participants commented that politicians from the main parties appeared indifferent; they rarely recognized the existence of non-Christian people. As Adam noted, "they [politicians] are not interested … there is nothing."

Most participants felt NI's education system ignored their worldview. Throughout her school life, Ada, thought the curriculum omitted Islam stating, "in most of the schools I went in like, it [Islam] wasn't really taught at all."

The tendency of the media to either discount non-Christian people, or deliver a misleading representation, was discussed by most participants. Arjun described the media's depiction of Hindu culture as trivialized and superficial, "it's only entertainment purpose, you know, that's not like Hinduism they are preaching, they are only doing the Bollywood." Hassan believed positive portrayals of Muslims were entirely missing in the media with a disproportionate focus placed on the negative stating, "the good stuff never gets covered and comes out always the bad stuff."

Due to the systemic invisibility of non-Christian backgrounds, most participants found many people in NI to be ill-informed of non-Christian worldviews, as Ahmed shared, "I think there is a lack of knowledge, like they said people don't know much about what Islam is, you know what the fundamental beliefs are." Most participants described how they had to educate people in NI about their non-Christian backgrounds. Sarah discussed how she often had to redress the ignorance created by the education system:

> That's why the burden falls on us so much to explain things because they're not learning it in school so, so all the education you have is from your friends, so it falls to me to teach everybody about Judaism and like, it's tiring.

Informing Christian people about their worldview was a time consuming and demanding task for many participants.

Different and Alienated

This theme explored participants' experiences of being treated as different from the Christian majority and how this frequently this led to a sense of isolation. For Simon, feelings of difference due to his Pagan background were one of the first things he observed when he moved to NI, "pretty much from the first day I got here, when I was introduced to my in-laws, I really noticed the fact that I am not Christian." Ben and Adam discussed how they were regularly singled out as Jewish. The emphasis placed on Ben's Jewish background lessened his sense of belonging in NI, "the fact that it [Jewish background] is pointed out, so you can never really become fully assimilated." Adam highlighted how people with a Christian background were not referred to by their affiliation to Christianity explaining that it is "not nice guy Catholic or nice guy Protestant." Sarah revealed how her alienation from the Christian majority was often implicitly communicated in subtle interactions. Even when people were respectful of her Jewish background, they often framed it as something exotic or unusual:

> People who are trying to be respectful are like 'Oh my God you're Jewish, I've never met a Jewish

> person before, that is so cool, like tell me all about it' and they're trying to be friendly, but they are still making it clear it's you and them and that you don't belong.

Muslim participants discussed how their sense of separateness from many people in NI resulted in feelings of loneliness. Ada stated, "I don't really want to settle here in the long term, I would rather go somewhere in England or something, so if I was to stay, I would say it would be quite lonely." Due to isolation and loneliness, Ada, Ahmed, and Syed could not foresee a future in NI.

Treated as an Enemy

This theme examined participants' experiences of being treated as enemies who presented a threat to society. Muslim participants often felt they were viewed as a terrorist threat, inclined toward intense violence. Ada believed most people in NI did not understand Islam was a peaceful and non-violent religion:

> Often people tie violence with Muslims but … we're not allowed to like harm another human being or anything, so like if you look into Islam … it's actually like a very peaceful religion and against violence like totally against harm, so I feel that people don't know that.

Participants from every non-Christian background felt they were treated as a threat to Christianity and faced the allegation they were evil. Ravi discussed the misconception that Hinduism was "like the devil." Ben and Adam explained Jewish people were sometimes viewed as "Christ killers" and "devil worshippers." Anna and Connor shared that people with a non-religious background were frequently positioned as amoral. Simon mentioned the accusation that Pagan people "wanted to burn churches down." Hassan recalled the description of Islam as a "satanic religion" in 2015 by a renowned religious leader in NI, comments initially endorsed by then First Minister, Peter Robinson.

Many participants were viewed as an economic threat. Adam mentioned the accusation all Jewish people were disproportionately wealthy stating, "I mean the number of times … they say 'all you Jews are rich.'" Ravi, Meena, and Arjun encountered claims they were depleting the Northern Irish economy by unfairly taking employment they were not entitled to. Ravi described the accusations made toward Hindu people, "whenever you come here [people with a Hindu background] our job opportunities, we lose our job opportunities."

Given the perceived widespread belief that non-Christian people were dangerous, most participants felt compelled to demonstrate they were not a threat to society. To promote understanding of their religious culture, Hindu participants arranged educational activities for the wider community. Arjun noted how politicians were specifically invited to these events, "we normally invited them [politicians] to an event or function … they come to know … this group is not like hard core." These meetings endeavored to challenge misconceptions of Hindu extremism. Similar events for people with a Christian background were held by Muslim participants. Hassan described how he believed these gatherings promoted a positive understanding of Islam, "we're meeting different people and things like this, this helps people give them a better understanding of Islam definitely." Syed and Hassan hoped these interactions would dispel the tendency to conflate Islam with terrorism.

Demeaned, Attacked, and Under Threat

This theme captured participants' experiences of degrading treatment, threatening, and hostile behaviour. Many participants described how they sometimes felt demeaned in NI. Michael believed Christianity was so established as the norm that all other non-Christian worldviews were positioned as commodities, devoid of any value beyond what could be bought or sold, "I feel like Christianity is so much the [pause] status quo that other religions that, or atheism, are seen as goods or products that you can just use." Anna shared how she felt people with a non-Christian background were not always recognized as full members of society, "I feel like a lot of people don't realize that everyone, because we're all humans in this society, we're all members of society that we all have the authority to say, to speak our minds."

Attacks of property were discussed by some participants. Arjun remarked that cars belonging to Hindu people were damaged on multiple occasions outside their religious meeting place. Ben described intentional damage to a synagogue in NI. Sarah mentioned that her family's garden was vandalized, "we had some stuff broken in our garden too and mum was like really sure it was because we're Jewish." Simon shared how he installed security cameras after the windows of his home were broken as retaliation for his Pagan worldview, "I had my windows put through a couple of times because of my [pause] belief system."

Frequent verbal and physical attacks were described by the Hindu participants. Items were thrown at Meena and Arjun. As racial slurs were included in these incidents, Meena was uncertain if they were assaulted for their racial or religious background, or both, stating, "bad experience from the kids over here because they were seeing in a group, or this color people first time or something and they saying, calling us 'Paki' and throwing the milk and things like that."

Muslim participants shared how Britain First, an anti-Islamic Christian supremacist political organization, held a rally targeting NI's Muslim population. Syed mentioned how the physical risk posed by Britain First resulted in police protection for local mosques, "I think there were police forces and stuff outside mosque to protect us." The danger faced by some Muslim participants appeared to have an explicitly political agenda.

Attempts to Force Religious Conformity

This theme explored the coercion participants experienced to conform to Christian beliefs and practices. Pressure was exerted through NI's education system and could manifest in personal relationships.

Sarah explained how religious education was, in essence, Christian education stating, "it's not religion, it's like Christian education." Mandatory Christian prayer at a school assembly was described by Michael, "they [students] had to go to assembly and there was like an event going on and they were all asked to pray, and they were all forced into prayer and that's quite scary."

The institutionalization of Christianity in NI's schools was profoundly challenging for participants who were parents. The only action they could take to avoid their children's almost exclusive exposure to a religious worldview contrary to their own was to remove them from activities that most, if not all, their fellow classmates would be participating in. The complexity of this choice was highlighted by Anna who had to decide between her child being taught the Christian New Testament or having him sit alone in a school corridor:

> My son is being tested on the miracles of Jesus, what are your options? At Primary school [children aged four to 11 years old] the option is to sit in the hall, sit out of things, but I think that's very clearly an example of discriminatory practice.

To be excused from Christian education and practices, non-Christian children must have permission from authority figures at school. Deva discussed how anxious and fearful this process made her son feel:

> My son was feeling when he was in P1 P2 [aged four to six years old], he was feeling like, they go from mass, they have like a mass session, he was really scared to say 'I'm not a Christian, I don't want to go.'

Christianity's dominance within the education system could leave Hindu participants' children confused about their religious and cultural identity. Meena shared how her children were relatively ignorant about Hinduism yet acquainted with the teachings of Christianity:

> Children's come home [from school] 'mummy what is Hinduism, why are we not having confession, why are we not having holy communion?', because our kids haven't an idea why we are not following that because that's the only thing he is experiencing.

Some participants experienced attempts to impose Christianity in their interpersonal relationships. Anna described how certain people tried to convert her to Christianity. These conversations tended to communicate the explicit message that Christianity was a more sophisticated worldview than atheism, "I thought God that is the

most patronizing thing I have ever heard [pause] because I'm a thinker I'll come round to your [Christian] point of view." Simon had the experience of people coming to his home uninvited, referring to him as a "Satanist" and a "heathen" if he did not conform with a Christian worldview. These visitors warned he would face eternal suffering by burning in "hell" if he did not convert to Christianity.

The results revealed that participants experienced being treated as outsiders in NI. Non-Christian people were perceived to be overlooked within the power structures of Northern Irish society. Participants felt they were often treated as different from the Christian majority, resulting in isolation. Many believed they were frequently considered an enemy who posed a dangerous threat. Instances of demeaning treatment, verbal, and physical attack were reported with participants experiencing pressure to conform with Christian norms.

Discussion

The current study offered unique insights into how participants tended to experience the normalization of Christianity in Northen Irish society as oppression. These experiences did not exclusively exist on an individual level, but were often manifestations of the ascendancy of Christianity in NI's systems of power.

The results demonstrate that participants frequently felt ignored by the media, politicians, and the education system. This aligns with Joshi's (2009) contention that, in a Christian hegemonic society, non-Christian people are commonly "rendered invisible, illegitimate, and unworthy of attention beyond the level of a novelty or stereotype" (p. 51). This invisibility could be viewed as a manifestation of cultural imperialism, characterized by Young (1990) as "the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm" (p. 59). Cultural imperialism can make minority groups invisible whilst simultaneously reducing them to a stereotype. Within liberal democracies, Young regarded cultural imperialism, alongside exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and violence, to form the five expressions of oppression.

The study provides evidence that due to systemic invisibility, many people in NI appeared to participants to be uninformed of, and unfamiliar with, non-Christian backgrounds. This finding concurs with the work of several authors who suggested that ignorance of non-Christian worldviews can be an expression of Christian privilege (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2009; Kivel, 2013). Most people with a Christian background can live in NI and remain oblivious to non-Christian perspectives; their lack of understanding is unlikely to cause any undue disadvantage or difficulty. However, non-Christian people must be acutely acquainted with Christian norms to navigate daily social and political life (Blumenfeld, 2006).

The results suggested how ignorance of non-Christian worldviews among people with a Christian background was frequently redressed by participants. The burden of informing privileged groups is often borne by people with a minority group background, as Lorde (2017) reminded us, "Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world" (p. 95). The current study, therefore, illustrated how Christian privilege, like many other forms of dominant group advantage, can be a "constant drain of energy" for those who do not avail of it (Lorde, 2017, p. 95).

Participants indicated their experiences of being treated as different, and separate from, the Christian majority in NI. This finding highlights how, in the context of Christian normalcy, non-Christian worldviews tend to be positioned as the other (Joshi, 2020). Othering is characterized by exclusion, alienation, and ascribed inferiority; it manifests in the "the ability to be distinguished from the familiar, the accepted, and the known" (Eliyahu-Levi & Semo, 2023, p. 1). Othered communities and individuals are often segregated and isolated from the society in which they live. Kivel (2013) suggested that anyone who is not considered a White Christian man has historically been deemed the other by many of the institutions of mainstream Christianity.

Throughout history, Christian hegemonic societies have been inclined to position non-Christians as a threat to justify oppression and exclusion from power (Joshi, 2020; Kivel, 2013). As demonstrated in the results, the nature of the alleged danger can differ according to non-Christian group. For centuries, Jewish people have

been treated as a threat to the economy, national security, and Christianity itself (Vellenga, 2018). People with a non-religious background are often deemed a moral threat, perceived to lack the virtue and integrity possessed by those who have a Christian background (Edgell et al., 2016). Muslim people are increasingly framed as supporters and perpetrators of terrorism; violence is often portrayed as an Islamic norm. Joshi (2009) maintained that in the present U.S. and European socio-political climate, race has become an indicator of religion resulting in anyone with brown skin potentially considered Muslim and subject to terrorist stereotypes. The distrust and fear directed toward non-Christian people in a Christian dominated society stands in sharp contrast to the trustworthiness that can be attributed to those with a Christian background, particularly White men (Kivel, 2013).

To rationalize oppression, people from many minority groups have been accused of posing a danger to the status quo. Myths of Black men as an inherent sexual threat to White women were propagated in the U.S. to defend lynching and other forms of racial violence (Davis, 1982). Various branches of the Christian Church in NI have traditionally referred to non-heterosexual people, particularly gay men, as dangerous and predatory figures (Duggan, 2012). Discourse surrounding the rights of transgender people has tended to focus on the perceived risk to the safety of cis gender women, despite research indicating that such fears are not "empirically grounded" (Hasenbush et al., 2019. p. 80). The British Government historically stereotyped many Catholic people in NI as a terrorist threat to justify policies of internment, collusion with loyalist paramilitary groups, and violent militarized policing (Cassel et al., 2006; Gethins, 2006; Lowry, 1976). This study, therefore, contributes to understanding the interconnections between multiple forms of oppression; examining these can help "unravel" the "comprehensive ideological tapestry" (Ferber, 2012, p. 74) that is used to validate inequality and its enactment in stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination.

The current results demonstrated that, for some participants, oppression manifested in the form of violent verbal and physical attacks. Aggression of this nature is systemic; it has social justice implications beyond the actions of the individual perpetrator, since victims are targeted solely because of their actual or perceived minority group status (Young, 1990). This type of hostility is often a "social given that everyone knows happens and will happen again" (Young, 1990, p. 62); it is inclined to be normalized and arguably legitimized within society.

Amnesty International has described the prevalence of hate crimes in NI, criminal offenses that are motivated by hostility toward a person's race, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or transgender identity, as "deeply worrying" (Amnesty International, 2023a, para. 1). In recent years, religiously motivated hate crimes in NI include the gathering of people in Ku Klux Klan robes at an Islamic Prayer Centre (Weaver, 2018), and the flying of Nazi flags outside a mosque (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2023). Crimes of this nature can have profound consequences for the individual, with a sense of fear and isolation lingering long after the event (Michael et al., 2022). Their injurious impact can spread throughout the wider community, delivering an intended message of intimidation to all those who share the victim's targeted identity. The current study, therefore, suggested that whilst a Christian background will not provide immunity from every kind of aggression or attack, Christian privilege might offer some degree of protection from the many forms of "hostility, distress, and violence" (Joshi, 2006, p. 131) certain non-Christian people can experience as part of their daily lives in NI.

Offering support for the work of Joshi (2006), the current results provide evidence that the omnipresence of Christianity in an education system can result in non-Christian children being "singled out and segregated"; they can be "literally on the outside looking in" (p. 132) if they do not confirm to Christian norms of belief and practice. Conversely, children with a Christian background are likely to receive a religious education at school that coincides, at least in part, with the religious upbringing they have received at home.

For participants in this study, attempts to convert them to Christianity were often experienced as an attack on their non-Christian background; proselytizing was frequently imbued with the assumption of Christian superiority. The results, therefore, concur with Blumenfeld's (2009) assertion that evangelism can be "an imposition, manipulation and a form of oppression" (p. 18). Regardless of the intent of the perpetrator, it can contribute to the marginalization and outsider status of non-Christian people.

Limitations

Due to the relatively small number of participants in this study, the results cannot be generalized; a limited number of non-Christian backgrounds were included in the sample as well. This study did not specifically adopt an intersectional approach. Whilst beyond its scope, this undoubtedly restricted appreciation for the complex range of experiences non-Christian people can have in NI. Other intersectional factors, specifically race, ethnicity, and/or nationality, likely shaped the experiences of some participants. As religion is often presumed from race or ethnicity, it can be difficult to "*disentangle*" these forms of oppression (Jordanova et al., 2015, p. 1728). Although providing a potentially empowering forum for data collection, focus groups could have been an intimidating environment for some participants restricting their disclosure of personal information. Additionally, certain participants might have found it difficult to voice a dissenting opinion in a group setting.

As I conducted the interviews, and transcribed and analyzed all the data, the potential impact of my privileged identities and personal biases cannot be discounted. Despite my efforts to develop cultural competence, my Christian background could nonetheless have been a source of unease, leading some participants to withhold or minimize certain experiences of oppression. There were moments when a few participants appeared apologetic when sharing their experiences of injustice, perhaps concerned that I might perceive it as a personal critique. As those in dominant groups can diminish forms of oppression that do not explicitly impact their own lives, it is possible I underestimated the significance of some instances of marginalization. Furthermore, I could have unintentionally discounted participant experiences that challenged my pre-existing view that significant harm can be caused by unexamined Christian hegemony.

Implications

The following section will consider implications for counseling training, practice, and research. Whilst the implications mostly focus on the socio-political context of NI, they are likely relevant for counselors working with marginalized groups in other Christian hegemonic societies.

Implications for Training

The results demonstrate that the normalization of Christianity as the dominant worldview in NI was frequently experienced as oppression by people with a non-Christian background. However, many counselors could be ill-equipped to respond to the challenges facing non-Christian clients (Flasch & Fulton, 2019; Mintert et al., 2020). Most counselors in NI will avail of Christian privilege as they have been brought up in a household that identified as Christian (NISRA, 2022). Their formative education will probably have taken place in an intensely Christian setting, in a political and social environment that often disregards and potentially persecutes non-Christian people as outsiders. Despite this profound socialization, counseling training programs tend to omit Christian privilege and often minimize religion as a multi-cultural consideration (Magaldi-Dopman, 2014; Mintert et al., 2020; Vieten et al., 2013). Research from the field of White privilege implies that unexamined experiences of Christian privilege are likely to limit a counselor's competence with non-Christian clients (Mindrup et al., 2011). It is recommended, therefore, that Christian privilege should be integrated into counseling training in NI as a critical component in developing multi-cultural competence. Training could assist counselors to examine how living in, and potentially benefiting from, a Christian hegemonic society might shape their professional work.

To facilitate awareness of Chrisitan privilege, educators could incorporate training initiatives to explore experiences of oppression among non-Christian people (Walls & Todd, 2014). Examining the systemic obstacles and societal hostility often endured by non-Christians could provide some counselors with valuable social comparison information to consider how their lives differ from those without a Christian background, potentially revealing previously concealed areas of privilege (Johnson, 2005). Recognizing how they have personally benefited from Christian hegemony might be deeply challenging for some counselors with a Christian background, particularly those who experience Christianity as a source of denominational, gender, racial, and/or sexual orientation oppression (Accapadi, 2009; Kivel,2013; Todd, 2010). Adopting an intersectional approach that validates these

painful experiences whilst recognizing that contradictory experiences of privilege can also exist, could therefore be beneficial (Ferber and O'Reilly Herrera, 2013; McIntosh, 2012).

Implications for Counseling Practice and Social Justice Integration

Given the far-reaching oppression experienced by non-Christian participants, the results strengthen the call for counselors to utilize their power and professional standing to advocate for social change (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018; Wilcox et al., 2022). Relying on traditional approaches to counseling could place responsibility for change exclusively with a client whilst systems of oppression are left intact.

The following proposals are specific steps a counselor could consider when working in collaboration with a non-Christian client whose difficulties stem from systemic injustice. They include actions any practitioner could take to challenge the inequality that can arise from Christian privilege both inside and outside the counseling profession. The proposals might be particularly useful for counselors who experience uncertainty around action as a barrier to their engagement with social justice (Winter & Hanley, 2015; Winter, 2019). The recommendations stem from the six levels of counseling and advocacy intervention stipulated in the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies: intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, public policy, and international/global (Ratts et al., 2015).

1. Support a client to locate their difficulties in the context of Christian hegemony. The hostile environment non-Christian people can encounter in NI is likely to have a significant impact on their psychological well-being; existing research indicates a correlation between certain mental health issues and experiences of religious oppression (Jordanova et al., 2015; Nadal et al., 2012; Rippy & Newman, 2006; Wu & Schimmele, 2019). Facilitating a client to develop critical consciousness and recognize the sociological origins of their difficulties can reduce self-blame, promote empowerment, and foster intrapersonal change. To develop this structural perspective, it would appear critical that a counselor actively educate themselves on the impact unjust structures can have on mental health and well-being (Bartlett et al., 2022).
2. Assist a client to cultivate communication skills to discuss experiences of oppression within their personal networks. Whilst these conversations have the potential to enhance interpersonal support, care, and understanding, they could be particularly challenging in NI as a potential legacy of the conflict has been the avoidance of religion in everyday conversation, including within mental health services (Carlisle, 2015). Counselors working in this context might therefore find it helpful to reflect on the historical residue of evasion and hesitancy that could exist when discussing a person's religious background. It also could be pertinent to explore with a client the defensive reactions that can sometimes occur when talking about Christian privilege with those who benefit from the phenomenon (Blumenfeld & Jaekel, 2012; Walls & Todd, 2014).
3. Critically consider organizational policies that could enact Christian privilege. Christian norms are ubiquitous within Northern Irish society and are likely replicated within counseling organizations (Mintert et al., 2020; Schlosser, 2003). For those oppressed by Christian hegemony, the overt celebration of Christian holidays, display of Christian symbols, or adherence to a Christian calendar could serve as poignant reminders of experiences of otherness (Accapadi, 2009; Kivel, 2013; Mintert et al., 2020; Weinbaum, 2009). Questioning such religious and cultural norms in counseling institutions could remove potential barriers and support the inclusion of non-Christian clients.
4. Partner with a client to identify religious or non-religious community organizations who are working to further the rights of marginalized groups. Whilst often overlooked in mainstream discourse, NI has a rich history of effective grass roots activism, most notably in feminism and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer rights (Deiana et al., 2022; Kilmurray, 2016). During the conflict in NI and in the years of peace building that followed the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, many community groups built connections across the Protestant/Catholic divide in pursuit of human rights. These groups have a wealth of institution-

al expertise in disrupting the status quo. Engagement with such organizations could provide an important source of solidarity, support, and collaboration for clients who wish to engage in self or group advocacy.

5. Petition government officials on issues of religious equality to foster change in public policy (Mintert et al., 2020). As the religious curriculum for NI's schools is presently being revised and has been subject to recent legal action, advocacy could focus on the urgent need for genuinely inclusive education that equally represents a plurality of religions and beliefs. In addition to creating a more equitable environment for non-Christians, removing the embedded nature of Christianity in education could potentially lessen the profound denominational divide between Catholic and Protestant young people. A further pertinent focus for lobbying could be the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, surveillance legislation in the UK which places a mandatory duty on counselors and their multi-disciplinary colleagues employed in a range of settings in Scotland, England, and Wales to report indicators of violent and non-violent extremism among their clients. Many leading human rights and community organizations have stressed that this legislation disproportionately targets Muslim people (Amnesty International, 2023b; Grierson, 2021; Liberty, n.d.). Counselors have consequently reported increased fear and distrust of counseling among Muslim clients, highlighting the importance of advocacy in this area ("I am Realising That Fear and Suspicion are More in the Relationship," 2015).
6. Use reliable media outlets to keep informed about international events that are likely to impact non-Christian clients. A meaningful example can be found in the Israel/Gaza war. For several decades, graffiti, murals, and flags in support of Israel or Palestine have been commonly displayed as "proxy tribal" identifiers throughout NI (Carroll & O'Carroll, 2023, para. 11). Based on their common experiences of perceived terrorism, those who identify as PUL in NI tend to share a deep affinity with Israel. People within CNR communities, who often view themselves as subject to colonial occupation, typically express strong support for the rights of Palestinian people. The violent escalation in the Israel/Gaza war has markedly intensified these affiliations in NI, undoubtedly heightening the fear and exclusion experienced by many non-Christian people. It would, therefore, be pertinent for a counselor to remain cognizant of developments in these global affairs.

Implications for Research

The far-reaching oppression experienced by the non-Christian participants in this study emphasizes the urgent need for additional research on Christian privilege. Future research could examine how multiple social groups identities, specifically race and ethnicity, converge to shape the oppression experienced by non-Christian people in NI. Christian privilege can vary significantly according to local norms and context. Studies in other geographic locations in Ireland and the UK would, therefore, be vital in developing a meaningful picture of the oppression that can arise from this complex phenomenon. Due to the paucity of research guiding counselors who wish to engage in advocacy on behalf of non-Christian clients, the findings support Mintert et al.'s (2020) recommendation that further studies are required to identify the social justice interventions that are effective in promoting religious inclusion in the counseling room and beyond.

Conclusion

The current research informs the present debate on social justice by providing evidence that Christian privilege is "real, historically significant, ongoing, and damaging" (Small et al., 2022, p. 357). In being the first study of its kind to explore Christian privilege in NI, it highlighted the exclusion, isolation, and danger non-Christian people can encounter in their daily lives. In a society that has traditionally silenced and overlooked voices outside of the Protestant/Catholic polarity, this study offered unique and critical insight into painful experiences of oppression that arise, at least in part, from Christian hegemony. In doing so, the study underscored the urgent need for the counseling profession in NI to uphold its commitment to equality by incorporating Christian privilege as a

vital factor in training to ensure competent multi-cultural practice. This article offered specific recommendations to equip counselors to engage in advocacy and become agents of change alongside, and on behalf of, their non-Christian clients. Dismantling the unjust systems that arise from Christian privilege in NI could not only improve the lives of non-Christian people but could assist a still fractured post-conflict society to move toward greater integration, inclusion, and religious equality.

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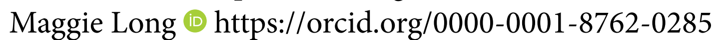
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Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in relation to this work.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. What knowledge or understanding do you feel most people in Northern Ireland have of your non-Christian background?
2. How is your non-Christian background talked about or discussed in Northern Ireland?
3. What reactions do you get when you express or share your non-Christian background in Northern Ireland?
4. What challenges (if any) do you encounter in Northern Ireland when trying to follow the practices associated with your non-Christian background?
5. How would you describe what it feels like to be someone with a non-Christian background living in Northern Ireland?
6. Are there any specific difficulties someone with your non-Christian background can face in Northern Ireland?
7. What else should I know to understand your life as someone with a non-Christian background living in Northern Ireland?

International Migrants in Counseling Literature: A 36-Year Content Analysis (1988-2023)

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Abstract

With the increasing number of international migrants worldwide and the emphasis on multicultural counseling competence and social justice, counseling professionals must learn more about how to work with this population. To address this need, we conducted a 36-year (1988-2023) content analysis of counseling literature focused on international migrants (i.e., immigrants and refugees) in 21 American Counseling Association-Affiliated Journals. Our analysis of 80 related journal articles aimed to explore publication trends, researched topics, and research methods related to this population, offering implications for counselors, researchers, and the counseling profession. The study underscored the significance of culturally sensitive counseling for international migrants, highlighting the necessity for advocacy efforts in the counseling profession to support the mental health needs of international migrants. We recommended that counselors remain informed about research and utilize digital and interdisciplinary approaches to enhance their support of international migrants.

Keywords: international migrants, immigrants, refugees, multicultural counseling competence, content analysis

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International Migrants in Counseling Literature: A 36-Year Content Analysis (1988-2023)

An international migrant (IM) is "any person who has changed his or her country of residence. This includes all migrants, regardless of their legal status, or the nature, or motive of their movement" (United Nations; UN, n.d.). This definition delineates the diversity in IMs, encompassing all individuals who have made the significant transition to a new country, including both voluntary immigrants and refugees. Refugees, distinct from voluntary immigrants, are individuals seeking international protection due to reasons such as "feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order" (UN, n.d.). According to the latest data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in 2020, there were 281 million IMs worldwide. Despite comprising only 3.6% of the global population, IMs have steadily increased over the last five decades (IOM, 2022).

Similarly, based on the United States (U.S.) Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) in 2022, the foreign-born population in the U.S. totaled approximately 47.9 million, representing roughly 13.9% of the entire population (ACS, 2022). Specifically, Latinx American and Caribbean migrants (e.g., Mexican) continued to constitute a significant portion (around 25%) of the IM population, while Asian immigrants represented the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group. European migration remained a factor, albeit with declining proportions compared to previous decades (Pew Research Center, 2020). Moreover, unauthorized immigrants comprised almost a quarter of the U.S. IMs in 2017. About 30,000 refugees were resettled in the U.S., approximately half from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Pew Research Center, 2020). With the increasing number and diversity of IMs worldwide and in the U.S., it is crucial for counselors and other mental health professionals to develop a comprehensive understanding of this population.

The counseling profession has a long history of working with and advocating for social justice concerning minority populations, including IMs (Ratts et al., 2016). For instance, the American Counseling Association (ACA) adopted the Multicultural Counseling and Social Justice Competence (MCSJC) framework, which requires each counseling professional to be equipped with awareness, knowledge, skills, and advocacy for the population they work with, especially individuals who are minorities (Ratts et al., 2016). IMs are often challenged by social injustices, such as restricted access to healthcare (Lindvall et al., 2020), encounters with discrimination and hate crimes (Gray et al., 2015), and the impact of their migration status (Enriquez et al., 2018). The advocacy role undertaken by counseling professionals is paramount in this context. Therefore, our study aimed to provide an overview of research about IMs for counselors and other mental health professionals using a content analysis of IMs in the counseling literature from 1988 to 2023. The study's implications can be applied to practice, research, and advocacy involving IMs.

IMs' Contributions and Relocation Reasons

Despite the social injustices they may experience, IMs have made myriad contributions to their host countries. These contributions span a broad spectrum of social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Socially, IMs play a pivotal role in national population growth dynamics. Infusing a large immigrant population has been reported as an effective strategy for resolving depopulation problems in large cities (Bayona-i-Carrasco & Gil-Alonso, 2013). Economically, IMs provide labor with lower wage expectations than native populations, filling employment gaps and offering cost-effective labor (Edo, 2019). Also, the influx of IMs has injected vitality into entrepreneurship and innovation. In the U.S., for instance, immigrants comprised 16% of the inventor population but generated 23% of the nation's total innovation output (Bernstein et al., 2022). IMs' willingness to work with international inventors and engage in foreign markets has expedited the introduction and spread of cutting-edge technologies (Bernstein et al., 2022). In addition, although a rise in diversity might pose challenges to social cohesion, the cultural variety brought by IMs typically has exerted a positive effect on economic development

(Bove & Elia, 2017). Given the continuous growth in the number of IMs and their significant contributions to their host countries, it is imperative to explore various factors related to IMs.

Ravenstein (1885) stated that migration could be prompted by adverse conditions or "push factors" in the migrants' home regions and "pull factors" in the destination regions or countries. The "push factors" are conditions that force or compel individuals to leave their place of origin, including economic hardship, political instability, religious persecution, and conflict. In contrast, "pull factors" are the favorable conditions and attractions of the destination regions or countries that draw migrants toward them, including the promise of better job opportunities, higher wages, political stability, family reunification, educational prospects, and improved living standards (Ravenstein, 1885). However, IMs may encounter numerous challenges when they move to their host countries.

Challenges Faced by IMs

Enormous challenges that IMs have faced include financial strains (Parutis, 2011), difficulty related to social integration (Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015), mental health hurdles (Hasanović et al., 2020), limited healthcare access (Lindvall et al., 2020), experiencing discrimination and hate crimes (Gray et al., 2015), and the influence of migration status (Enriquez et al., 2018). IMs have frequently struggled with economic difficulties, particularly unemployment or low-wage employment, with many facing low employment rates (Correa-Velez et al., 2013). Many IMs have reported challenges obtaining foreign credentials or skills (Correa-Velez et al., 2013) and finding well-paid jobs or jobs related to their field of expertise (Parutis, 2011), which constrains their financial ability.

IMs have also faced challenges related to social integration, such as acculturation stress (Berry, 2005). According to Silva et al. (2017), people under acculturative stress frequently experience feelings of melancholy, hopelessness, and excessive concern. Further, while they attempt to acculturate into the new culture, some IMs experience a loss or fragmentation of their previous cultural identity (Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015). Acculturation stress might negatively impact IMs' mental health status (Hasanović et al., 2020; Xiong & Zhou, 2018). However, this group's mental health hurdles extend beyond acculturation stress.

The mental health of IMs has been affected by pre-migration trauma, post-migration stressors, and long-term adjustment difficulties (Sangalang et al., 2019). For instance, Bustamante et al. (2017) stated that many refugees had traumatic experiences in their original countries, including natural catastrophes, violence, persecution, and war. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), typified by intrusive memories, flashbacks, hypervigilance, and avoidance behaviors, might result from these stressful experiences (Kazour et al., 2017). Moreover, the stress of migration, including issues with language, acculturation, prejudice, and social isolation, might cause depression and other anxiety disorders in migrants (Hasanović et al., 2020).

IMs' health challenges are exacerbated by barriers to accessing healthcare, ranging from economic constraints to cultural and linguistic misunderstandings with healthcare providers (Derr, 2016). Weak social support networks worsen these difficulties due to relocation and lacking community ties. As a result, many IMs receive inadequate health care (Lindvall et al., 2020). Researchers (e.g., Memon et al., 2016) have noted that cultural stigma related to mental health disorders, self-reliance ideas, and worries about privacy and faith in healthcare systems contribute to IMs' hesitation to seek professional assistance. Cultural norms and beliefs might affect how mental health issues are perceived by people in general, which could affect how willing they are to seek professional mental health care (Corrigan et al., 2014).

Racial and societal discrimination also challenge IMs in different contexts. Prejudice and discrimination towards IMs and the effects of these unfavorable attitudes and actions have harmed their physical and mental health (Esses, 2021). The intersectionality among the identities of the IMs might make the situation worse. For example, IMs who identified with the LGBTQ+ population were more vulnerable to social exclusion, stigma, and mental health problems such as trauma, depression, and anxiety (Gray et al. 2015).

IMs might experience stress based on their immigration status. Undocumented immigrants might face unique challenges, including limited employment opportunities (Vieira, 2016), fear of deportation, and ineligibility for certain services (Hacker et al., 2015), leading to chronic stress and mental health issues (Enriquez et al., 2018). Policies like language testing for IMs might marginalize those with limited formal education (Cummins, 2015). Consequently, the absence of immigration documents might hinder IMs' ability to integrate into society, create obstacles to their professional and personal development, and perpetuate the harmful cycle of their social marginalization and economic instability.

Helpful Resources and Strategies for IMs

Despite many challenges, IMs utilize various resources and strategies to cope with obstacles. For example, social support networks in ethnic communities and religious institutions serve as crucial coping mechanisms, helping IMs navigate the healthcare system and other aspects of integration (Kivisto, 2014). According to Kivisto (2014), religion and faith provide comfort and practical assistance, serving as a crucial part of the coping strategies for several IM communities. IMs also employ various personal strategies, such as cognitive reframing and behavioral adaptability, often rooted in cultural pride and ancestral heritage, to foster resilience in the face of adversity (Schwartz et al., 2014). Education has also been a pivotal tool for IMs, offering academic advancement and serving as a coping mechanism in a new environment. Crul and colleagues (2017) proposed a multiplier effect whereby the children of low-education migrants actively pursued educational qualifications to improve their knowledge and skills, access better opportunities, and improve their socio-economic status.

Counseling could be another useful resource to help IMs navigate challenges and adjustments. Despite various barriers to accessing counseling resources among IMs, research has indicated the benefits of counseling for IMs, including promoting their mental health (Sue et al., 2022), facilitating the acculturation process (Atiyeh et al., 2020), addressing their cultural identity issues (Ibrahim & Heuer, 2016), and enhancing their overall adjustment and integration (Sue et al., 2022). Given the benefits of counseling, it is essential to review how counseling professionals have worked with IMs.

Counseling Profession and IMs

The counseling profession has historically responded to IMs' unique needs and challenges through various approaches. Counselors have increasingly recognized the importance of cultural sensitivity and competence when working with IMs (Chung et al., 2011). Counselors and researchers have also worked to understand the cultural backgrounds, values, beliefs, and traditions of IMs to provide culturally responsive counseling services, including acknowledging the impact of acculturation, language barriers, and cultural adjustment stressors on the mental health and well-being of IMs (ACA, 2014). Moreover, counselors have employed trauma-informed approaches to address the mental health needs of IMs, recognizing the impact of past experiences on their present-day well-being (Figley, 2012).

Counselors have also worked to empower IMs by fostering their resilience, self-efficacy, and coping skills. These efforts might involve strength-based approaches drawing on the assets in IM communities, supporting IMs in navigating challenges, building social support networks, and accessing resources to promote their well-being and integration (Ungar, 2012).

In addition, counseling professionals have played a vital role in advocating for the rights and well-being of IMs through advocacy efforts to address systemic barriers, discrimination, and inequalities (Ratts et al., 2016). IMs have often been marginalized from mainstream society with unequal treatment (Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015). For example, the Chinese Exclusion Act, enacted in 1882, prohibited all immigration of Chinese laborers for a decade (Lee, 2002). More recently, a Florida law now bars individuals from several countries (i.e., China, Cuba, Venezuela, Syria, Iran, Russia, and North Korea) from purchasing real estate in that state (Wiessner, 2024). In the U.S., negative political rhetoric and an unfavorable portrayal of IMs in the media have significantly influenced public perceptions of IMs, bolstering a climate of hostility and discrimination (Durand & Massey, 2019). This

climate is exemplified by the consistent rise in anti-Latinx and anti-Asian hate crimes in the top ten U.S. cities in recent years (Levin et al., 2022). The connection between immigration policies and practices and IMs' well-being is evident. The advocacy role of counseling professionals is critical in this regard. Counselors can play a crucial role as flag-bearers for policy change, working to protect IMs' rights and well-being, including comprehensive immigration reform and measures to address systemic barriers (ACA, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

In summary, the literature highlights IMs' contributions to the U.S. and their many challenges. Counseling emerges as a potentially valuable resource, among others, to aid IMs in navigating these challenges. However, a systematic review of the research on IMs in the counseling profession remains notably absent (Yoon et al., 2023). Such a review could serve the pivotal function of indexing past accomplishments, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses in the field, and directing future research, practice, and advocacy efforts (Yoon et al., 2023) linked with IMs. Therefore, this review aimed to synthesize and evaluate previous research about IMs in the counseling profession and offer implications for research, practice, and advocacy in the field. To achieve this aim, we utilized a content analysis method. Specifically, we analyzed published articles that investigated IMs in 21 ACA-affiliated journals listed on the ACA website.

The research questions that guided our study were as follows. (1) What are the publication trends (i.e., journals and published years) when studying IMs in the professional counseling literature? (2) What topics have been explored regarding IMs in the professional counseling literature? (3) What research methods have been used when studying IMs in the professional counseling literature?

Methods

A qualitative content analysis (QCA; Schreier, 2012) was conducted to examine the research about IMs in professional counseling journals affiliated with ACA. Content analysis systematically examines existing communication and literature on a given topic (Schreier, 2012). Therefore, it was an appropriate method to use in the current study. In the counseling field, content analysis has been utilized to explore the research and publication trends on certain topics, including wellness and well-being (Nice et al., 2023), counseling military populations (Prosek & Burgin, 2020), and social justice outcomes in counseling (Clark et al., 2022).

Research Team

The research team consisted of an associate professor in a Clinical Mental Health Counseling program and two students in Educational Studies. The associate professor identified as a cis-gender female faculty member; she came from China and had gone through the immigration process. Being in the U.S. for more than ten years, she has experienced and witnessed the challenges IMs face, which helped her become an advocate for IMs in various settings. One student identified as a cis-gender female, and the other identified as a cis-gender male. They were both international students on temporary visas from China. The female student came to the U.S. for her master's degree. In less than two years, she experienced the transition from being a student to an employee. Currently, she is attempting to obtain a work visa, a challenge faced by most IMs; this allowed her to better understand the situation of IMs. The male student has completed both a bachelor's and a master's degree in the U.S. He witnessed the despair of some immigrant students during the 2019 pandemic and has volunteered in local educational settings. His experience as an international student led to his research interest in exploring IMs' challenges and supporting this population.

To minimize the influences of the researchers' assumptions and biases, the research team held regular meetings led by the first author and kept journals to process the assumptions and biases. Some shared assumptions and biases about IMs reported by the team included: (1) IMs could experience challenges during the immigration process, (2) IMs could receive unequal treatment based on immigration status, and (3) it is critical to apply a strength-based approach when working with IMs. It was an emotional process for the researchers to process these

assumptions and biases as they were related to their personal experiences. However, the process was helpful for the researchers to stay objective and neutral during the course of the entire project. Despite these efforts, our assumptions and biases may still have influenced the research process, including how we interpreted the research articles we included and the codebook we developed.

The two student team members received a three-day training on content analysis led by the first author. The training included a definition of content analysis, instruction on conducting content analysis in the counseling profession, and practicing content analysis with an example article written by Clark and colleagues (2022). The students also were required to read chapters in Schreier's (2012) book on content analysis.

Procedure

When conducting the research, we followed the steps recommended by Schreier (2012): (1) selecting research materials, (2) developing a tentative coding frame, (3) pilot coding, (4) adjusting the coding frame as needed, (5) coding all research materials, and (6) analyzing, interoperating, and presenting the results. After obtaining the list of the 21 ACA-affiliated journals, the first author identified the publishers of the journals. She then used "immigr*" or "refugees" or "migra*" as keywords and restricted the journals to the ACA-affiliated journals on the publishers' website to search for targeted articles. For example, Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation, the Family Journal, and Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin were published by Sage Publications. The first author restricted the search field to those three journals and used the above keywords to search on the Sage website. The Journal of Military and Government Counseling and the Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology were not associated with a publisher but a university. The first author used the above keywords to identify articles for the Journal of Social Action in Counseling and Psychology. However, there was no search bar for the Journal of Military and Government website; therefore, we included all the articles from the Journal of Military and Government for screening. The initial search of all the targeted journals ended with 399 articles and entries.

All retrieved content was entered into Covidence, a website for screening articles. Two master's-level graduates in education screened the articles after being thoroughly trained in content analysis and screening criteria. The inclusion criteria for the articles were: (1) the topic focused on immigrants/refugees/IMs, (2) the article was published in ACA-affiliated counseling journals, and (3) the text was available on the internet or written in English. The exclusion criteria were: (1) the articles mentioned immigrants/refugees/migrants only in passing, (2) the articles were not published in the ACA-affiliated counseling journals, or (3) the text was not available on the internet or written in English. To ensure the precision of the coding process, two students examined each article. The articles were included or excluded for data analysis only if two students agreed that the article met or did not meet these criteria. When there was a conflict, a third student voted on the article to arrive at a final decision. This review process yielded 84 articles for data analysis. During our analysis, we excluded four more articles as two were published in 1985 and 1988, and we could not access them. The other two only mentioned IMs in passing. Therefore, our final data set included 80 journal articles. Table 4 presents all the articles included in the analysis.

Coding and Data Analysis

Following the data analysis steps Schreier (2012) recommended, the first author developed an initial coding framework based on the research questions. To maintain the accuracy of the coding process, all research team members coded the articles with two people coding the same article. The coding process was divided into three stages. For the initial stage, the research team first coded ten articles to see how the code frame worked and whether any revisions were needed. For the second stage, the research team coded 20 more articles to evaluate the updated code frame and see if further revision was needed. After two rounds of discussion and coding, the research team made revisions and formed a final code frame. For example, the research team first used resilience and trauma as one topic. After coding a few articles, the team separated them into two topics because resilience and trauma were different, with resilience a strength perspective and trauma a negative experience. Based on

the final code frame, all team members coded the rest of the articles and revised the previously coded articles. During the process, the research team held regular meetings to discuss the coding process to clarify and resolve any confusion. Moreover, we used Fleiss's K to measure interrater reliability to further check the coding accuracy, with 0.4-0.75 reflecting a moderate to good agreement (Scheier, 2012). The Fleiss's K in our study ranged from 0.5 - 0.65, indicating good agreement among the coders. For any disagreement on the codes, we held regular research meetings to discuss these disagreements until arriving at a consensus.

The final code frame included authors, publication years, journal names, population of focus (immigrants, refugees, both, or other), host country, country of origin, research methods (qualitative, quantitative, mixed method, and other), and topics of focus. The topics were categorized as (1) trauma, (2) resilience, (3) mental health status, needs, and characteristics, (4) career and identity development, (5) counseling strategies and counselor education strategies to prepare counseling students to work with immigrants, or (6) acculturation experience (see Table 1). The topics were decided based on the title, abstract, and main content of the articles.

Table 1

Operationalized Definition of Topics

Topics	Operationalized Definition
Trauma	It included pre-migration trauma and trauma after their migration, such as discrimination in the host countries.
Resilience	It describes immigrants' inner strength in coping with adversity in their environment.
Mental health status, needs, and characteristics	It elaborates on IMs' mental health status, their mental health needs, and characteristics (e.g., coping strategies).
Career and Identity Development	It describes IMs' career development and their identity development.
Counseling strategies and counselor education strategies to prepare counseling students to work with immigrants	It includes counseling strategies to work efficiently with immigrants and counselor education strategies to prepare counseling students to work with immigrants.
Acculturation experience	It describes immigrants' acculturation experience to the host countries.

Results

Publication Patterns

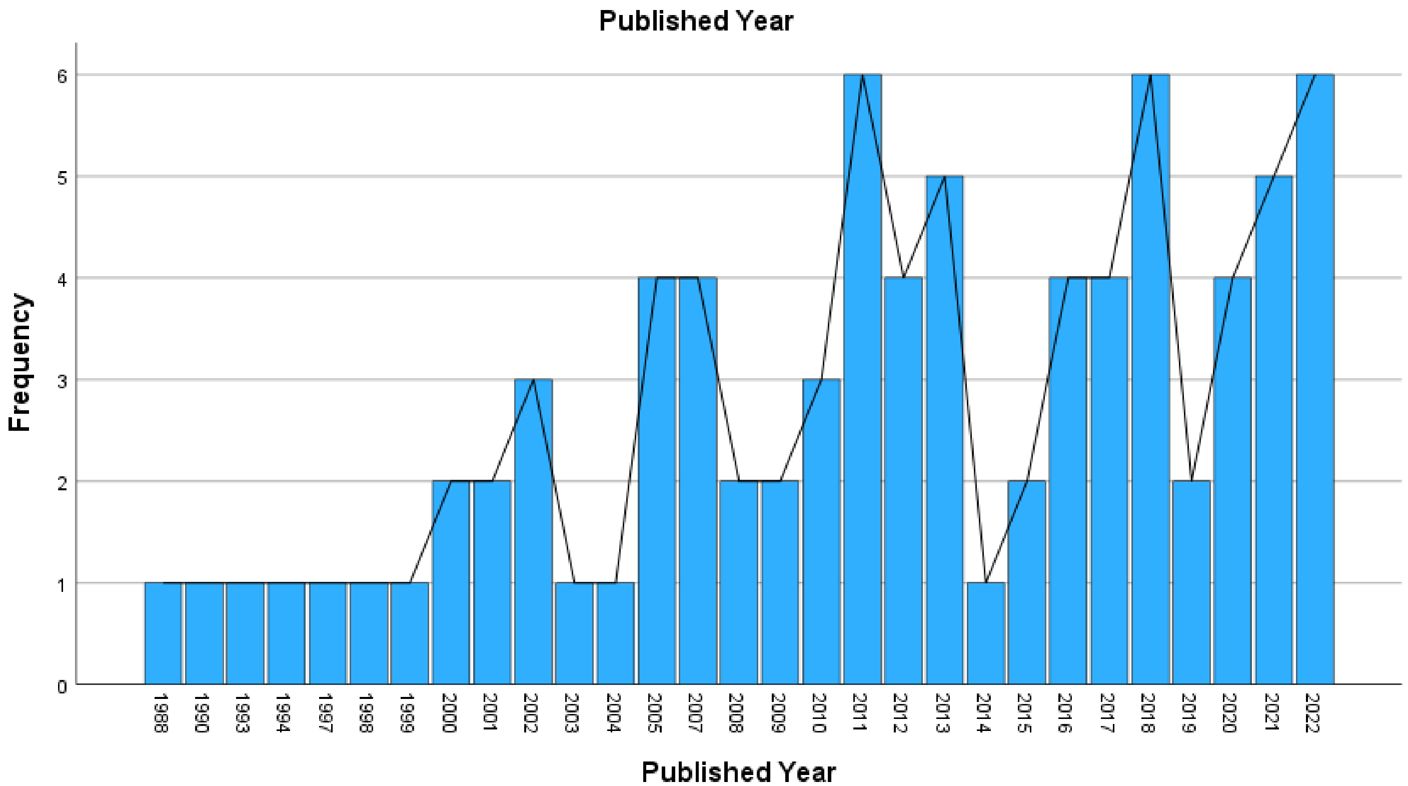
The first article focusing on immigrants from the ACA-affiliated journals was published in 1988 in the Journal of Counseling and Development (JCD). Despite some increase in the number of annual publications in this population, the highest number of annual publications was six per year (see Figure 1). Among the journals that published on this topic, JCD published the most (n = 16, 19.8%), followed by both the Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development (JMCD) (n = 13, 16%) and the Family Journal (n = 13, 16%) (see Table 2).

Research Methods

Regarding the research methods employed in the published articles, 60% featured empirical research (n = 48) involving data collection and analytical processes. The remaining articles (n = 32, 40%) did not present empirical research (n = 32, 40%). According to Woo et al. (2016), these documents could be considered non-research-oriented articles as they featured literature reviews, conceptual models, theories, or case studies. Among

Figure 1

The publication trends of published articles from 1988 to 2022



Among the empirical articles, most employed quantitative methods (*n* = 26, 54.17%), followed by qualitative methods (*n* = 19, 39.58%). Three studies (6.25%) used mixed methods.

The populations investigated in the empirical articles included both volunteer immigrants and refugees. Most of these articles focused on volunteer immigrants (*n* = 41,51.25%), while a few addressed refugees (*n* = 28,35%), and the rest discussed both immigrants and refugees (*n* = 11, 13.75%). The host countries included the U.S. (*n* = 67, 83.75%), Canada (*n* = 5, 6.25%), Australia (*n* = 2, 2.5%), South Korea (*n* = 2, 2.5%), Greece (*n* = 1,1.25%), Israel (*n* = 1, 1.25%), Jordan (*n* = 1, 1.25%), and an unspecified destination (*n* = 1, 1.25%). The countries of origin of the IMs varied, with China being mentioned the most (*n* = 8, 10%), Vietnam next (*n* = 7, 8.75%), Honduras third (n=6, 7.5%), and Mexico fourth (*n* = 5, 6.25%). The other countries of origins included Afghan, Arabia, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivians, Bosnia, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Herzegovina, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Malaysia, Montagnard, Nicaragua, Nigeria, North Korea, Panamanians, Puerto Rico, Peru, Russia, Salvadora, Singapore, Somalia, South Korea, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Bahamas, Uruguayan, Venezuelan, and Yemen. In most empirical articles, the participants were adults (*n* = 31, 38.75%), and a few included children or adolescents (*n* = 13, 16.25%). Six articles focused on immigrants who identified as LGBTQ+ group (7.5%).

Research Topics

Regarding the research topics explored, thirteen articles addressed two topics, and two focused on three topics in the same article. Forty-three articles addressed the topics of counseling strategies and the preparation of counseling trainees (53.75%), 14 (17.5%) elaborated on the topics of mental health status, needs, and characteristics,

Table 2

Journal Names and the Numbers of Published Articles on Immigrants

Journal Names	n	%
JCD	16	20.00%
JMCD	13	16.30%
The Family Journal	13	16.30%
The Journal for Specialists in Group Work	10	12.50%
Journal for Social Action in Counseling & Psychology	4	5.00%
The Career Development Quarterly	4	5.00%
Journal of Creativity in Mental Health	3	3.80%
Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling	3	3.80%
Journal of Mental Health Counseling	3	3.80%
Counseling and Values	2	2.50%
Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling	2	2.50%
Journal of LGBTQ Issues in Counseling	2	2.50%
Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development	2	2.50%
The Journal of Humanistic Counseling	2	2.50%
Journal of College Counseling	1	1.30%
Total	80	100%

Note. The table included journals that had at least one publication about IMs. The ACA-affiliated journals that were not included were the Journal of Addictions and Offender Counseling, the Journal of Employment Counseling, the Adultspan Journal, the Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, and the Journal of Military and Government Counseling.

12 addressed the career and identity development (15%), ten (12.5%) focused on trauma-related issues, ten addressed the acculturation experience (12.5%), and three articles (3.75%) included the topic of resilience.

A Chi-square test was performed to measure potential differences in the research methods employed to study the various topics. The results revealed significant differences, $\chi^2 = 28.55$, $p = .018$, in the research methods utilized (see Table 3). In other words, the researchers relied on different research methods when exploring distinct topics. We conducted post-hoc tests (per Beasley & Schumacker, 2010) with Bonferroni adjustments to investigate the differences just mentioned. For the topic of mental health status, needs, and characteristics, significantly more studies used quantitative methods ($z = 4.0$, $p = 0.01$), and fewer studies utilized non-research-oriented methods ($z = -3.5$, $p = 0.01$). For the topic of counseling strategies and preparation of counseling trainees, significantly more articles employed non-research-oriented methods ($z = 2.3$, $p = 0.02$), and fewer articles used quantitative methods ($z = -2.2$, $p = 0.03$).

Table 3

Topics and Research Methods Used for Each Topic

Topics	Research Methods				
	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed	Conceptual	Total
Trauma	1	4	1	4	10
Resilience	2	0	0	1	3
Mental health status, mental health needs, and characteristics	3	11	0	0	14
Career and identity development	3	2	0	7	12
Counseling strategies and preparation strategies	9	10	2	26	47
Acculturation	3	4	0	4	11
Total	21	31	3	42	97

Note. The total number of articles exceeded 80 because a few articles had multiple topics.

Discussion

This study investigated the research status of IMs in counseling professional journals. It aimed to provide an overview of the landscape of current publications on IMs in counseling to offer suggestions to future researchers and practitioners interested in exploring this topic. First, compared to the increasing number of IMs worldwide and in the U.S., the number of published studies in the targeted counseling journals was very small. The highest number of published articles on IMs in the ACA-affiliated journals per year was six, while the annual total number of publications in the 21 identified journals was around 400. The JCD, JMCD, and the Family Journal published the most articles on IMs. The JCD and the JMCD are the two flagship journals in the counseling profession. Thus, this finding may indicate increasing attention to IMs in counseling. It is also important to note that the Family Journal published the second-highest number of articles about IMs. Most articles published in the Family Journal were about family and couple interventions for IMs. As stated earlier, across all 21 targeted journals, the top countries of origin of the IMs studied were South and Central America, China, and Vietnam. Collectivism is one of the key cultural characteristics in these locales, where people value family cohesion and unity (Joe et al., 2022). Therefore, family and couple interventions may be an effective way of providing mental health services to IMs, especially in these areas.

Regarding the participants in the targeted articles, the majority were volunteer immigrants, and a relatively small number were refugees, similar to a pattern found in content analyses reported in psychology journals (Yoon et al., 2023). Yoon et al. (2023) conducted a 31-year content analysis of immigrants and refugees in psychology-related journals and identified only thirteen studies that included solely refugees among 323 studies on the topic. The Yoon et. al (2023) findings and our results may be related to a lack of attention paid to refugees by the counseling and psychology fields. Another interesting finding we discovered was that most of the studies targeted adults instead of children and adolescents. This may be because it is easier to conduct research with adults than with minors, who require consent from their parents or guardians to participate in most parts of the world.

Turning to our findings about the host countries and countries of origin of the IMs, various host countries worldwide were featured in the targeted articles, with the U.S. and Canada as the top countries. This result is

similar to what Yoon and colleagues (2023) discovered. Moreover, in the current study, the top origins of the IMs were China, Vietnam, and South and Central America. This finding is fairly consistent with Yoon et al. (2023), who discovered that Latinx and Asian Americans were the most frequently studied racial and ethnic groups. Both sets of results may be related to the fact that Latinx and Asian Americans were the largest and fastest-growing IM groups in the U.S. in the latter years of the last decade (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Another highlight of the literature on immigrants investigated in the current study was the discovery that six publications focused on IMs that identified with the LGBTQ+ community. These individuals may experience more challenges than other IMs (Fournier et al., 2017). Most of the six articles we identified relied on qualitative methodology to explore IMs' experience regarding their acculturation process (e.g., Attia et al., 2022; Morales, 2013; Morales et al., 2013) and career development (Kassan & Nakamura, 2013). The publication of these articles may reflect the counseling profession's increased attention to minoritized groups, such as immigrants who identify with the LGBTQ+ population, and the field's emphasis on diversity and social justice (Crethar & Ratts, 2008).

The topics of the articles we evaluated align with the counseling field's emphasis. These topics included trauma-related issues, resilience, mental health needs, status, and characteristics, counseling strategies and preparation of counselor trainees, career and identity development, and acculturation experiences. Not surprisingly, counseling strategies and the preparation of counselor trainees were the most popular topics in the published articles (47 of 97 records). With the trend of evidence-based practice in psychology and counseling, an increasing amount of research has been conducted on counseling efficacy and strategies with diverse populations (Yates, 2013). Moreover, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs requires accredited counseling programs to teach students to understand best practices and outcomes research in the counseling and psychology fields (Yates, 2013). Most of the 47 entries focused on intervention strategies for particular IM groups, such as immigrant women (Yakushko & Chronister, 2005), Chinese immigrant youth (Shea et al., 2011), and immigrant children (Björn et al., 2013). However, few articles presented strategies for preparing counseling trainees to work with IMs. One article reported immersing counseling trainees in an outreach program for IMs, which enhanced the trainees' multicultural development and social justice advocacy skills (Nilsson et al., 2011).

When reflecting on the topics and research methods found in the articles we investigated, we discovered that many articles about counseling strategies and the preparation of counselor trainees were conceptual in nature instead of empirical research papers. More empirical studies are needed to measure the efficacy of the conceptual models discussed in these articles.

Although several articles incorporated social justice and action, only six articles focused on social justice and advocacy for IMs, including a case study on counseling and social advocacy interventions with IMs (Kondili et al., 2022), an advocacy project for counseling services for IM adolescents (Hoffman et al., 2018), multicultural-social justice leadership and counseling when working with IMs (Chuang et al., 2008; Chung et al., 2011), group counseling strategies for school counselors to advocate for undocumented IM students (Chen et al., 2010), and a training program to enhance trainees' multicultural development and social justice (Nilsson et al., 2011).

While the other topics (e.g., trauma, acculturation, career and identity development, mental health status, mental health needs, and characteristics) were mentioned in about an equal number of articles we evaluated, only three articles addressed resilience. The underrepresentation of resilience compared to the other topics may result from a historical emphasis in the counseling and psychology fields on deficits rather than strengths among minority populations. This deficit paradigm has only begun to shift in recent years. In two of the articles we identified, however, resilience was reported to be a protective factor for immigrants and refugees (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Goodman et al., 2017). More attention is needed to the strengths of IMs, such as their resilience.

Finally, we assessed the research methods employed in the literature. There was a mixed usage of methods in the articles, with more empirical research articles than conceptual papers. Among the research articles, quantitative methods were utilized more often than qualitative methods, while mixed methods were the least often

employed. When assessing the research topics, we found significantly more quantitative studies than qualitative studies exploring IM's mental health status, needs, and characteristics. Of the articles that explored those topics, the published researchers utilized survey designs to explore IMs' mental health status (e.g., Brown et al., 2010), mental health needs (e.g., Chung & Bemak, 2002), self-critical perfectionism (e.g., Roysircar et al., 2024), associated factors related to quality of life (e.g., Belizaire & Fuertes, 2011; Lee et al., 2019)coping, acculturative stress, and quality of life (QOL, help-seeking attitudes (e.g., Bismar & Wang, 2021; Yee et al., 2020), and drug and alcohol abuse (e.g., Dillon et al., 2012)it is critical for counselors to understand pre- and postimmigration social contextual factors affecting the mental health of this heterogeneous ethnic population. The objective of our cross-sectional, retrospective study was to investigate the potential protective influence of preimmigration family cohesion on drug/alcohol abuse just prior to migration among 527 Latino young adults (age 18–34 years. While quantitative methods can be used to examine the topics just mentioned, qualitative studies may help reveal IMs' unique experiences (Creswell, 2012).

Implications

Our findings offer important implications for the counseling profession, particularly for counselors engaged with immigrant populations and researchers seeking to explore the experiences of IMs.

Advocacy Implications

First, it is urgent that counseling professionals focus on IMs and advocate for this population. For example, professional counseling associations could assign task groups to acquire additional knowledge about immigrants and refugees and to develop guidelines to work with this population. We searched through the ACA and ACA-affiliated counseling associations' guidelines but did not find officially published guidelines on counseling immigrants and refugees. The American Psychological Association (APA), in contrast, has published various documents about advocating for immigrants and refugees, including the APA Resolution on Immigrant Children, Youth, and Families (APA, 2008), Crossroads: The Psychology of Immigration in the New Century (APA, 2012), and The 2019 APA Immigration and Refugee Policy Statement (APA, 2019). The APA guidelines may help guide our work with IM, but it is critical to establish guidelines grounded in the counseling profession to appropriately align with the philosophy, models, and strategies of this profession.

Given the close relationship between immigrant policies and IMs' well-being, counseling professionals on the frontline can best support this population and advocate for their rights (Chung et al., 2011). Guided by the ACA advocacy competencies (Toporek & Daniels, 2018), counseling professionals and associations may engage in various levels of advocacy with and for IMs.

For example, in the public arena, counseling associations could issue social justice statements to stand in solidarity with immigrants facing injustices related to policies and societal attitudes and behaviors. Counseling associations also could advocate for policy changes at the state and national levels, including lobbying for policies that protect IMs from discrimination, ensuring their access to mental health services regardless of their immigration status, and promoting their family reunification. Moreover, at the community/school/organization level, counselors could advocate for equitable mental health services for IMs guided by data-driven strategies (e.g., Hoffman et al., 2018).

Counseling professionals also could collaborate with community organizations to create comprehensive support networks for IMs. Community partnerships could help provide holistic care for IMs by addressing not only their mental health needs but also other critical needs such as for housing, employment, and legal assistance. For example, counselors could work with local nonprofits to develop workshops and support groups tailored to IMs' unique experiences, promoting resilience and community integration. Additionally, at the individual level, counselors could educate their IM clients about their rights and provide them with tools and resources so that they can advocate for themselves in various settings.

Practice Implications

Counselors working or intending to work with IMs should equip themselves with basic knowledge of their clients' cultural backgrounds by keeping up with recently published articles on IMs and utilizing culturally sensitive interventions. For example, it is essential for counselors to reflect on their biases about IMs before and while working with this population (Chung et al., 2011).

It is also essential that counselors adopt counseling models specific to supporting IMs, such as the Social Pedagogical Model for counseling immigrant students (Nivala et al., 2022), the Achieving Success Everyday group counseling model for undocumented Latinx youth (Talleyrand & Vojtech, 2018), and the Narrative Therapy for college-age Latino immigrants (Farrell & Gibbons, 2019). These models emphasize understanding the unique experiences of immigrants, promoting their resilience, and providing culturally tailored counseling to address their needs effectively. Additionally, counselors need to recognize IMs' perseverance and strengths, implement advocacy-based approaches, and offer support that respects their clients' diversity and cultural backgrounds (Bestazza & Ranci, 2015; Chung et al., 2008; Cigrand et al., 2021). By incorporating these principles into their counseling practices, counselors can better assist IMs in navigating challenges, promoting their well-being, and facilitating their successful integration into their new environments. Counselors also should continually pursue professional development opportunities to stay informed about the latest research, policies, and best practices related to IMs.

Given our results and the practice implications just discussed, it is important that counseling programs prepare their students to work with IMs by integrating specialized courses, practical experiences, and research focused on working with IM populations. For example, counselor-educators may prepare counselor trainees to work with IMs by emphasizing MCSJC, along with skills for understanding, critiquing, and applying research outcomes about IMs found in the literature.

Research Implications

There is a great need for additional counseling research on IMs so the field can provide targeted and evidence-based services to this vulnerable population. In general, we call for research with an ecological and strength-based emphasis. Leaders in the counseling profession have recommended that counselors pay attention to the systematic influences on clients' holistic wellness, relying on a strength-based perspective (Nice et al., 2023). Embracing an ecological approach will help researchers and practitioners to understand IMs in the context of their migratory challenges, such as their need for appropriate cultural resources in the community (Yoon et al., 2023). Moreover, a strength-based approach would highlight the resilience of IMs instead of pathologizing their stress and difficulties (Yoon et al., 2023). Resilience is a protective factor for immigrants (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). However, as stated earlier, we found only three articles focused on resilience. Therefore, more research should be published in ACA-affiliated journals investigating IMs' resilience to build a strength-based understanding of the population and to generate additional strategies to promote their well-being.

More studies on refugees, migrated children and adolescents, and other minoritized groups need to appear in counseling journals as well. Compared to other IM groups, refugees may face unique challenges related to trauma, migration, and acculturation (Attia et al., 2021). Given how trauma may influence children and youth development, more studies in ACA-affiliated journals are needed on how counseling may protect children and adolescents from the negative impacts of migration and how counseling can be used to treat the symptoms developed because of migration.

Also, more empirical studies on IMs that rely on diverse research methods need to be published in ACA-affiliated journals. While evidence-based practice is emphasized in counseling (Yates, 2013), most of the articles on counseling strategies and counselor education we identified were not reporting on empirical studies. Counseling researchers could employ a randomized controlled study design to investigate the effectiveness of a treatment module aimed at improving the well-being of immigrants and refugees. They also could utilize qualitative or

mixed-method approaches to investigate IMs' unique experiences. In addition, comparative studies are critical to understanding the experiences of different migrant groups. Such studies should be designed to analyze differences in countries of origin, socio-economic contexts, and migrant experiences to identify universal and unique challenges and coping mechanisms of IMs.

Additionally, with the development of technology and interdisciplinary collaboration, more research is needed to explore using digital counseling and interdisciplinary approaches to improve IMs' well-being. Employing these strategies could help address the psychosocial challenges faced by IMs. By avoiding stigmatization and pathologization of mental health issues, digital counseling can effectively address psychosocial stressors and post-traumatic stress disorders commonly experienced by refugees and migrants (Orang et al., 2023). At the same time, involving various professional disciplines when assisting refugees and IMs can result in these individuals receiving more comprehensive mental health care. Interdisciplinary approaches in counseling for IMs have been recognized for their potential to promote access to and uptake of services. For instance, when Medinetz, a network of volunteer medical students and mental health professionals in Germany, offered interdisciplinary services to IMs, the care that was provided was more comprehensive (Hanewald et al., 2022).

Limitations

There are some limitations to our study. First, only ACA-affiliated journals were investigated. Some counseling professionals publish their work in other journals. Second, although we used various strategies to maximize objectivity and neutrality during the research process, our assumptions as researchers could not be fully expunged. For example, we designed the codebook based on our understanding and experiences. Other researchers might create different codebooks, potentially leading to different conclusions. And third, we only used the keywords "immigr*" or "refugees" or "migra*." This decision may have omitted some relevant articles that could have been extracted if additional keywords were included.

Conclusion

We used qualitative content analysis to explore the research on IMs in the ACA-affiliated counseling literature. The analysis revealed positive trends in the literature, such as increased publications about IMs and a focus on counseling interventions for IMs. However, it also identified limitations, including a lack of empirical studies and a shortage of research employing strength-based approaches in ACA-affiliated journals. Further, the results revealed the importance of culturally sensitive counseling for IMs as well as engaging in advocacy initiatives in the counseling field to address immigrants' mental health needs. We suggest that additional research on IMs be performed and published in ACA journals. Moreover, we recommend that counselors maintain their awareness of research advancements and incorporate digital and interdisciplinary strategies to improve their work with IMs. We hope our research will help to raise the attention of the counseling profession on this vulnerable population so that we can provide more targeted services to this group.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

There are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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Table 4

Characteristics of Included Articles on IMs

Author	Journal	Title	Population (immigrant, refugee, or both)	Country of Origin	Host country
Acquaye et al., (2018)	Counseling and Values	Religious Commitment's Moderating Effect on Refugee Trauma and Growth	Refugee	Liberia	U.S.
Akinsulure-Smith et al., (2009)	The Journal for Specialists in Group Work	Brief Psychoeducational Group Treatment with Re-Traumatized Refugees and Asylum Seekers	Refugee		U.S.
Akinsulure-Smith et al., (2012)	Journal of Mental Health Counseling	Working with Forced Migrants: Therapeutic Issues and Considerations for Mental Health Counselors	Refugee		U.S.
Akinsulure-Smith (2012)	The Journal for Specialists in Group Work	Using Group Work to Rebuild Family and Community Ties Among Displaced African Men	Refugee	Africa	U.S.
Asner-Self et al., (2005)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Developmental Indices Among Central American Immigrants Exposed to War-Related Trauma: Clinical Implications for Counselors	Immigrant	Honduras	U.S.
Atiyeh et al., (2020)	The Journal for Specialists in Group Work	Considerations for Facilitating Refugee Acculturation through Groups	Refugee		U.S.
Attia et al., (2022)	Journal of LGBTQ Issues in Counseling	Pre- and Post-Migration Experiences of LGBTQ+ Asylum-Seeking Individuals: A Phenomenological Investigation	Immigrant	Nigeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Indonesia, Lebanon, and Belarus	U.S.
Baggerly et al., (2021)	Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling	Group Counseling for Southeast Asian Refugee Children with Trauma Symptoms: Pilot Study Results and Practical Guidelines	Refugee	China, Vietnam	U.S.

Author	Journal	Title	Population (immigrant, refugee, or both)	Country of Origin	Host country
Beauregard et al., (2020)	Journal of Creativity in Mental Health	Being in Between: Exploring Cultural Bereavement and Identity Expression through Drawing	Immigrant	U.S.	Egypt
Beauregard et al., (2022)	Journal of Creativity in Mental Health	Creating a safe space during classroom-based sandplay workshops for immigrant and refugee preschool children	Both	Syrian	Canada
Belizaire et al., (2011)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Attachment, Coping, Acculturative Stress, and Quality of Life Among Haitian Immigrants	Immigrant	Haiti	U.S.
Bemak et al., (1994)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Southeast Asian Refugee Adolescents: Implications for Counseling	Refugee	Vietnam, Cambodia	U.S.
Bemak et al., (2017)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Refugee Trauma: Culturally Responsive Counseling Interventions	Refugee		U.S.
Bismar et al., (2021)	Journal of College Counseling	Mental Illness Stigma and Help-Seeking Attitudes of Students With Immigrant Parents	Immigrant		U.S.
Björn et al., (2013)	The Family Journal	Brief Family Therapy for Refugee Children	Refugee	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosnia-Herzegovina
Blount et al., (2018)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Promoting Wellness in Refugee Populations	Refugee		U.S.

Author	Journal	Title	Population (immigrant, refugee, or both)	Country of Origin	Host country
Brown et al., (2010)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Vietnamese Immigrant and Refugee Women's Mental Health: An Examination of Age of Arrival, Length of Stay, Income, and English Language Proficiency	Both	Vietnam	U.S.
Bunn et al., (2022)	The Journal for Specialists in Group Work	Sharing Stories Eases Pain: Core Relational Processes of a Group Intervention with Syrian Refugees in Jordan	Refugee	Syrian	Jordan
Cardenas et al., (1993)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Transition Support for Immigrant Students	Immigrant	Mexico, Central and South American countries	U.S.
Chen et al., (2010)	The Journal for Specialists in Group Work	Professional School Counselors as Social Justice Advocates for Undocumented Immigrant Students in Group Work	Undocumented immigrant	China	U.S.
Chen et al., (2016)	The Career Development Quarterly	Career Development of Chinese Canadian Professional Immigrants	Immigrant	China	Canada
Chung et al., (2002)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Revisiting the California Southeast Asian Mental Health Needs Assessment Data: An Examination of Refugee Ethnic and Gender Differences	Refugee	Vietnam, Cambodia, Laotian.	U.S.
Chung et al., (2011)	Journal for Social Action in Counseling & Psychology	Multicultural-Social Justice Leadership Strategies: Counseling and Advocacy with Immigrants	Immigrant		U.S.
Chung et al., (2008)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Promoting the Mental Health of Immigrants: A Multicultural/Social Justice Perspective	Both		U.S.
Cigrand et al., (2022)	Journal of Counseling & Development	A phenomenological study of perseverance and resilience through the migration journey	Refugee	Mexico, Laos, Puerto Rico	U.S.

Author	Journal	Title	Population (immigrant, refugee, or both)	Country of Origin	Host country
Clarke et al., (2014)	Journal of Counseling & Development	You Got to Apply Seriousnessâ€ : A Phenomenological Inquiry of Liberian Refugees' Coping	Refugee	Liberia	U.S.
Comas-Diaz (2017)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Crossing Borders: Multicultural Counseling With Puerto Rican Migrant Women	Immigrant	Puerto Rica	U.S.
Constantine et al., (2003)	Journal of Counseling & Development	School Counselors' Ethnic Tolerance Attitudes and Racism Attitudes as Predictors of Their Multicultural Case Conceptualization of an Immigrant Student	Immigrant		U.S.
Dillon et al., (2012)	The Family Journal	Preimmigration Family Cohesion and Drug/Alcohol Abuse Among Recent Latino Immigrants	Immigrant	Cubans, Colombians, Hondurans, Nicaraguans, Guatemalans, Venezuelans, Peruvians, Mexicans, Bolivians, Uruguayans, Argentines, Chileans, Costa Ricans, Dominicans, Ecuadorians, Salvadorans, Panamanians,	U.S.
Firling (1988)	Journal of Counseling & Development	The Afghan Refugee Client	Refugee	Afghan	U.S.

Author	Journal	Title	Population (immigrant, refugee, or both)	Country of Origin	Host country
Fontes et al., (2002)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Child Discipline and Physical Abuse in Immigrant Latino Families: Reducing Violence and Misunderstandings	Immigrant	(Latino in general)	U.S.
Gonzalaz et al., (2015)	The Journal of Humanistic Counseling	Spanish-Speaking Immigrant Parents and Their Children: Reflections on the Path to College	Immigrant	Colombia, Honduras, Argentina, Mexico, Peru	U.S.
Goodman et al., (2017)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Trauma and Resilience Among Refugee and Undocumented Immigrant Women	Both	Mexico, Central America, South America; the Middle East and Africa	U.S.
Hoffman et al., (2018)	Journal for Social Action in Counseling & Psychology	Seeing "RED" to Serve Students: An Example of Advocacy for Counseling Services for Refugee and Immigrant Adolescents	Both		U.S.
Houseknecht et al., (2019)	Journal of Creativity in Mental Health	Preparing Counselors to Work with Refugees: Integration of Experiential Activities	Refugee		U.S.
Hundley et al., (2007)	Journal of Mental Health Counseling	Russian Speaking Immigrants from the Commonwealth of Independent States in the United States: Implications for Mental Health Counselors	Immigrant	Russia	U.S.
Jannati et al., (2018)	The Family Journal	Parental Perspectives on Parent -Child Conflict and Acculturation in Iranian Immigrants in California	Immigrant	Iranian	U.S.
Kahn et al., (2018)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Facilitating Mental Health Support for LGBT Forced Migrants: A Qualitative Inquiry	Immigrant	Bahamas, Bangladesh, Iran, Lebanon, the Arabian Peninsula, and Ghana	Canada

Author	Journal	Title	Population (immigrant, refugee, or both)	Country of Origin	Host country
Kang et al., (2015)	The Career Development Quarterly	An Intersectional Social Capital Model of Career Development for International Marriage Immigrants	Immigrant	South Korea	South Korea
Kassan et al., (2013)	Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling	This Was My Only Option: Career Transitions of Canadian Immigrants in Same-Sex Binational Relationships	Immigrant	Canada	Canada
Khamphakdy-Brown et al., (2005)	Journal of Mental Health Counseling	The Empowerment Program: An Application of an Outreach Program for Refugee and Immigrant Women	Both		U.S.
Kim et al., (2015)	The Family Journal	Characteristics and Risk Factors of Chinese Immigrant Intimate Partner Violence Victims in New York City and the Role of Supportive Social Networks	immigrants	China	U.S.
Kiteki et al., (2021)	The Journal for Specialists in Group Work	African Refugee Youth's Experiences and Impact on Career Development: An Adaptation of a Culturally Responsive Career Exploration Group	Refugee	Africa	U.S.
Kondili et al., (2022)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Counseling and social justice advocacy interventions with refugees: Two case studies	Refugee	Sudan, Libya, Iraq	U.S.
Kwan et al., (1997)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Internal and External Ethnic Identity and Their Correlates: A Study of Chinese American Immigrants	Immigrant	China	U.S.
Lee et al., (2019)	Journal for Social Action in Counseling & Psychology	Quality of Life for North Korean Female Refugees: The Influence of Physical Health, PTSD, and Social Support	Refugee	North Korea	U.S.

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Loewy et al., (2002)	The Journal for Specialists in Group Work	Group Counseling with Traumatized East African Refugee Women in the United States:	Refugee	East Africa	U.S.
Ma et al., (2010)	The Career Development Quarterly	Individual and Familial Factors Influencing the Educational and Career Plans of Chinese Immigrant Youths	Immigrant	China	U.S.
Mariño et al., (2000)	Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development	Acculturation of Values and Behavior: A Study of Vietnamese Immigrants	Immigrant	Vietnam	Australia
McCarthy et al., (2001)	The Journal for Specialists in Group Work	Using groups to promote preventive coping: A case example with college students from migrant farm-working families	Immigrant		U.S.
Midgett et al., (2016)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Evaluation of Service-Learning-Infused Courses with Refugee Families	Refugee		U.S.
Morales et al., (2013)	Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling	Latino, Immigrant, and Gay: A Qualitative Study About Their Adaptation and Transitions	Immigrant	Latino in general	U.S.
Morales (2013)	Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling	Latino Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Immigrants in the United States	Immigrant		U.S.
Nilsson et al., (2011)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Facilitating Trainees' Multicultural Development and Social Justice Advocacy Through a Refugee/ Immigrant Mental Health Program	Both		U.S.
Obiakor et al., (2007)	The Family Journal	African Immigrant Families in the United States: Surviving the Sociocultural Tide	Immigrant		U.S.
Oren et al., (2021)	Journal of LGBTQ Issues in Counseling	Lived Experiences of Recent Russian-Speaking LGBT+ Immigrants in the United States: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis	Refugee	Russia	U.S.

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Paynter et al., (2009)	The Family Journal	Multicultural Training Applied in Clinical Practice: Reflections from a Euro-American Female Counselor-in-Training Working with Mexican Immigrants	Immigrant		U.S.
Pejic et al., (2016)	The Family Journal	Community-Based Interventions with Refugee Families Using a Family Systems Approach	Refugee	N/A	U.S.
Phan et al., (2005)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Understanding Vietnamese Refugee Women's Identity Development from a Sociopolitical and Historical Perspective	Refugee	Vietnam	U.S.
Pierce et al., (2012)	The Journal of Humanistic Counseling	An Ever-Changing Meaning: A Career Constructivist Application to Working with African Refugees	Refugee	Somali	U.S.
Rajaei et al., (2021)	The Family Journal	Re-Visioning Immigrant Couple Therapy: Immigrant Couples in the United States and Telebehavioral Health	Immigrant		U.S.
Rose (2001)	The Journal for Specialists in Group Work	Group Work to Promote the Occupational Functioning of Ethiopian Minority Men with Disabilities who have Immigrated to Israel	Immigrant	Ethiopia	Israel
Rosser-Hogan (1990)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Making Counseling Culturally Appropriate: Intervention with a Montagnard Refugee	Refugee	Montagnard	U.S.
Rotter et al., (1998)	The Family Journal	Therapeutic Approaches with Immigrant Families	Immigrant		U.S.
Roysircar et al., (2022)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Immigrant youth of Indian origin: Generational differences in self-critical perfectionism	Immigrant	India	U.S.
Rumsey et al., (2018)	Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling	Addressing the Social and Emotional Needs of Refugee Adolescents in Schools: Learning from the Experiences of School Counselors	Refugee		U.S.

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Sciarra et al., (1999)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Intrafamilial Separations in the Immigrant Family: Implications for Cross-Cultural Counseling	Immigrant	Salvador	U.S.
Seto et al., (2007)	The Family Journal	Helping a Japanese Immigrant Family Cope with Acculturation Issues: A Case Study	Immigrant	Japan	U.S.
Shea et al., (2007)	The Career Development Quarterly	Development of a Culturally Specific Career Exploration Group for Urban Chinese Immigrant Youth	Immigrant	China	U.S.
Sheehan et al., (2016)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Recruiting and Assessing Recent Young Adult Latina Immigrants in Health Disparities Research	Immigrant	Mexico, Honduras, Colombia	U.S.
Shin et al., (2000)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Informal and Professional Support for Solving Psychological Problems Among Korean-Speaking Immigrants	Immigrant	Korea	U.S.
Sohtorik et al., (2011)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Hugging, Drinking Tea, and Listening: Mental Health Needs of Turkish Immigrants	Immigrant	Turkey	U.S.
Sonn et al., (2013)	Journal for Social Action in Counseling & Psychology	Reflections on a Participatory Research Project: Young People of Refugee Background in an Arts-Based Program	Refugee		Australia
Vassilopoulos et al., (2020)	The Journal for Specialists in Group Work	Promoting Positive Attitudes toward Refugees: A Prejudice-Reduction, Classroom-Based Group Intervention for Preadolescents in Greece	Refugee		Greece
Wong et al., (2011)	The Family Journal	Vietnamese American Immigrant Parents: A Pilot Parenting Intervention	Immigrant	Vietnam	U.S.

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Wycoff et al., (2011)	The Family Journal	Therapeutic Practice with Cambodian Refugee Families: Trauma, Adaptation, Resiliency, and Wellness	Refugee	Cambodia	U.S.
Yakushko et al., (2005)	Counseling and Values	Immigrant Women and Counseling: The Invisible Others	Immigrant		U.S.
Yakushko et al., (2005)	Journal of Counseling & Development	Immigrant Women and Counseling: The Invisible Others	Both		U.S.
Yee et al., (2020)	Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development	Help-Seeking Attitudes of Chinese Americans and Chinese Immigrants in the United States: The Mediating Role of Self-Stigma	Immigrant	China, Malaysia	U.S.
Yznaga (2008)	The Family Journal	Using the Genogram to Facilitate the Intercultural Competence of Mexican Immigrants	Immigrant	Mexico	U.S.