THREE ESSAYS ON HOW SCHOOL COUNSELORS ARE SHAPED BY AND EXPERIENCE THE U.S. EDUCATION SYSTEM

By

Christine Nicole Dickason

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Approved:

Kelly E. Slay, Ph.D. Chair

Joanne W. Golann, Ph.D.

Carolyn J. Heinrich, Ph.D.

Nicole M. Joseph, Ph.D.

To my parents, for everything.

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INTRODUCTION

Counselors play a critical role in U.S. schools and provide a range of services to students, from academic guidance to mental health supports. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics, there were 322,000 school and career counselor and advisor jobs in 2020, and that number of roles is expected to increase by 11% over the next decade (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Existing evidence suggests that quality school counselors can positively affect a range of student- and school-level indicators and outcomes, including, but not limited to, high school graduation, students' well-being, college-going rates, standardized test scores, attendance rates, and postsecondary completion (Mulhern, 2020; Carey & Dimmitt, 2012; Erickson & Abel, 2013; Johnson, 2016; Carrell and Hoekstra 2014; Goodman-Scott et al. 2018).

Despite the wealth of evidence on the positive impact school counselors can have on students and schools, the profession itself remains vastly understudied. Many scholars have called for an increased investment in school counseling research, especially using rigorous quantitative, causal methods (Whiston & Sexton, 1998; Savitz-Romer, 2012). But qualitative research on how counselors experience their roles also remains scant, and little is known about how policies—including policies from the school, district, state, and federal level—impact school counselors' work. Additionally, few studies consider diversity within the context of the school counseling profession. This dissertation aims to contribute to the existing literature on school counselors, particularly on the experiences of Black school counselors, by considering their work and policies that impact their work from a variety of perspectives.

The first paper in this dissertation, co-authored with Youjin Chung, approaches the school counseling profession from a broad, top-down perspective by considering how state-level school counselor mandates affect the number of school counselors working within districts and

student-to-counselor ratios, which evidence suggests can impact how effective a counselor can be in their role (Goodman-Scott et al. 2018; Lapan et al., 2012; Kearney et al., 2021; Johnson & Rochkind, 2010). Using a difference-in-differences design, this quantitative study aims to determine the impact of the introduction of a state-level school counselor mandate on district-level student-to-counselor ratios. We find evidence that state counselor mandates do increase the number of counselors working in schools; yet we find no evidence to support the theory that these mandates affect student-to-counselor ratios. Given that little evidence exists on the efficacy of such mandates, this research can inform policymakers on whether implementing counselor mandates is an effective policy lever in increasing the number of school counselors and lowering student-to-counselor ratios.

The second study narrows in scope to explore diversity efforts in master's programs in school counseling, one pipeline for school counselors from diverse backgrounds, particularly counselors of color. This is especially important to understand because most school counselors are White; yet they serve an increasingly diverse student body, one that White school counselors may be less equipped to effectively advise (American School Counselor Association, 2021a). Given that the majority of states only license individuals as school counselors if they have received at least a master's degree in school counseling, this study uses school counseling master's programs in 10 states that serve some of the highest percentages of Black students as the main unit of analysis. Using Sarah Ahmed's concept of "diversity work," I interviewed faculty who work in these graduate programs to understand the strategies, policies, and practices they use to recruit and retain a diverse class of students. I identify three typologies of faculty members and how they think about and approach diversity work: active diversity agents, diversity strivers, and status quo accepters. By better understanding how faculty engage in

diversity efforts, the study can help identify promising practices for replication in other counseling programs and highlight areas of concern that need targeted improvement.

The third study focuses even further on the individual level by seeking to understand Black school counselors' lived experiences—a community that remains understudied in the counseling profession. Drawing from interviews and diary reports, I use a phenomenological approach to gain in-depth insight into the experiences of 6 Black school counselors in Mississippi—the state that serves the highest density of Black students in the country. The theory of funds of knowledge offers a lens through which I analyze the data and is supplemented by BlackCrit and political clarity frameworks. I find that Black school counselors bring a deep level of expertise and cultural wealth to their roles. However, at times, these forms of knowledge are either underutilized or exploited, often specifically due to their racial identity.

Collectively, these papers aim to enhance our understanding of the how counselors are shaped by and experience the U.S. education system. Of particular importance to this dissertation is the focus on Black school counselors, which have too often been ignored in the limited research on counseling. To fully understand the school counseling profession, I argue that we can no longer overlook a growing portion of the profession that serve an increasingly diverse population of students in our schools. The hope for this dissertation is that I can illuminate challenges and areas of opportunity in enhancing and supporting a more racially diverse and equity-centered profession that will inform policy makers and school leaders.

Definitions

Before I proceed, it is important to clarify a definition central to this dissertation: school counselors. I define school counselors using the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) definition:

"School counselors are certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and social/emotional development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success" (2021).

This definition differentiates them from other counselors, particularly mental health professionals, that work outside the school system. Moreover, it highlights the multiple roles school counselors are often asked to take on, from offer academic guidance to providing mental health supports.

CHAPTER 1

Mandating Our Way Out of the Counselor Crisis? State Mandates and Student-to-Counselor Ratios

Introduction

With increasing academic, social, and personal demands on today's students, the role of counselors in schools is increasingly suggested as a potential solution to alleviate some of these pressures, or at least help students cope with them. Many studies look at the effects of counselors from an academic perspective, finding that schools with more fully established counseling programs have students with higher GPAs and other positive academic outcomes, such as higher test scores (Carrell & Hoekstra, 2014; Lapan et al., 1997; Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). Other studies focus on the effects of counselors on students' behavior, and the evidence suggests that more robust guidance programs can lower detention rates and absences, as well as incidents of discipline (Lapan et al., 2012).

Even as research continues to demonstrate the importance of counselors, there are a lack of school counselors nationwide. Although the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) recommends a student-to-counselor ratio of 250-to-1, the average student-to-counselor ratio nationwide is 455-to-1, nearly double the recommended amount (National Association for College Admission Counseling & American School Counselor Association, 2019). Caseloads are even higher in low-income, diverse, and city school districts (Woods & Domina, 2014; Gagnon & Mattingly, n.d.), despite evidence that low student-to-counselor ratios have positive implications in these schools (Lapan et al., 2012).

Due to their heavy workloads, counselors often have little time to spend with students individually. Specifically regarding college assistance from counselors, a 2009 survey by the U.S. Department of Education found "public school students receive an average of 38 minutes

[total] of college admissions advice from their guidance counselors" (Steckel, 2014). Given the complexity of the college application and financial aid processes, 38 minutes seems insufficient. The limited time for one-on-one counselor-student interactions is especially important to consider given that increased complexity of federal student aid programs can dampen the distributional impacts of programs when the costs must be borne by the target population (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2014). Moreover, the complexity of applications, without assistance, "may discourage the target population from applying for student aid" (Dynarski and Scott-Clayton, 2014).

State mandates represent a possible policy to address counselor shortages and high student-to-counselor ratios (e.g., Fuschillo, 2018; Bell, 2023). Such mandates may be written as legislation, in state code, as rules handed down by the state board of education, or as a school district accreditation requirement. Sometimes, these mandates simply state that every school or district must employ at least one counselor or have a school counseling program; other times, they provide a maximum student-to-counselor ratio for each school or district. However, little empirical research has been conducted on whether school counselor state mandates are an effective way to increase the number of school counselors employed within a district or reduce student-to-counselor ratios. This study aims to contribute to existing literature by exploring how state counselor mandates might increase the hiring of counselors and lower student-to-counselor ratios.

Research Question and Approach

This study aims to address the following two research questions:

1. To what extent do state mandates requiring school counselors in public schools increase the number of school counselors working in schools?

2. To what extent do state mandates requiring school counselors in public schools lower student-to-counselor ratios?

The study uses enrollment and counselor data from the Common Core of Data (CCD) and original data collected on the presence of state mandates around school counselors, as confirmed by state officials, to estimate the impact of state-level school counselor mandates on the total number of counselors working and student-to-counselor ratios. We find evidence that state-level school counselor mandates do lead to an increase in the number of counselors hired in school districts; yet, these mandates do not seem to affect student-to-counselor ratios, perhaps due to the student population growth outpacing the number of new counselors hired.

We begin this paper by supplying context to this study with a literature review, including a discussion of how counselors influence student-level outcomes and existing evidence around negative consequences associated with high student-to-counselor ratios. Then, we offer a review of implementation theory, with a specific focus on state mandates. Next, we describe the data and methods for this study. We review findings and then conclude with a discussion of the contributions and implications of the study.

Literature Review

Prior research has identified how counselors affect student-level outcomes, from academic achievement to college-going rates. Additionally, studies have identified negative consequences associated with high student-to-counselor ratios. We review this body of work to provide context on why counselors are critical within U.S. public schools and offer insight on why these student-to-counselor ratios may be so important.

School Counselors' Effects on Student Outcomes

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests school counselors can affect a wide range of student outcomes. A group of work finds schools with more fully established counseling programs had students with higher grades and other positive academic outcomes, such as more AP credits accumulated and high school graduation (Goodman-Scott et al. 2018; Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun 1997). Goodman-Scott and colleagues (2018) used logistic regression to examine the interactions of student-to-counselor ratios and Title I status, finding a significant, positive relationship between students attending low-ratio (250:1) and non-Title I schools and GPAs. The study provides some evidence to support the claim that counselors have a positive influence on student academic outcomes. However, their findings are not causal, and Title 1 status could be having an outsized effect on academic indicators, as opposed to student-to-counselor ratios.

Other studies have focused on the behavioral effects of school counselors on students. The evidence suggests that more robust guidance programs can lower detention rates and absences, as well as overall incidents of discipline (Lapan et al. 2012; Carrell and Hoekstra 2014; Whiston et al., 2011). Carrell and Hoekstra (2014) exploit what they argue to be the exogeneity of counselor placement within schools to explore how counselors affect academic achievement and behavior indicators. They find that counselors reduce discipline incidents among boys and girls by 20% and 29%, respectively (Carrell & Hoekstra, 2014). It is important to note, however, that school-wide outcomes, such as discipline, vary depending on the type of school counseling activities that the school provides (ASCA, 2012).

Research has also focused on counselors' impacts on college-going rates and general awareness of college and career opportunities. Using a regression discontinuity design in order to

draw causal inferences, Hurwitz & Howell (2013) found that the addition of one high school

counselor (in an average senior class enrollment size of 113) led to a 10-percentage-point

increase in four-year college-going rates. Counselors may also increase access to career and

college materials, as Lapan et al. (1997) highlighted in their study in Missouri. Using a survey of

students, the researchers found that students who attended a school with a fully implemented

model guidance program were more likely to report that career and college information was

easily available to them within their schools (Lapan et al., 1997).[1]

There exists some disconfirming evidence around the influence of counselors on students

and postsecondary outcomes. Cholewa and colleagues used data from the High School

Longitudinal Survey (HSLS:2009) and found only 2.84 percent of respondents said their high

school counselor had the most influence on their thinking about postsecondary education

(Cholewa et al., 2015). More research is needed to determine if that low percentage is due to

limited access to school counselors or some other reason, such as distrust of the counselor or an

overwhelming influence of another individual in the process. If the lack of influence of

counselors is found to be caused by a lack of access, then understanding policy levers that can

increase the number of counselors in schools and lower student-to-counselor ratios is even more

critical.

Often, the studies conducted around the influence of school counselors on students are

grounded in social capital theory, in which school counselors act as "social agents who can help

students along the path toward college" (McKillip et al., 2012). Other researchers note that,

especially for students with limited resources, counselors can help increase students' social

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[1] According to a 2009 study, "17 states have established [school counseling] models, 24 states
are progressing in model implementation, and 10 states are at a beginning stage of model
development" (Martin et al., 2009).

capital so that students can successfully navigate postsecondary opportunities (Woods &
Domina, 2014). While the use of social capital theory can be useful, it has limitations, including
an overemphasis on this theory as a panacea for barriers to access and an obfuscation of the
policy and political systems at work around state-level mandates and the implementation of the
mandates that impact counselors.

How Student-to-Counselor Ratios Affect Outcomes

Not all counseling programs are created equal, and one of the main differentiating factors
between programs rests on the caseloads that counselors are dealt. High caseloads can limit the
effectiveness of counselors, as the one-on-one time they have to work with students is scant.
Some studies have included student-to-counselor ratios as one of their key variables, such as the
2018 Goodman-Scott et al. study mentioned above, which found lower caseloads for counselors
were associated with higher GPAs among students (Goodman-Scott et al. 2018).

As counselors face higher caseloads, they have less time to spend individually with
students. A 2010 Public Agenda report for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation specifically
focused on the issue of "overstretched" school counselors. The report included a survey of over
600 young adults who had overwhelmingly negative feedback about their interactions (or lack
thereof) with school counselors. For example, 48% of respondents described their experiences
with their counselors as feeling like "just another face in the crowd" (Johnson & Rochkind,
2010, pg. 6). These feelings translated to real-life consequences, with 18% of students who said
they felt like another face in the crowd delaying college for at least a year or more (compared to
13% of students who said they believed the counselors made an effort to get to know them)
(Johnson & Rochkind, 2010, pg. 8). This evidence suggests that when counselors are

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overwhelmed with high caseloads, students suffer, as they fail to receive the one-on-one interactions that can positively impact their postsecondary outcomes.

High student caseloads might also impact work experiences and levels of stress for school counselors themselves, as some qualitative research suggests. McCarthy et al. (2010) conducted a survey of counselors and found that high caseloads were a major stressor for school counselors—and that that stressor could be enough to force higher rates of turnover within the profession. Moracco et al (1984) explored sources of counselor stress using an instrument known as the Counselor Occupational Stress Inventory (COSI). One of the main factors that emerged was "professional job overload," which could be exacerbated as caseloads increase (Moracco et al., 1984, pg. 113). Similarly, a study from 1983, which surveyed 240 school counselors about causes of stress in their profession, revealed "quantitative overload" to be one of three primary stressors (Sears & Navin, 1983). From the existing evidence, it is clear that higher student-to-counselor ratios can affect school counselors' abilities to effectively do their job and, at times, can push them out of the profession. The potential for high student-to-counselor ratios to push out counselors represents a major area of concern, especially in the United States, which is constantly searching for more counselors to work in schools. It is also another reason why the exploration and analysis of state-level policies that could impact student-to-counselor ratios across different state contexts is important.

In schools with lower student-to-counselor ratios, counselors may be able to have a larger influence on a range of academic and behavioral outcomes for students. In an analysis of counseling programs in Missouri, Lapan and colleagues (2012) found that schools with ASCA-recommended student-to-counselor ratios of 250-1 had higher rates of graduation and attendance and lower rates of disciplinary incidents (Lapan et al., 2012). Evidence on student-to-counselor

ratios and disciplinary events was the focus of Carrell and Carrell's (2006) study. Using a linear probability model with fixed effects, the authors write that lighter counselor caseloads "decreases both the probability of a disciplinary recurrence and the share of students involved in a disciplinary incident" (Carrell & Carrell 2006, pg. 14). The drop was especially pronounced for Black male students; a decrease in the student-to-counselor ratio from 544-1 to 250-1 was estimated to result in a 25.6% decrease in the probability of a disciplinary recurrence for this population of students (Carrell & Carrell, 2006). Similarly, Kearney et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analytic review of 16 studies surrounding student-to-counselor ratios. Their findings led them to conclude that school counselors were a good investment to improve student outcomes. They found that lower student-to-counselor ratios had the greatest effect on attendance, discipline, and high school graduation, with smaller impacts on academic achievement outcomes. They caution, however, that more evidence is needed around what mechanisms are at play in the relationship between ratios and student-level outcomes (Kearney et al., 2021). This body of quantitative evidence around smaller caseloads for school counselors emphasizes the need to understand what policies can effectively lower student-to-counselor ratios.

Theoretical Framework: Implementation Theory and State Mandates

Policy advocates and education writers have suggested that state mandates requiring school counselors in public schools will lower student-to-counselor ratios and thus lead to increased student-counselor interactions and increased student awareness of and preparation for postsecondary opportunities. However, drawing on implementation theory, this study hypothesizes that barriers to effective implementation will act as moderators of the relationship between state mandates and an increased number of counselors/lower student-to-counselor ratios. Figure 1 shows that framework graphically.

Figure 1.1: Theoretical Framework

INTERVENTION	POTENTIAL MODERATORS	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES
State-Level Mandates • State mandate requiring school counselors (at district or school level) • State mandate requiring that districts and/or schools do not exceed a specific student-to-counselor ratio (e.g., 450:1)	**Moderators (from implementation theory)** • Provision of resources (or lack thereof) • Level of specificity of the intervention • Level of conflict present	**Outputs (at the school and/or district level)** • Increased number of counselors hired • Lower student-to-counselor ratios	**Outcomes for students** • Increased student-counselor interactions • Increased student awareness and preparation for postsecondary opportunities • Decreased incidents of discipline • Improved academic outcomes

Implementation theory has been used in the literature in a diverse set of applications, from understanding inequities in disability access to e-government (Rubaii-Barrett & Wise, 2008) to variation in the implementation of state mandates aimed at preventing unnecessary separation of children from their families in the social services sector (Samantrai, 1992). The theory has been used to explain failures in the implementation of public health mandates (Holland et al., 2018) and how school reform initiatives have successfully (or not) scaled up (Bodilly, 1998). All these studies have reinforced the numerous challenges to implementation of a mandate.

Implementation theorists point to three key characteristics that can predict the success of a mandate: provision of resources (or lack thereof); the level of specificity of a mandate; and the level of conflict present (Montjoy & O'Toole, 1979; Matland, 1995). We detail these three characteristics here and offer ideas around how they may impact counselor mandates. If mandates fail on all three characteristics laid out by Montjoy and O'Toole Jr. (1979), mandates are likely to never be implemented fully and never achieve their intended goals.

Provision of Resources

The first consideration, provision of resources, relates to whether a mandate is funded or unfunded. If it is unfunded, some institutions may have sufficient slack resources to cover the costs of implementation; however, this is likely not the case for many public schools. Research from a variety of settings has shown that evidence-based policies (EBPs) are often not implemented as they were meant to be in low-resource communities (Glasgow et al., 1999; Dingfelder & Mandell, 2011). Domitrovich et al. (2008) laid out a theoretical framework for understanding those challenges at the school level, noting that there are significant factors at the individual, school, and macro levels that affect the implementation of a policy in a school. Lack of resources is one clear challenge to any policy implementation strategy, especially in schools. In our review of state school counselor mandates, many are unfunded mandates, meaning schools that are already under-resourced will have to find room in their budgets to pay additional counselors to meet the mandate's requirements. As one editorial board wrote about a West Virginia House Bill aiming to require one counselor in every school in the state, "More school psychologists and counselors are very much needed. But unfunded mandates are not" (Domitrovich et al., 2008). While the policy makers passing unfunded mandates might be well-meaning, these mandates can have unintended, negative consequences at the local level, such as causing more stress on an already-stressed system due to lack of resources.

Level of Specificity

Regarding the second consideration, the level of specificity of mandates, we often think about how vague the wording is of the mandate and how much autonomy is left up for the implementing organizations. Lack of specificity also remains an obstacle to state mandates on counselors. First, there is a lot of ambiguity around and diffusion of school counselor roles

(Astramovich et al., 2013). This makes it hard to specify counselor mandates, especially if what a counselor is and the roles of such counselors are not defined in any other state legislation or code. For example, the North Dakota Century Code Requirements for Counselors, at only about 100 words long, says, "…each school district must have available one full-time equivalent counselor for every three hundred students in grades seven through twelve" (North Dakota Century Code Requirements for School Counselors, 2010). It remains unclear how they define counselors here, or what the repercussions are if a school district fails to comply. Some states, such as Oregon, even mandate school counseling programs, but not the presence of counselors themselves, leaving the actual realization of such programs open to interpretation and funding (Comprehensive School Counseling, 1996).

Level of Conflict

The third consideration, the level of conflict present, can be related to both conflict between the mandating and the implementing bodies and conflict between new mandates and existing policy. Montjoy and O'Toole Jr. (1979) write that mandates that are vague and without resources "allow room for interpretation, but the organization is constrained by its own routines. In the absence of resources, we would expect little voluntary organizational change" (pg. 467). Research suggests that implementation is smoother and has more positive impacts when the policies align with the personal views of the administrators, who, in this case, include principals and other school-level administrators (Seashore & Robinson, 2012). However, studies show that administrators generally show low levels of knowledge about school counseling programs and the roles of school counselors, even in states that have adopted the ASCA national model (Graham et al., 2011). This lack of knowledge could contribute to a lack of active support for such policies, which could result in a failure to implement counselor mandates.

Additionally, implementation theory suggests the need for tightly coupled systems to ensure policy change; yet, education systems in the United States are often described as loosely coupled, presenting another difficulty to implementing policy, especially at the local level (Fusarelli, 2002). Building on Weick's (1976) organizational theory on loosely coupled systems, Meyer & Rowan (1977) write that in formal organizations, like schools:

> "…structural elements are only loosely linked to each other and to activities, rules are often violated, decisions are often unimplemented, or if implemented have uncertain consequences, technologies are of problematic efficiency, and evaluation and inspection systems are subverted or rendered so vague as to provide little organization."

There is evidence that this theory of loose coupling is relevant for U.S. schools. For example, Deal and Celotti (1980) studied the impact of administration on classroom instruction and found evidence that the system is so loosely coupled that "teachers in their classrooms function largely independently from their administration of the school" (Dellar, 1994, pg. 6). Similarly, Firestone (1986) and colleagues offered support of the idea of loose coupling between different hierarchical levels within schools (e.g. teacher and principal). While some research suggests that certain policies or individuals can "tighten" smaller systems within education (e.g. Murphy & Hallinger, 1984), this is not universally applicable, and the loose coupling theory remains strong when considering the larger education system. Additionally, the tightening of systems generally only can occur where specificity and ties to standards are involved, which is not the case with school counselor mandates (Rowan & Miskel, 1999).

Taken together, these components that can disrupt the implementation of mandates leads us to hypothesize that school counselor mandates will not significantly impact the number of counselors hired or the student-to-counselor ratios.

Data and Methods

Below, we detail the data and methodological approach for this study. We use data from the Common Core of Data, as well as original data collected on state counselor mandates. We employ Callaway and Sant'Anna's (2021) weighted estimation approach for difference-in-differences (DiD) to attempt to estimate the impact of state counselor mandates on the total number of counselors in a district and student-to-counselor ratios.

Data

This study uses data from the Common Core of Data (CCD) and original data on school counselor mandates collected from the states' Departments of Education officials and state codes. To understand which states have existing mandates on school counselors, we employed a variety of methods including calling each state's Department of Education or legislative research office; searching state codes, legislative text, Department of Education school certification requirements, and legal databases; and reaching out to state-level school counselor professional associations. Not only did we ask whether a state has a mandate or not, but also the date in which the mandate was enacted, if one existed. Through these approaches, we found school counselor mandates in 24 states at some point between 1986 and 2020.[2] Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands are excluded from the analysis because their governance systems function very differently. Figure 1.2 shows which states have mandates between 1986 and 2020. For more on existing state mandates, see Table 1.1 in Appendix A.

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[2] For all counselor mandates we observed, we found no evidence to suggest that these mandates were ever revoked after implementation; therefore, once a state is identified in our data as having a mandate, that remains true for every following year.

Figure 1.2: Map of State Mandates in the United States (1986-2020), as coded in our analysis

States that have broad counselor mandates

States that specify a maximum student-to-counselor ratio in their mandate
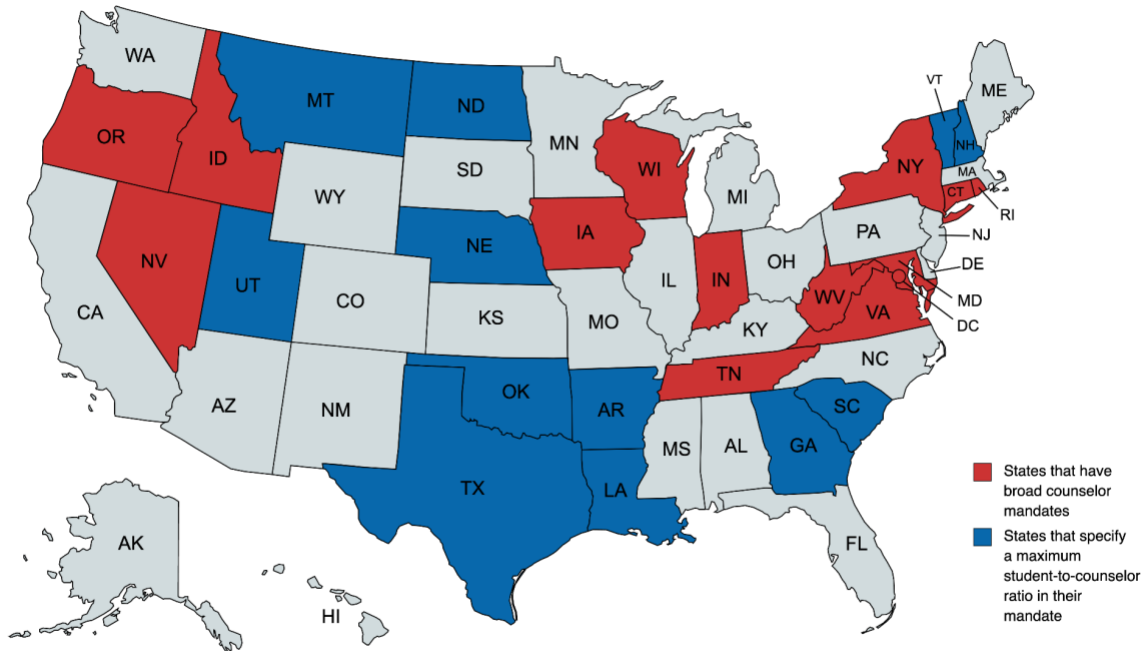
The Common Core of Data (CCD), which "collects and compiles administrative data from state education agencies covering the universe of all public elementary and secondary schools and school districts in the United States," provides staff counts and student enrollment data necessary for calculating the counselor-to-student ratio,[3] which is one of the dependent variables in our analysis (*Common Core of Data (CCD)*, n.d. , pg. 1). The 2021-22 data was released in January 2023, and we use that data for our analysis. The CCD was first collected in 1986, which allows us to include states that implemented mandates decades ago, such as

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[3] We calculate the counselor-to-student ratio, given the challenges that the student-to-counselor ratio presents in data analysis. Many districts reported having 0 counselors employed in some years. Thus, calculating the student-to-counselor ratio left us with a lot of "missing" data, due to the inability to divide the number of students by 0. Therefore, we decided to flip this ratio to avoid issues with dividing by 0.

Louisiana. However, it also causes us to have to exclude Washington from our analysis; even though the state has a counselor mandate, it was enacted in 1965, decades before we have data on our other key variables.

Sample

Given that our data on the number of counselors and counselor-to-student ratios—our dependent variables—are at the school district level, our unit of analysis is the school district. To begin, we include all U.S. school districts, as included in the CCD. We then drop all school districts that were classified as districts other than regular local school districts and charters[4] (e.g., federally operated agencies), given that they would be exempt from state mandates, which led to 105,590 observations being deleted. The final analytic sample includes 516,650 school districts. More information about our sample can be found in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Descriptive Statistics of the Dependent Variables at the District Level

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
Number of school counselors	409339	6.75	26.63
Counselor-to-student ratio	398180	0	.02

Measures & Relevant Variables

There are two key outcomes of interest: number of counselors and counselor-to-student ratios. There are also two types of treatment: one treatment type that includes any states that had a state counselor mandate, and a second treatment type that only includes states that had a state counselor mandate that requires a specific student-to-counselor ratio. For example, in Arkansas, the state code that requires counselors in schools also requires that the student-to-counselor ratio in any given school does not exceed 450-to-1. We are specifically interested in including this second form of treatment given the literature indicating that the level of specificity of mandates

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[4] The extent to which charters must comply with state mandates varies by state and by type of mandate. Therefore, we decided to include charter school districts; if we included a charter district that does not have to comply with state mandates, this could affect our outcomes.

can impact implementation and outcomes, as discussed above. Table 1.3 shows the details of the four different models used in our analysis.

Table 1.3: Model Specifications

Model Number	Outcome of Interest	Treatment Type
1	Number of counselors	State-level counselor mandate (broadly defined)
2	Counselor-to-student ratio	State-level counselor mandate (broadly defined)
3	Number of counselors	State-level counselor mandate that specifies a maximum student-to-counselor ratio
4	Counselor-to-student ratio	State-level counselor mandate that specifies a maximum student-to-counselor ratio

For Models 1 and 2, the independent variable is a dummy variable of whether the state has any mandate that requires schools or school districts to have school counselors. Due to the wide variety of language in these mandates, we strive to be inclusive in my definition of counselor mandates, meaning that we look only for the presence of such a mandate, regardless of whether it specified a ratio. However, we exclude any states that only included a mandate for there to be a counselor *program* in each school, as we do not believe that meets the threshold of actually requiring school counselors. For example, some states mandate counselor programs, yet note that the program can be staffed with non-counseling professionals. Therefore, such a mandate would not necessarily impact the number of counselors employed by school districts in that state. We code a binary mandate variable that is equal to 1 if a state has a school counselor mandate and 0 otherwise. For Model 1, the dependent variable is the number of guidance counselors by school district. The CCD includes data on the full-time equivalent of guidance counselors by school district from 1986 to 2022. For Model 2, the dependent variable is the

student-to-counselor ratios. The CCD provides us with enrollment data between 1986 and 2022. To calculate the ratio, we simply divide the number of students enrolled in a given district by the number of full-time counselors staffed in that district.

For Models 3 and 4, the independent variable is a dummy variable of whether the state has a mandate that requires a school or school districts to have school counselors *and* includes a specified maximum student-to-counselor ratio threshold that schools or school districts must meet. Similar to above, we code a binary mandate ratio variable that is equal to 1 if a state has a school counselor mandate that specifies a maximum student-to-counselor ratio and 0 otherwise. For Model 3, the dependent variable is the number of guidance counselors by school district. For Model 4, the dependent variable is the student-to-counselor ratios.

Data Analysis

Selection bias would cause erroneous results if we simply compared an individual state's number of counselors or counselor-to-student ratio before and after the implementation of a counselor mandate. For example, we might see a change in these outcomes due to something not accounted for in that simple model, such as increases in state funding for school counselors. Therefore, to avoid these potential sources of bias, we use a difference-in-differences (DiD) approach. Specifically, given new literature that raises concerns about bias in staggered DiD designs with multiple treatment periods estimated with two-way fixed effects (TWFE) models (e.g. Goodman-Bacon, 2021), we use Callaway and Sant'Anna's (2021) estimation approach that considers mandate rollouts with different time periods of implementation, or treatment heterogeneity. This estimation approach compares groups of treated and comparison units (in this case, "never treated" states) in each treatment period. It then aggregates those estimates to produce an average treatment effect.

For our initial models that focus on the number of counselors, the first difference is the comparison of the number of counselors within states before and after states mandate school counselors. For the second difference, we compare the number of counselors over time between treated and untreated states. We look at these outcomes for all states that have mandates, and then look at these outcomes specifically for states whose mandates specify a student-to-counselor ratio. For our next models that focus on ratios, the first difference is the comparison of counselor-to-student ratios within states before and after states mandate school counselors. For the second difference, we compare counselor-to-student ratios over time between treated and untreated states. Once again, we look at these outcomes for all states that have mandates, and then look at these outcomes specifically for states whose mandates specify a student-to-counselor ratio.

Callaway and Sant'Anna's (2021) DiD framework relies on several assumptions. First, there is the assumption that once a unit (or school district) is treated (based on the implementation of a statewide counselor mandate), it will remain treated in the time periods that follow. In other words, as Callaway & Sant'Anna (2021) write, it is as if "units do not 'forget' about the treatment experience" (pg. 203). We found no evidence in the data that any of the treated states ever revoked their state counselor mandate after implementing it, so we are confident that this assumption holds. Second, DiD relies on the assumption of random sampling; we are using population data, so this is not a concern for our study. Assumption 3 requires limited treatment anticipation. Given that the school districts themselves do not choose treatment status, we believe this assumption holds.

The next assumption is the idea of conditional parallel trends based on a "never-treated group."[5] The assumption is that trends in the hiring of counselors and student-to-counselor ratios in treated states would have been similar to the outcomes' trajectories, in the absence of treatment, as in untreated states. To examine if this parallel trends assumption is met, we evaluated pre-treatment time trends of treated and comparison groups. Results of the time trends analysis can be seen in Figures 1.3-1.6 in Appendix B. Although there are clear differences in the trends in the pre- and post-periods, there are some pre-years with outliers (e.g., 2 years pre-treatment) that cause concern about the validity of claiming robust evidence for parallel trends, especially with Model 2. Taken altogether, we believe there is sufficient evidence that our models meet nearly all the assumptions; however, due to the pre-year outliers in the parallel trends analysis, we do not claim causal attribution in interpreting our findings.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. First, there remain questions around the reliability of the state-level counselor mandate data. Out of 50 states plus D.C., we identify a counselor mandate for 24 states (1 was excluded from our analysis because their mandate was implemented in years prior to the beginning of the CCD data). For the remaining states, we verify the absence of counselor mandates for 11 states by consulting their state-wide comprehensive school counseling program policies. We confirm the absence of counselor mandates in an additional 10 states by contacting state officials.

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[5] We decided to use the never-treated states as our comparison group, rather than not-yet-treated states as our comparison group, based on guidance in Callaway and Sant'Anna's (2021) paper. Specifically, they write that researchers prefer this assumption when "a sizeable group of units that do not participate in the treatment in any period, and, at the same time, these units are similar enough to the 'eventually treated' units" (pg. 205).

However, three states—Missouri, Nebraska, and New Hampshire—have mixed information from different sources, and we cannot verify the information we found in any legal documents or from contacting state officials. Additionally, many counselor mandates are included in extensive pieces of legislation that had multiple amendments, and it is often difficult to verify when the specific mandate was enacted and expected to be implemented. Again, contacting state officials helped clear up some of this confusion, but certainly not in every case.

The lack of information around state-level school counselor mandates is concerning for several reasons that extend beyond our study. Clearly, if we get any of the state mandates' information wrong, that could impact the internal validity of our analysis. But even if we correctly identify which states have mandates and when those mandates were put into place, our conversations with state officials make it clear that even people working in policy are confused by the mandates or do not even know of the existence of such mandates. Many state officials told us that they simply could not give us an answer on whether a mandate existed, even after spending hours researching on our behalf. If state officials are unaware of a mandate's existence, then they clearly are not enforcing the mandate at the school or district level. A lack of information about the existence of these mandates could also limit a local school's ability to advocate for increased resources needed to expand their counseling staff. There were also cases where state officials knew a mandate existed but could not confirm the year it was enacted. For example, although Alabama has a state counselor mandate, we were unable to include it in our analysis because Alabama state officials could not confirm the year it was enacted.

Finally, as with any DiD model, the burden of proof is on us to explain why we believe our model is causal. While we have evidence for many of the assumptions, we note concern

around the parallel trends assumption given the pre-year outliers, and thus, caution assumptions of causality around our findings. This is especially true for Model 2.

Researchers' Positionality

Even in conducting quantitative research, we recognize the impact our identities and perspectives have on our work. We come to this research having never previously worked in school buildings, which could limit our understanding of how state mandates might be implemented on the ground level. However, we both possess previous experience in policy settings, which may have supported our ability to navigate and interact with Departments of Education employees and other state staffers who we reached out to build our original data set on school counselor mandates.

<div align="center">

Findings

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Across our four models, we find mixed results about the impact of state-level school counselor mandates on our outcomes of interest (the number of counselors and counselor-to-student ratios). When looking at the outcome of the number of counselors, both mandates that are broadly defined and those mandates that specify a maximum ratio lead to an increase in the number of counselors working in school districts. Yet, we find no evidence that these mandates impact counselor-to-student ratios.

Model 1: Counselor Mandates and the Number of Counselors

Model 1 explores the relationship between state-level counselor mandates, broadly defined, and the number of counselors working in districts. As can be seen in Table 1.3, the implementation of a state-level counselor mandate is associated with a 0.48 increase in the number of counselors working in school districts. This result is statistically significant, $p<.01$.

Given the strong evidence for parallel trends in this model, we interpret this result causally. This finding provides evidence against our hypothesis, in which we thought the mandates would not have an impact due to challenges with implementing state-level mandates. Instead, this finding suggests that counselor mandates *are* positively impacting the number of counselors hired in a school district.

Model 2: Counselor Mandates and the Counselor-to-Student Ratio

Model 2 tests the relationship between state-level counselor mandates, broadly defined, and the counselor-to-student ratio. As reflected in Table 1.4, the null result shows there is no evidence to support a statistically significant relationship between state-level counselor mandates and counselor-to-student ratios. Additionally, there is no evidence that the parallel trends assumption is met for this model.

This finding supports our hypothesis, and we reiterate that we suspect barriers to implementation are likely leading to this result. Additionally, the difference in results between Models 1 and 2 could be driven by the student population growth outpacing the rate at which school districts are hiring new counselors; in other words, although the mandate may cause school districts to hire more counselors, it does not lead them to hire enough school counselors to effectively lower the counselor-to-student ratio as the student population grows.

Model 3: Ratio-Specific Mandates and the Number of Counselors

Our third model explores the relationship between state-level counselor mandates that specify a maximum student-to-counselor ratio and the number of counselors. We find that in these states that had ratio-specific mandates, the implementation of the mandate leads to a 0.956 increase in the number of counselors working in school districts. This is statistically significant, $p<.001$.

As with Model 1, we find strong suggestive evidence that parallel trends hold for this model; thus, we interpret this finding causally. Similar to Model 1's result, this finding also presents disconfirming evidence for our hypothesis, as it shows that mandates do impact the number of counselors. Importantly, the effect in states that specify maximum ratios is stronger; these states see a higher increase in the number of counselors, as compared with states whose counselor mandates are broadly defined, in terms of ratios.

Model 4: Ratio-Specific Mandates and the Student-to-Counselor Ratio

In our fourth model, we test the relationship between state-level counselor mandates that specify a maximum student-to-counselor ratio and the counselor-to-student ratio. Here, as with Model 2, we find no evidence to support that these ratio-specific mandates impact counselor-to-student ratios. In addition, there is no evidence to support the parallel trends assumption is met for this model.

Table 1.4: Results

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
ATT	0.480**	-0.0000573	0.956***	.0000806
	(0.160)	(0.0000707)	(0.1867)	(.0000788)
N	516,650	516,650	516,650	516,650

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note. The outcome of interest for Models 1 and 3 is the number of counselors. The outcome of interest for Models 2 and 4 is the counselor-to-student ratio. For Models 1 and 2, the treatment is state-level counselor mandates, broadly defined. For Models 3 and 4, the treatment is state-level counselor mandates that specify a maximum student-to-counselor ratio.

Conclusion

Discussion

The findings of our study suggest that state-level counselor mandates can be effective at increasing the number of counselors working in school districts. Given the existing literature on counselors' impact on students, the hiring of counselors could lead to improved outcomes for students. However, it is important to note that simply getting counselors into schools may not improve outcomes, if counselors are overworked, under resourced, or improperly trained. Mandates that help increase the number of school counselors are an important first step but are certainly not sufficient to ensuring better student outcomes.

One determinant of counselors' ability to impact student outcomes is the counselors' caseloads. Here, our findings indicate that counselor-to-student ratios appear stubbornly difficult to lower. We hypothesize that while state-level counselor mandates lead to more counselors, the hiring of these counselors is outpaced by student population growth. Additionally, pulling from implementation theorists, we suspect that these mandates may fail to significantly impact ratios due to the lack of specificity of many of the mandates, the lack of resources that accompany the mandates, and the lack of "teeth" to actually enforce these mandates. In fact, as we mention above, many state officials we spoke with did not even know counselor mandates existed in their state. These findings point to the importance of exploring other mechanisms that can effectively lower the number of students counselors are serving at any given time.

Contributions & Implications

This study represents an important contribution to understanding whether the policy lever of state mandates impacts the number of counselors working in school districts and consequently, student-to-counselor ratios. Although claims have been made that state mandates

could lower ratios, we find no evidence to support this assertion. By exploring the relationship between state mandates requiring school counselors and two outcomes—the number of counselors and student-to-counselor ratios)—we take an initial step at evaluating policy levers that can affect student access to counselors and counselors' caseloads—an effort that can be expanded upon in the future with studies that consider alternative policy levers, such as an increase in investment for "counselor corps" programs.

The findings have implications for future research and policy. In terms of research, further efforts should be made to verify the accuracy of the data around state school counselor mandates, especially regarding original years of implementation. Researchers might also explore the impact of mandates on a state-by-state basis, which could allow for more nuance in terms of the specific characteristics of an individual state's mandate. Future research could also look at other outcomes of interest—beyond the number of school counselors working in a district and student-to-counselor ratios—when evaluating counselor mandates, such as student- or school-level outcomes. Qualitative methods would contribute valuable information on counselor mandates as well; for example, future studies might consider speaking with district leaders to assess whether they are aware of state mandates and how they approach implementing such mandates at the school or district level.

For policy makers, implementation theory provides an important insight into challenges state counselor mandates might face in schools and districts. Therefore, policy makers who are considering revising or creating state counselor mandates should consider funding the mandates, ensuring the wording of the mandates are specific in nature, and supporting training for district leaders to ease the implementation of the mandates. None of these mandates can be implemented without trained professional counselors who are willing to work in schools; therefore, policy

makers should also advance legislation or other mandates that incentivize students to pursue careers in school counseling and high standards for programs that are training future school counselors.

Concluding Statement

Counselors have a vital role to play in our schools, but high student-to-counselor ratios can limit their effectiveness. Our findings suggest that the implementation of state-level counselor mandates did lead to an increased number of counselors working in school districts; yet, there is no evidence to support the idea that such mandates lowered student-to-counselor ratios within affected states. As researchers and practitioners explore ways to strengthen the school counseling profession, and thus improve student outcomes, state-level policies centered on school counselors and their work must be continually evaluated.

CHAPTER 2

**Recruitment Efforts in School Counseling Master's Programs:
A Typology of Faculty Approaches to Diversity Work**

Introduction

Even as America's schools become increasingly diverse (U. S. Government

Accountability Office, 2022), the school counseling profession remains overwhelmingly White

(77%) and female (87%) (American School Counselor Association, 2021). This stands in sharp

contrast to the demographics of U.S. students, who are 55% non-White and 49% female

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The misalignment in demographics between

counselors and students has raised concerns among the school counseling profession. In fact, the

credentialing body for counselor graduate programs has specifically called for counselor

education programs to "make systematic efforts to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse group of

students and to create and support an inclusive learning community" (Council for the

Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009). One effort to creating an

inclusive environment has been to train White school counselors on issues around diversity

(Uehara, 2005; Packer-Williams et al., 2010; Sue et al., 2022); however, even with training,

White school counselors lack the inherent cultural capital that counselors of color bring to their

interactions with students of color, which may impact their ability to effectively counsel students

of color. As Mulhern (2022) finds, "Non-white students are more likely to graduate high school

and attend college if assigned to a non-white counselor" (Mulhern, 2022, pg. 3). These outcomes

are similar to positive benefits found in same-race teacher-student matching and reinforce the

need for a more diverse school counselor workforce.

Recently, there have been growing calls outside of the profession to increase the racial

diversity of school counselors—a strategy to supporting the increasingly diverse student

population in the United States (e.g. Najarro, 2022; Barnum, 2019). The lack of racial and ethnic diversity within the school counseling profession has real consequences for students. Research suggests that students and counselors interact differently with each other based on their racial identities. These differences in interactions can manifest as counselors' biases limiting their effectiveness with students, so this lack of diversity can particularly affect students of color (Harrison, 1975; Cooper & Liou, 2007; Francis et al., 2019; Mayes et al., 2021; Harris et al., 2021; Hays & Chang, 2003). Additionally, an overwhelmingly White profession could affect the levels of job satisfaction for the small minority of counselors of color. Research in a variety of professional fields, including teaching, has found evidence that racial isolation at work—defined as being in the minority racial identity in a workplace—can lead to higher rates of turnover, dissatisfaction, disconnection from colleagues, and fatigue (Smith & Calasanti, 2005; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Sloan et al., 2013; Bristol, 2020).

While this evidence lends credence to the idea that diversity within the school counseling profession matters, few, if any, published studies have explored why the profession is composed of mainly White women. This study aims to begin to bridge that gap in the literature by focusing on an integral part of the pipeline through which individuals become school counselors: graduate programs in counseling. There is no one standardized way in which all school counselors enter the profession, but a review of the state certification requirements for school counselors indicates that the majority of states (44) require at least a master's degree in counseling or a related degree to be certified by the state as a school counselor (Todd, 2012). Many states require that education requirements be fulfilled at an accredited program.[6] Therefore, this study focuses on accredited

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[6] Currently, the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), which was established in 1981, is the main accrediting body for counseling

master's level counseling degree programs, providing a first step in exploring the challenges with recruiting and retaining diverse students[7] that can go on to work in schools as school counselors. The call from CACREP to encourage programs to recruit and retain a more diverse group of counseling students further motivates the study and speaks directly to the need to understand how education programs are approaching these efforts. Specifically, this study focuses on faculty within counseling masters programs, given their outsized role in shaping the diversity of enrollments within their programs (Griffin & Muniz, 2015; Alger & Carrasco, 1997). Graduate program faculty tend to have the most facetime with prospective students, as they often conduct student interviews during the admissions process, and their strategies to recruit and admit students can change the racial makeup of a class of students. Given their close relationship with students, they may also be aware of what aspects of a program are most attractive to (and least attractive to) potential students. Their work responsibilities make faculty members uniquely positioned to make efforts toward diversifying the counseling profession.

To provide insight into how faculty in school counseling programs think about recruiting and retaining diverse students, I conducted interviews with 12 faculty members across states with the highest percentages of non-White students. I aim to describe in what ways faculty within these programs think they are succeeding in goals to diversify—and what ways they are not. While existing research has explored how faculty engage in diversity work in a variety of disciplines, no studies focus on school counseling master's programs.

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programs in the United States (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2022).

[7] The use of the term "diverse students" throughout this paper is informed by my conversations with faculty members. While diversity in these conversations was often used as a substitute for racial and ethnic diversity, faculty members also used diversity to reference a wide range of student characteristics, including, but not limited to, gender, sexual identification, country of origin, and disability status.

To frame this work, I draw upon Sarah Ahmed's research on "diversity work," which is arguably what faculty may be engaging in within graduate school counseling programs. To interpret the findings, I consider Ahmed's framing of the characteristics of diversity work—namely, the collaborative nature of the work and the process of creating institutional habits—and the challenges that may arise in engaging in these efforts.

Research Questions

With this motivation in mind, this study uses an exploratory approach to answer the following research questions:

1. How do faculty in graduate counseling programs conceptualize diversity and the importance of a diverse enrollment in the program?

2. What are the strategies, policies, and practices that faculty in graduate counseling programs use to attract and retain diverse candidates, specifically candidates of color?

I find that faculty in school counseling masters programs think about and approach diversity work in distinct ways, and I identify three typologies of faculty: active diversity agents, diversity strivers, and status quo accepters. These typologies can be fluid at times and are affected by the department culture, the wider community environment, and the status of the faculty member (tenured or untenured). The findings provide new insight into the challenges faculty face in engaging in diversity work, indicating broader barriers to access to the profession for students from diverse backgrounds.

Literature Review

To contextualize the motivation behind this study and provide background on the literature around diversity in graduate programs, I describe the existing evidence on how graduate programs from a variety of disciplines approach recruiting for diversity and challenges

individuals within these programs encounter when engaging in diversity work. I also discuss evidence around barriers students of color face once enrolled in graduate programs, which speak specifically to issues of retainment. I conclude with existing literature around the role of faculty in diversity work. Overall, the literature reveals that while graduate programs may espouse commitments to diversity, their efforts often fall short of what is required to both recruit and retain a diverse class of students. The existing evidence also underscores the challenges students of color in particular face once in graduate programs.

Graduate Programs and Recruiting for Diversity

As our society becomes more diverse, higher education leaders and administrators have recognized the importance of diverse enrollments within their graduate programs (e.g. Garces, 2014; Griffin et al., 2012; Rogers & Molina, 2006). However, U.S. graduate programs have seen slow progress in increasing the diversity of their student bodies (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, 2004). Thus, understanding what strategies are effective—and which are not—in diversifying graduate programs' enrollment is critical in the literature around diversity in graduate education. My review of the empirical literature reveals the importance of systems of support and financial aid to enrolling and retaining a diverse class of students, and I discuss these strategies in turn.

Systems of Support

To face the challenges associated with pursuing a graduate degree, students may seek out systems of support within programs, even before they decide to accept an admittance offer. Therefore, personal contact with faculty—particularly faculty of color or faculty from an underrepresented gender identity—can provide some reassurance to students choosing where to enroll. Rogers and Molina (2006) explored promising practices for recruiting and retaining

graduate students of color in psychology. Programs that stood out for their exemplary diversity efforts had faculty that engaged personally with prospective students and included faculty and current students of color in the admissions process (Rogers & Molina, 2006). Findings from Slay and colleagues' (2019) research found that students of color similarly reflected positively on personalized communication with faculty of color and believed that such interactions influenced their decision to enroll in the graduate program. The literature here suggests that talking to individuals with similar identities allowed students insight into what the program might be like for them to attend.

The importance of supports extended beyond the admissions process. Rogers and Molina (2006) write, "Almost all students and faculty [interviewed] mentioned the importance of social support and mentoring" (pg. 152). Students looked for support systems from individuals with similar identities not only in the admissions process, but also as an indicator of a program that could successfully lead them to graduation. These supporters came from a variety of sources, including "classmates, staff, faculty, campus-based support groups, department committees, and student buddies" (pg. 152). However, there is a particular emphasis in the literature on the importance of one-on-one relationships between faculty and students as an important aspect for any graduate program that aims to be successful at recruiting and retaining diverse student enrollments (Griffin et al., 2012; Rogers & Molina, 2006; Posselt, 2018).

The importance of systems of support has been found within more traditional STEM programs as well. Posselt et al. (2017) used a case study design to explore the University of Michigan's Applied Physics program, which trains 10% of the country's Black PhDs in Physics. Specifically, the researchers were interested in organizational practices that supported a diverse student enrollment, in terms of racial and gender identities. They found that the cultivation of a

"family-life" atmosphere was a key factor in enrolling and retaining diverse students (Posselt et al., 2017, pg. 1). These supportive relationships gave the department an upper hand in recruiting racially diverse students, who felt like they had a home within the program. Similarly, Williams et al. (2005) spoke to Black women graduate students at a predominantly White research university. One student in a mathematics graduate program reflected, "I realize how critical a strong support system at the institution you are attending can be" (Williams et al., 2005, pg. 194).

These systems of support can be even more critical for students of color in programs where they have negative, racialized experiences. Gildersleeve and colleagues (2011) used a critical race lens to explore the daily experiences of Black and Latino/a doctoral students. Several of their participants spoke to the necessity of forming peer groups with other students of color, as outlets for "express[ing] their feelings, frustrations, opinions, or thoughts" (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). These peer groups allowed students of color to have a space in which to share their experiences and find affirmation among colleagues around the microaggressions they faced within their programs. Perez et al. (2020)'s study of graduate students who had experienced negative experiences based upon their identity also found that their participants sought out community among like individuals to grapple with these incidents. The researchers note that students often created these support groups as a survival mechanism to persist to the end of their degrees (Perez et al., 2020).

The existing research suggests that creating and maintaining strong relationships with peers, faculty, and staff are key for non-White students' success in graduate programs. Together, these findings speak to the importance of understanding whether and how faculty in master's in school counseling programs think and convey information about systems of support for students.

Sufficient Financial Aid Packages

While highlighting systems of support may be an important part of successfully recruiting applicants from underrepresented backgrounds, financial realities often come into play as students consider their graduate education options (e.g., Bersola et al., 2014). Thus, graduate programs that can offer strong financial aid packages to prospective students have an advantage in recruiting students, especially those students who come from under-resourced backgrounds. Rogers and Molina (2006) found this to be true in their study, not only for recruiting students of color but for also "retaining students through to graduation" (pg. 153). Having access to financial supports throughout the course of study can help alleviate financial concerns that, in other circumstances, might cause a student to discontinue his or her studies.

Similarly, Ecton and colleagues (2021) used a natural experiment to test the impacts of a new PhD fellowship on the composition of applicants and enrolled students within a graduate school of education. They found that both applications and the percentage of Black students who applied and enrolled in the PhD programs increased (Ecton et al., 2021). Moreover, the percentage of all racially minoritized students increased with regards to applications. Ecton et al. (2021) also conducted a survey asking prospective doctoral students what they considered while choosing which programs to apply to and in which program to enroll. When deciding where to apply and enroll, the availability and dollar amount of stipends were top priorities among all students and among racially minoritized students.

These findings indicate that students prioritize tangible benefits when considering where to apply and enroll, whether emotional (support systems) or financial (aid packages). Graduate programs appear to benefit from moving beyond words and putting their commitments to diversity into action through the strategies outlined here.

Challenges in Recruiting for Diversity

Campus Racial Climate. Despite evidence around effective strategies for recruiting and retaining for diversity, the extent to which a campus is racially diverse and inclusive, and the experiences of students of color, can complicate efforts to attract students from racially diverse backgrounds to graduate programs, particularly those in historically White institutions. Griffin, Muñiz, and Espinosa (2012) explored the effects of campus racial climate on recruitment efforts by interviewing graduate diversity officers (GDOs) at 11 universities. One GDO spoke about the power of current students' stories in recruiting, saying that if a student has negative experiences, they will often share those experiences with prospective students which can "perhaps dissuade otherwise interested students" (Griffin et al., 2012, pg. 549). The "truth-telling" that current students who have had negative, racialized experiences engage in was a theme in Slay et al.'s (2019) work as well. Participants expressed concern around the mismatch between an espoused commitment to diversity and their own experiences, indicating that while there was extensive rhetoric from some programs about diversity, the actions did not match the talk (Slay, 2019). Having had negative experiences, students of color expressed an unwillingness to promote the program to prospective students of color, and in fact, some noted they felt a responsibility to warn students of "what they're getting into" (Slay et al., 2019, pg. 274). Thus, negative racial experiences and climate had the potential to have long-lasting, far-reaching effects beyond the current class of students.

Lack of Commitment. Challenges can also arise in recruiting efforts when students perceive a lack of commitment to achieving diversity goals, or when diversity practitioners are unsupported in their work. Using a multi-case study approach, Griffin et al. (2012) explored the factors that affect the work of graduate diversity officers (GDOs). They write that GDOs overall

indicated a lack of support from senior administration for diversity work. For example, one GDO "question[ed] the true campus commitment to promoting diversity, considering a lack of willingness to commit institutional monies to funding her position or formally plac[ing] her on the organizational chart" (Griffin et al., 2012).

A mismatch between the perceptions of faculty and students could also lead to challenges in recruiting efforts, especially when students perceive that the school is failing to commit to diversity aims. Galán et al. (2023) used a survey to analyze the beliefs of faculty and students in a clinical psychology doctoral program around recruitment and retainment efforts of graduate students and faculty of color. They found that faculty had far rosier views of the programs' diversity efforts, as compared with students of color, who reported experiencing racial discrimination. The disconnect between what faculty in these programs thought of the departments' diversity efforts and what the students of color thought highlights the risk in failing to incorporate student feedback into diversity work. Even though faculty thought they were doing a good job recruiting and retaining graduate students and faculty of color, students' responses indicated a disillusionment with what they saw as a failure of their programs to not only meet diversity aims, but also to take meaningful action against racial discrimination. This work underscores the challenges of performative diversity efforts that do not actually help the students that they are intended to serve.

While the existing evidence lays important groundwork for understanding how graduate programs think about recruiting and retaining diverse students and the challenges that exist, there is a gap in the literature around these efforts in school counseling graduate programs. This study aims to fill that gap by speaking with faculty who work in school counseling graduate programs about how they approach recruiting and retaining for diversity.

Experiences of Students of Color in Master's Programs

Recruiting students of color into graduate counseling programs is not sufficient to achieve the goal of a more diverse counselor workforce; those students also need to successfully graduate from the program. There remain challenges to retaining students of color, particularly Black students, in graduate programs. Students of color face significant challenges to finding supportive mentoring relationships, resulting in what Thomas et al. (2007) define as dysfunctional mentoring. Dysfunctional mentoring experiences for students of color can lead to a lack of trust, a restriction of academic freedom to pursue their topics of interest, the neglection of the development of their own mentoring skills, and a failure in feeling prepared for their careers (Thomas et al., 2007). Moreover, students who have negative experiences with mentoring in graduate programs may be less likely to enter academia themselves, restricting the diversity of the pipeline of faculty (Ellis, 2001). Dysfunctional mentoring means that students of color may not have the systems of support that have been identified as critical to persistence for graduate students, which can lead to feelings of "isolation [and] exclusion" (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008, pg. 365).

The presence of racism and microaggressions within graduate programs also dominate the literature around the graduate experiences of students of color—particularly Black students (e.g. Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Gildersleeve et al., 2011). A review of the sociological research on the experiences of Black women graduate students and faculty emphasized the role of workplace discrimination. This discrimination often relegated Black women graduate students to positions with fewer resources; forced upon them negative stereotypes of Black women, such as the "Mammy" imagery; and, created hypersexualized images of them in graduate programs by non-Blacks (Walkington, 2017). When racist incidents occur in the broader campus setting,

Briscoe (2022) found that Black graduate students tended to view the administration's response as "untimely, inadequate, and inappropriate" (Briscoe, 2022). This finding indicates that when faced with racism and microaggressions, Black students felt unsupported by the leaders on their campus. Negative, racialized experiences could have long-lasting impacts, as Gildersleeve et al. (2011) found. Students of color questioned whether their experiences were legitimate or worth concern, which Gildersleeve et al. coin the "Am I going crazy?!" narrative. For students of color, this internalized narrative can lead to self-censorship, a questioning of their abilities, an adjustment to White norms, and a decision to not engage in research projects that centered people of color (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). Again, these consequences could extend beyond an individual student; for example, it could contribute to the underinvestment in research around people of color or lead to the perpetuation of harmful microaggressions against students from minoritized backgrounds.

A few studies have looked specifically at the experiences of students of color in counseling programs. Henfield et al. (2010) used a phenomenological approach to study the experiences of 11 Black doctoral students enrolled in counselor education programs. The researchers emphasized "the centrality of race in students' experiences" and noted how issues around race added a burden to Black students that was not shared by White peers (Henfield et al., 2011, pg. 237). This study indicates that entry into a counseling program at an advanced level is not the only challenge facing Black students; in reality, more challenges emerge once they have entered the program.

Haskins et al. (2013) used a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of 8 Black students enrolled in a master's counseling program. The authors reported that five themes emerged from their research, many of which echo findings found in other graduate disciplines.

They include: "(a) isolation as a Black student, (b) tokenization as a Black student, (c) lack of inclusion of Black counselor perspectives within course work, (d) differences between support received by faculty of color and support received by White faculty, and (e) access to support from people of color and White peers" (Haskins et al., 2013, pg. 162). This study highlights the array of barriers Black students face once enrolled in counseling programs, potentially discouraging those students from completing their degree or pursuing a career in the field. Without strong systems of support, Black students can feel disconnected from their program, faculty, and peers, which could increase the likelihood of leaving the program before completion.

These findings underscore the importance of student experiences once they have entered a graduate program, not only because of the impact on their own graduation progress, but also on what their experiences can signal to future prospective students of color. Therefore, I consider not only recruitment strategies used by school counseling programs, but also retainment strategies for diverse students. Haskins et al. (2013) also center the role of faculty in the experiences of Black graduate students in these counseling programs, which informs my study and choice of participants.

The Role of Faculty in Diversity Work

There are numerous actors who affect the ability of graduate programs to recruit and retain a diverse student body. However, I choose to focus on faculty in this study, as faculty continue to play a large role in this work, according to existing research. In a presentation at the AACRAO Policy Summit in 1997, Alger and Carrasco laid out the role of faculty in recruiting and retaining a diverse student population. They discuss the importance of recruitment events specifically targeted at minoritized students. Additionally, they suggest the mentorship role that faculty can play for minoritized students, especially when the faculty share the same background

as the students (Alger & Carrasco, 1997). For example, they note that faculty members should "attend high school career days to encourage minority high school students to consider professional careers" (Alger & Carrasco, 1997, pg. 1). It is important to note here, however, that relying on faculty of color to mentor students of color may further the already heavy burden of service that we know faculty of color face (Menges & Exum, 1983; Banks, 1984; Brayboy, 2003).

Faculty affect more than just recruitment efforts, however; they often have decision-making responsibilities around which students are admitted to programs. Citing work by Gumport (1993) and Hirt and Muffo (1998), Griffin and Muñiz (2015) discuss the role faculty have as decision-makers throughout the admissions process. They also reflect on faculty's duties in establishing departmental policies and procedures and contributing to the departmental climate. Although Griffin and Muñiz's (2015) study focused on graduate diversity officers (GDOs), their participants often cited faculty as crucial to their work. In fact, Griffin and Muñiz write, "the work of GDOs…is futile unless faculty were really committed to diversity" (pg. 208).

Beyond the capability of faculty to affect the demographic composition of the student body in their department, some scholars have argued that they have a *responsibility* to increase access for those students underrepresented in graduate education. Posselt lays out this argument in her book, *Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping*. She focuses specifically on faculty with tenure, who often have more resources to affect change within their departments. She explains that increasing diversity within student enrollments, as well as changes in what paths students plan to pursue, have caused some faculty to double down on antiquated ideas around merit and admissions. She argues that this must change, writing, "Tenured faculty have both the influence and the responsibility to respond to changes in student

trajectories" (Posselt, 2016). This body of evidence further motivates the need for studies that engage with faculty on how they view diversity and the strategies they use to further diversity in their departments.

Together, the existing literature provides evidence around the strategies that are effective in recruiting and retaining diverse students in graduate programs, broadly, and the role of faculty in those efforts. It also tells us about the experiences of diverse students within graduate programs, and how graduate programs often fail to properly support students of color once they are enrolled. However, there is a gap in understanding how recruitment works in counseling programs. Despite increasing calls to diversify the field of counseling and an increasing body of work on diversity in graduate education, little is known about the efforts of key stakeholders to increase diversity in graduate counseling programs. This study aims to offer a first step at illuminating these efforts by centering the perspectives of faculty who, presumably, are expected to carry out this work.

Conceptual Framework

I center this work in Sara Ahmed's seminal 2012 book, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, and her exploration of what it means to engage in diversity work in higher education. More specifically, I use Ahmed's concept of "diversity work" which she defines as "the work of trying to transform institutions by opening them up to populations that have hitherto been excluded" (Ahmed, 2017). The conceptualization of diversity work is derived from Ahmed's ethnographic research on diversity practitioners who work within the higher education sector in the United Kingdom and Australia. Here, I detail key aspects of Ahmed's conceptualization that inform my analysis and interpretation of how and if faculty engage in diversity work in graduate counseling programs. I focus on two main themes: the collaborative

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nature of the work and the process of creating institutional habits before turning to a discussion

of the challenges that may arise in pursuing diversity-focused aims.

Key Features of Diversity Work

Collaborative Work

Diversity practitioners' work does not occur within a silo and is often a very collaborative

effort. Many of the participants in Ahmed's study spoke to the necessity of spending time finding

people within organizations who are willing to advocate on behalf of diversity efforts. Finding

these champions for diversity is critical to advancing diversity work within an organization, and

diversity practitioners are required to have a deep understanding of the actors within an

organization and how those actors interact. Ahmed writes, "Having diversity people—those

interested in diversity—in the governing bodies of the institution allows diversity to become

'part and parcel' of what the institution is doing, to become 'central business'" (Ahmed, 2012,

pg. 31). Identifying who those diversity people are and ensuring they sit in positions of power

where they can make tangible change is therefore a central piece of diversity work.

Once diversity practitioners identify colleagues who might be willing to be champions of

diversity work, they then must also be able to analyze the positionality and aims of individuals to

be able to interact with them in the way that is most likely to lead to the desired result. This is

especially true in terms of language, as diversity practitioners must "try different words out until

you find the right one for the right person" (Ahmed, 2012, pg. 73). Therefore, much of the work

of diversity practitioners in higher education involves crafting their messaging in ways that

brings champions into their work and avoids alienating people. The ability to translate messages

for different audiences is a critical skill for any diversity practitioner.

It is important to note, however, that the use of individual champions in diversity work is exactly what can cause this work to lack longevity. The reliance on individuals to carry out and maintain diversity efforts becomes vulnerable as people leave positions and institutions. Ahmed explains, "As [diversity champions] come and go, or as their priorities change, so too diversity and equality 'come and go'" (pg. 135). The inevitable shifts and ebbs and flows in higher education underscore why the creation of institutional habits is so critical to the work of diversity practitioners.

Creating Institutional Habits

Institutional habits are things that institutions do over time; actions that we can expect in response to certain situations. For example, an institutional habit might refer to the typical way that university administrators respond to a racist incident occurring on their campus. Ahmed expands the definition of institutional habits, however, to include "how certain people become habituated within institutions—how they come to occupy spaces that have already been given to them" (Ahmed, 2012, pg. 123). The creation of institutional habits that value and lift up diversity rests at the center of diversity work. That is, for diversity efforts to have longevity within an institution, practitioners must work to ensure that individuals within the institution engage in practices conducive to fostering diversity as part of their daily work, thus becoming embedded in their habits. Ahmed and Swan (2006) offer an example in their opening essay for a special issue in the *Policy Futures in Education* journal, sharing that teaching practices that offer students space to talk about diversity are one way in which diversity work is done at the university level. If professors begin to incorporate diversity training in their curriculum—and this becomes a norm that is carried out in new courses as well—then we might consider that the creation of an institutional habit that is embedded in the work of the faculty. These efforts can be challenging,

however, and Ahmed describes diversity practitioners as plumbers who must work to unclog areas of "stuckness" within an institution (Ahmed, 2012, pg. 128). By institutionalizing diversity work as a habit, there is less resistance to the work, as it is simply part of normal routines.

The Challenges of Doing Diversity Work

Institutional "Inertia" & Racism

Even in spaces where individuals are hired specifically to do diversity work, this work can be accompanied by major challenges like "institutional inertia." In Ahmed's research, she describes diversity work as inherently institutional work. She explains, "Doing diversity work is institutional work in the sense that it is an experience of encountering resistance and countering that resistance" (Ahmed, 2012, pg. 175). Thus, the location of this work within a broader institution presents its own challenges, as institutions may not value diversity in the same way diversity practitioners do or may be slow to change. Ahmed notes that "institutional inertia," or the resistance of the institution to change, may slow down diversity work, even within institutions that express an "official desire to institutionalize diversity" (Ahmed, 2012, pg. 26). In other words, the very institutions that hire practitioners to do diversity work may present a barrier to doing that work successfully.

Institutions may act as barriers to diversity work in more explicit ways that go beyond inaction. In fact, institutions may be actively perpetrating harms, such as racism, that run counter to the values of diversity. Ahmed notes that racism is often allowed to continue to exist in institutions when racism is "looked over" (Ahmed, 2012, pg. 183). The first step of diversity work, thus, requires naming racism and other harms within institutions that go by ignored.

An (Over-)Emphasis on Perceptions

Even as institutions present challenges to diversity practitioners, they also understand that the language of diversity has value and is necessary to convey to attract customers (students). The focus on marketing diversity, rather than engaging in the difficult work necessary to diversify a space or student body, can lead to a misalignment in stated values and internal actions. As Ahmed explains, "Diversity becomes about *changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations*" (Ahmed, 2012, pg. 34). Recognizing the market value of diversity, institutions like universities seek to describe their organizations as diverse, even if they are simultaneously creating barriers to doing diversity work. Ahmed describes the performative use of diversity by institutional officials as "official diversity," which may run counter to the efforts of diversity practitioners (pg. 54). As long as outsiders perceive the institution as valuing diversity, there is less urgency in enacting changes that challenge inequities and actually lead to increased diversity within the organization. In fact, Ahmed suggests that the use of diversity in mission statements and other organizational value documents can actually "be a way of maintaining rather than transforming existing organizational values" (pg. 57). Commitments from organizations mean little if actions are not taken to work towards those goals or values that are named in commitments.

The emphasis on perceptions over real change creates problems for diversity practitioners, as they need diversity champions who are willing to push back against stagnant institutional practices that restrict diversity. This is especially true when "diversity" becomes so broad that it can be applied to anything. One of the participants in Ahmed's study, for example, said that diversity was being used to talk about the type of plants on a specific campus. The use of the word diversity in this situation was being used to talk about something so far removed

from the definition of the intended aims of diversity work, which were to expand access to underrepresented students and fight structural inequities (often ones steeped in racism or sexism). The wide range of definitions at play in higher education when using the word "diversity" led me to ask my participants broadly how they think about diversity, rather than applying a prescriptive definition to our conversations. But this lack of a prescribed definition also highlights the pitfalls of the many definitions of diversity that are at play.

Using Ahmed's research on diversity work as my conceptual framework allows me to interpret how faculty individually and collaboratively approach diversity efforts, the role they think diversity plays in their departments, and the actions they take to advance diversity within their programs.

Methodology

To answer the research questions of this study, I used an exploratory approach, which is useful when little is known about a certain topic, as the approach seeks to lead to discovery about the subject of interest. Stebbins (2001) defined social science exploration as "a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life" (pg. 3). This definition is helpful in understanding the work undertaken in this study, as I sought to describe the strategies used by faculty at school counseling education programs to recruit and admit for diversity. Importantly, "exploration is not a synonym for qualitative research," but rather a specific methodological approach under the broader umbrella of qualitative research (Stebbins, 2001, pg. 5). The main method used in this approach is the individual interview.

Sampling and Recruitment

Given that there is evidence suggesting that school counselors of color can be especially beneficial for students of color (Mulhern, 2022), I approached the sampling frame[8] by looking at the states with the highest densities of non-White students. Because there are high densities of non-White students in these states, it is especially critical that master's counseling programs with those states are preparing individuals of color to work in those states' schools. I selected the ten states, including the District of Columbia, with the highest density of non-White students, using data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2019).[9] Those states are District of Columbia (D.C.), Mississippi, Maryland, Georgia, Louisiana, New York, California, South Carolina, and Alabama. More information about these states can be found in Table 2.1.

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[8] I originally sought to do a strengths-based study by interviewing faculty and staff at the school counseling programs with the most diverse student bodies. However, those data are not publicly available, according to phone conversations I had with CACREP.

[9] Hawaii is second in the nation, behind D.C., in terms of non-White students. However, I decided to exclude Hawaii, given that less than 2% of its students are Black. Black school counselors are of particular importance given the literature around Black students' outcomes and Black students' challenges in graduate counseling programs. Therefore, I wanted to ensure that the states I included had a sufficiently large Black student population.

Table 2.1: Description of Included States

State	Percent of Non-White Students[10]	Number of Accredited School Counseling Masters Programs[11]
District of Columbia	68.4%	3
Mississippi	45.6%	5
Maryland	44.8%	4
Georgia	43%	11
Louisiana	41.1%	10
New York	37.2%	15
California	36.5%	3
South Carolina	35.1%	5
Alabama	34.4%	10

CACREP's directory of accredited counseling programs was used to identify master's programs of interest in the chosen states. Only programs that offer a specific master's degree in school counseling were considered. For example, addiction counseling programs were excluded because it is not expected that graduates from that program would go on to work in schools as school counselors.

My participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques, where each member is selected based on a specific purpose, are knowledgeable about the topic being studied, and are willing to speak with the researcher (Schutt, 2015). In this case, the purpose was to identify faculty members who worked in accredited master's in school counseling programs within the

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[10] These percentages were pulled from the National Center for Education Statistics.
[11] These numbers were identified using CACREP's directory of accredited programs.

selected states. To recruit participants, I first created a spreadsheet to compile contact information, including email addresses and phone numbers, of all faculty who work within the school counseling programs at the chosen schools. Outreach emails were sent to each faculty member that indicated the purpose of the study, a request for participation, and a link to a REDcap survey to collect basic information about them, including years working in their current role. Follow-up emails were sent to individuals who did not respond to the initial email after 10 days. Individuals who participated were entered into a drawing to win a $100 Amazon gift card. In total, 12 faculty in accredited master's in school counseling programs agreed to participate in the study.

Participants

The 12 faculty members came from 10 colleges and universities across 8 states. The faculty held a variety of titles, including Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Program Director or Coordinator, and Chair of the Department. Most of the participants—8 out of 12— are people of color. Pseudonyms are used for all participants to protect confidentiality. More information about the participants can be found in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Participant Information

Pseudonym	State	Role	Person of Color?
Thomas	Georgia	Assistant Professor	Yes
Lucas	Georgia	Assistant Professor	Yes
Beverly	Georgia	Assistant Professor	Yes
Erica	Louisiana	Assistant Professor & Program Coordinator	Yes
Brielle	New York	Assistant Professor & Program Director	Yes
Nathaniel	New York	Associate Professor & Program Coordinator	No
Caroline	South Carolina	Associate Professor	No
Elijah	California	Associate Professor & Department Chair	No
Valeria	Alabama	Assistant Professor	No
Diana	Louisiana	Assistant Professor	Yes
Nina	California	Professor & Program Director	Yes
Naomi	Maryland	Assistant Professor	Yes

Data Collection

The data for this study come from intensive interviews, described by Charmaz (2006) as interviews that "permit an in-depth exploration of a particular topic with a person who has had the relevant experiences" (pg. 25). This style of interviewing allows for initial protocols, but also permits flexibility throughout the conversation. Once a faculty member indicated they would like to participate in the study, he or she participated in a semi-structured, 60-minute interview over Zoom. With participants' consent, these interviews were audio and video recorded. Transcripts from these recordings were created using Otter.ai, and the transcripts were stored in a secure Vanderbilt Box folder.

I developed the interview protocol by drawing upon the existing literature on efforts to recruit for diversity in graduate programs and aiming to gain understanding around areas in which there were gaps. Given the focus on faculty members, I sought to understand what their

daily work looked like, especially in light of literature that points to the important role faculty

play in recruiting and retaining diverse students (Haskins et al., 2013). I then narrowed in on

their work with recruiting and admitting students, in particular, and the role diversity played in

that work. This included questions around how the faculty interact with prospective students

from diverse backgrounds and how those interactions work to recruit and retain those students.

Here again, I drew upon the existing literature around strategies used to recruit, admit, and retain

diverse students, including the role of diverse faculty in the admissions process (e.g., Rogers &

Molina, 2006) and the way in which the program works (or does not work) to alleviate

challenges faced by diverse students (e.g., Henfield et al., 2011). I also included questions

specific to school counseling programs—such as seeking to understand the broader role of

diversity in the counseling profession—given the lack of studies around recruiting and retaining

for diversity that explore school counseling graduate programs. While the protocol provided a

starting point for these conversations, I continually "express[ed] interest and want[ed] to know

more," as dictated by Charmaz (2006) in her instructions about intensive interviewing. Sample

protocol for these interviews can be found in Appendix C.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved multiple rounds of coding and memoing that took place over

several months. Within 48 hours after the completion of interviews, I filled out a reflection form

to capture initial thoughts and reactions to the interview (Saldana, 2012). This structured form of

memoing aided analysis further down the line, as it helped me highlight key ideas and concepts

that arose during each interview soon after the completion of the interview.

Audio transcripts from each interview were cleaned for errors and uploaded to NVivo, a

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) program. Index codes were created first, which connect the

interview protocol to the data collected. For example, one index code was "Recruitment strategies," as that was a clearly defined section of the interview protocol and of particular interest to answer the study's research questions. However, index codes were insufficient for analyzing the data thoroughly, as new information surfaced throughout the course of interviews. Therefore, using Deterding and Waters' (2018) approach, I also created emergent codes, which are a combination of new information discovered throughout the interview process that was not anticipated prior to conducting the interviews and information from existing literature and evidence (Deterding & Waters, 2018). For example, one code that emerged after an initial round of coding was "Avenues for addressing student grievances."

I used four rounds of coding to ensure a thorough investigation of the interview data. Importantly, during my initial round of coding, I "remain[ed] open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by [my] readings of the data" (Charmaz, 2006, pg. 46). Only in subsequent rounds of coding did the process become more focused. As I honed in on the story the data told and began to create typologies of participants, I used coding in Excel to pull out key quotes from participants and identified a category or multiple categories for each participant. Finally, I used focused freewriting throughout and following the coding process to help draw relationships between codes and interviews (Charmaz, 2006).

Trustworthiness and Rigor

I used several techniques to strengthen the trustworthiness and rigor of the study. First, in the data collection process, I sought participants from a range of states, departments, levels of tenure, gender and racial identity, and titles. After interviews were completed, I engaged in memoing and peer debriefing sessions, which helped to process the data I had gathered during the interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, given that the validity of qualitative

research can be threatened by unchecked researcher bias, I employed reflexive journaling to continually check my own privileges, biases, and identity (Cypress, 2017).

Limitations

As with any study, there are some limitations of this work. First, this study is only considering one pipeline in which individuals can access the school counseling career. Future work should consider alternative credentialing pathways, especially in states that do not require a master's degree to become a state-licensed school counselor. Second, the scope of this project is limited to ten states, which, like other states, have their own unique higher education system, processes for credentialing school counselors, and demographic characteristics. This study should be replicated in other states to see if similar findings are drawn from different states. Finally, interviews are a powerful tool for data collection, but interview participants and interviewers themselves come to conversations with their own biases and goals. Incorporating other data collection tools in future research could help triangulate findings.

Positionality

I come to this research as a person that represents the realities of the complex insider/outsider status, as explained by Merriam et al. (2010). As an individual who has navigated the application and admissions process to several different universities at the master's and PhD levels, I understand some of the ways in which faculty appeal to prospective students— giving me some insider status. However, as a cis-het White women, I remain in some ways an outsider; I do not fully understand the ways in which faculty interact with racially diverse students, nor do I know how those students perceive these interactions.

Using Milner (2007)'s work on dangers in research seen, unseen, and unforeseen, I have critically reflected on my role in this project and in the research space in order to ensure that I am

working diligently to "validate and give voice to people who have often been silenced, misinterpreted, misrepresented, and placed on the margins" (Milner, 2007). This work of self-reflection is especially critical for this study, as the majority of my participants are people of color. As I interacted with those who have different identities and experiences than me during interviews, I strove to focus on listening, stay non-judgmental, and remain aware of my own privilege. Similarly, throughout the writing of this paper, I have sought to center the voices of my participants, bringing their stories and experiences to the page.

Findings

Recognizing that faculty are not a monolith, especially in terms of how they approach issues of diversity, I identify three distinct typologies of faculty members in regard to their work recruiting for and retaining diverse students: active diversity agents, diversity strivers, and status quo accepters. Active diversity agents are individuals who both articulate that diversity is of critical importance in graduate counseling programs and are actively working to increase the diversity of the student body within their programs. Diversity strivers are individuals who say that diversity is important and express a desire to increase diversity within the program; yet they also note a lack of action on the part of themselves and/or their team to actually increase diversity, often due to other work priorities. And finally, status quo accepters are individuals who may acknowledge that diversity is a positive attribute of a program, at least in theory, but they admit that there is nothing they or their team are doing to actively work towards increasing diversity. In fact, in some cases, these individuals may encourage a "color-evasive" approach to the recruitment and admissions process. More information about these typologies can be found in Table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3: Typology Descriptions

	Active Diversity Agents	**Diversity Strivers**	**Status Quo Accepters**
Description	Individuals who both articulate that diversity is of critical importance in graduate counseling programs and are actively working to increase the diversity of the student body within their programs	Individuals who say that diversity is important and express a desire to increase diversity within the program, yet note a lack of action on the part of themselves and/or their team to actually increase diversity	Individuals who may acknowledge that diversity is a positive attribute of a program, at least in theory, but they admit that there is nothing they or their team are doing to actively work towards increasing diversity
Common Characteristics	Tend to work with colleagues who are also active diversity agents; have tenure; work at urban campuses; identify as a member of an underrepresented group	Tend to work with colleagues who are status quo accepters; overworked, not yet tenured; work within institutions that do not prioritize diversity; identify as the only member an underrepresented group within the department	Tend to work with other colleagues who are status quo accepters; work at rural campuses

While there are clear examples of each of these typologies among my participants, I also find evidence of boundary crossers—individuals who seem to fit into multiple categories or straddle the boundaries between multiple typologies. These boundary crossers often highlight tension between what they ideally would like to do and constraints that they find themselves within, showing the power of the institution over its bureaucrats.

In this section, I describe in further depth each typology, pulling evidence from the interview data, and explain cases of boundary crossers. Within each typology, I will discuss how

participants within that category view diversity and their strategies for increasing diversity—or the challenges they face in doing diversity work.

Active Diversity Agents

Active diversity agents laid out a number of ways in which diversity was central to their responsibilities and the goals of their team. Rather than being another thing to check off a long list, diversity work was prioritized among active diversity agents. Active diversity agents often worked within departments that were supportive of diversity work and placed diversity at the center of the department's or broader university's mission. Many active diversity agents also had tenure (although not all). Most of the active diversity agents worked at schools located in urban centers, and the majority of the active diversity agents I interviewed identified as a member of an underrepresented group. Active diversity agents were focused on specific steps that could further diversity efforts within their programs. Lucas, an Assistant Professor in Georgia, exemplified this characteristic, telling me: "I'm tired of talking, you know, so I like action…We can talk about [diversity], we can write all the research about it, but let's go to work, let's get in the trenches and make things happen." Like Lucas, other active diversity agents worked to put their values into action, which highlighted the discretion they had over their roles.

Views on Diversity: "[It's] who we are."

When asked about the role of diversity in their programs, active diversity agents emphasized the importance of diversity, in both broad terms and in terms of racial diversity. They centered diversity as a core component of their programs, rather than something that sat on the periphery. Diversity infused their work in their classrooms, in the admissions process, and in how they interacted with prospective and current students. Brielle, a tenured faculty member and Program Director at a Master's in School Counseling program in New York, told me,

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"[Diversity] is who we are. It's part of our identity." Diversity as central to a program's identity was a theme among active diversity agents, who expressed that it played a role in everything they did. The prominent role of diversity thus could be clear to prospective students; it was a value that active diversity agents hoped to showcase to individuals considering attending their programs.

Intentionality was continually mentioned during conversations with active diversity agents, as they recognized that diversification of their student bodies was not something that would happen passively. Lucas emphasized this aversion to passivity, saying that being active and present in the community was key to diversity work. He explained: "Well, representation matters. So it behooves me, it behooves our program as a whole…and I think what most programs do is they wait for the folks. I'm gonna use this as an analogy, they wait for the folks to come to church, instead of going out into the community and ministering to the people." Lucas continually used the word "intentional" when describing diversity efforts, as did other active diversity agents. It was clear that diversity work did not happen without champions pushing the work forward.

This work became easier when it was a team effort. Active diversity agents often were surrounded by like-minded colleagues, who also valued diversity. Thomas, a tenured faculty member, explained the diversity work in his program as a "concerted effort." Elijah, an Associate Professor and Department Chair in California, described the decision to center diversity in the department as an effort that originated within and was fought for by faculty members. He explained:

"I wouldn't say that it was top-down…As we were crafting [our strategic planning documents], we got into some pretty big discussions with folks about like, the language

that we wanted to use, the things that we wanted to say, and disrupting educational

inequities…And we stood by it, we got pushback, we hit the resistance, but we were like,

No, this is important to us. We are saying as a faculty…This is important."

Even when faced with resistance from administrators, Elijah and his colleagues remained

committed to including language around disrupting educational inequities in the mission

statement of the department.

Strategies for Increasing Diversity

Recruitment Efforts. To put their values into action, active diversity agents infused

diversity work in their multiple roles as faculty. In terms of recruitment efforts, active diversity

agents noted specific events and strategies targeted to increase the diversity of the student body.

Oftentimes, these recruitment efforts centered around public-facing materials that were

consumed by prospective students. For example, Nathaniel, a tenured professor and program

coordinator in New York, said: "In terms of recruitment, we do anti-racist pieces on our website,

in our mission statement. Folks know that we're committed to equity, social justice, and

everything that we do. We have such word of mouth." Nathaniel's comments underscore the

importance of publicly committing to diversity and equity, which can then attract students who

recognize the program as a space that will value their contributions and experiences. Elijah

echoed the importance of public-facing materials that emphasize the centrality of diverse

experiences in the department. He explained:

"The videos that we have posted online are not of, you know, White students, but instead

are some of our historically underrepresented students talking about their

experiences…Those are really important, I think, markers to really, as people are looking

for themselves, like to see themselves on a website, and be like, 'Ooh, that's my story, or

that's part of, I'm seeing something connected to me there.'"

According to active diversity agents, this kind of public content allowed students of color and

other diverse students to see themselves in the program, and most of the interviewees noted

representation as a critical aspect to diversifying their student population. Still, it was unclear if

the emphasis on the presentation of diversity on the website and in department materials was

perceived and experienced positively by the intended audience, students of color (e.g. Slay et al.,

2019).

Active diversity agents also pointed to specific recruitment initiatives that targeted

underrepresented students beyond communications and PR materials. Several active diversity

agents spoke to the importance of establishing pipelines from which they could encourage

students of color in particular to enter the counseling program and profession. Caroline, an

Assistant Professor in South Carolina, spoke about efforts by the school to engage with local

HBCUs to recruit students of color. She said, "In terms of being intentional about our

recruitment, we have two HBCUs close to our university, so we partner with them and, you

know, make sure we're connecting with them." She went on to explain that she and her

colleagues offered training at local school districts where there were high populations of

minoritized students and teachers, as another way to recruit a diverse student body. This kind of

service had institutional support, which was crucial in enabling Caroline and other non-tenured

faculty to participate in diversity work.

Overall, active diversity agents spoke about the importance of visibility within the

university, community, and profession. They knew that setting an example was key to

encouraging diverse students to join their programs; this was especially true for faculty of color,

who explained that many students of color were unaware of the counseling profession as an option unless they met individuals who worked within the profession. Thomas spoke about doing diversity work on a public stage, saying, "We really believe in that concept of being visible and making a difference, and really fighting for equity within the school. I think if that's done, and if our students do that, and we continually push them in that endeavor, then I think there'll be more students wanting to do that same thing." He sought to set an example for students and colleagues to mimic diversity and work, and he believed that these efforts helped to bring in a more diverse student body. Similarly, Erica, an Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator in Louisiana and a woman of color, said, "I'm being visible in communities. I'm going to conferences—regional, national, state, and local conferences…I'm also trying to keep the doors open to our offices from when students stopped by and greeting them with a smile, and making sure that we publicly advocate for students of color." The visibility aspect of their work was critical to setting an example for their colleagues and students (future counselors) to follow.

Admissions Process. The admissions process was another critical component where active diversity agents saw room for action around diversity. Given the complexity in the admissions process and the multiple steps it involved, active diversity agents took several opportunities to engage with prospective students on issues of diversity. As explained in Ahmed's work, diversity work often involves embedding diversity in institutional practices and habits, which can be seen here (Ahmed, 2012). Elijah noted that diversity was central to their processes. He said, "I would say at almost every single point of the admissions process, we're asking something about it."

Like Elijah, active diversity agents continually talked about the value of infusing diversity within discussions throughout the application process, both as a way to signal to diverse

students that there was a place for them in the program and as a way to dissuade and identify students who were not committed to engaging in diversity work. Naomi, an Assistant Professor in Maryland, explained this "weeding out" process, saying, "If you're not ready for those conversations [about privilege and oppression], I always tell the applicant, if you're doing this to fix people outside, you're in the wrong profession. Turn the mirror, look at you. This is about you, not about them. And if you're not ready to look at yourself and go somewhere else, you don't belong here. You don't belong as a counselor." For her, prospective students needed to be willing to engage in topics around diversity—conversations that she thought some students were simply not ready to participate in yet.

Essay questions were one opportunity during the admissions process to assess individuals' commitment to or experiences with diversity. Brielle noted, "The essays, we do a writing sample, they choose a case, and they're all about diversity…Because we're trying to assess their positionality." Brielle went on to say that diversity did play a role in the decision-making process of whether to admit a student, and a student's positionality, as revealed through the essay questions, was one factor in determining fit for the program.

Interviews also played a critical role in assessing students' fit for programs that prioritized diversity. The majority of active diversity agents described how interviews that were used in the admissions process were an opportunity to ask prospective students about issues of diversity. For example, Thomas explained that his department leveraged the interview process in order to elicit insight into how students thought about the profession and their future roles in schools. He described the types of questions him and his colleagues asked, saying: "Broadly, we ask questions about what they think about equity…What do they think about diversity in schools, trying to hear what their thoughts are, the thought processes, and that's what gives us indications

of whether or not this person might be a good fit for a school counseling program." In Thomas's program—as in the programs of other active diversity agents—diversity was top-of-mind throughout the admissions process, and faculty were specifically looking for students who could talk about diversity and equity in thoughtful ways. The use of interview questions around diversity was another presentation of diversity in public-facing spaces, just like the use of certain materials on the website. These questions aimed to be a signal to incoming students that the department centered diversity in its work.

Once students had entered the programs, curriculum was another way in which values of diversity could be conveyed to students by active diversity agents. Active diversity agents ensured that issues of diversity were not restricted to a single multiculturalism course. Rather, they worked to infuse diversity throughout the entire curriculum. Thomas explained that this tactic helped students, especially minoritized students, feel as if their own experiences were reflected in their coursework, which was also important for increasing a sense of belonging within the program. Valeria, an Assistant Professor in Alabama, explained a similar strategy of infusing diversity in all courses. She shared:

> "[Diversity] comes up in every course. So it's one of those that I think as the school counselor educator, I'm constantly pushing, specifically the data piece of like, how are you finding these achievement gaps? How are you looking for the students that are gonna get lost in the mix, that are different? And how are we advocating to support them? And so, for me, it comes up often. But in a general sense, we as a program treat [diversity] like ethics, like it should be coming up in every course."

Here, Valeria is acting as an active diversity agent in the courses that she teaches, as she prioritizes questions that compel students to consider the role diversity will play in their future

careers. But, she also notes that she is not alone in this advocacy; in fact, it is a department-wide strategy to ensure that diversity is central to each and every course. It is important to note here that Valeria's work was supported in her efforts around diversity by colleagues, which potentially made barriers to doing diversity work lower.

In order to retain students from underrepresented backgrounds once they had been admitted to the program, active diversity agents sought to incorporate an emphasis on diversity throughout the faculty hiring process. Elijah was one active diversity agent who had to use his own position of power to advocate for a stronger emphasis on diversity within the hiring process. He noted that when he became Chair of the department, the demographic makeup of the adjunct faculty was not diverse. So, he implemented changes in the hiring process. He recounted:

> "But it was really important for me that we started to be very intentional about if we had the need for new faculty to be hired, I wanted to prioritize, as much as we could, racially diverse faculty to be in those roles. And so that became a particularly important piece for me. And so, you know, over the last four years, we've had a very significant diversification of our faculty. And I think that really does, that has been meaningful for our students, for them to have the opportunity to have faculty that look like them and can be, you know, possibility models."

His activism led to noticeable changes within the department's faculty, leading to their department having the most racially diverse faculty across the entire graduate school. Without his efforts, the status quo—one that lacked a representative faculty—would have been maintained, re-emphasizing the importance of the work and discretion of active diversity agents.

A racially diverse faculty did not go unnoticed by underrepresented students and was often a "selling point" for prospective students. Erica, an Assistant Professor and Program

Coordinator in Louisiana, shared that she received positive feedback from students of color who saw their identities in the faculty. She said:

> "I've actually had students pointing out, to be able to be taught by Black core faculty members…And so that was something else that was helpful for those students to be able to see someone who was a member of their salient identity, and to be there on campus and using critically inclusive pedagogical methods and using authors of color within their curriculum."

Erica went on to share that students of color felt an increased sense of belonging in programs that had faculty of color, and that she often served as a mentor to Black students within the program. Having mentors and people they could trust thus increased retention for minoritized students.

As seen in these examples, active diversity agents worked to diversify the student body within their programs and retain those students. Oftentimes, they were aided by their colleagues or were given the space and resources to do this work.

Diversity Strivers

Diversity strivers expressed that diversity was an important value to them, at least personally, but encountered numerous barriers to doing diversity work or achieving a more diverse student body within their programs. They often worked with colleagues who were status quo accepters, or did not fully appreciate diversity as a priority. Many of the diversity strivers I spoke with were untenured faculty, who juggled numerous demands on their time and attention, including teaching classes, advising students, and engaging in non-diversity-related service work. Moreover, many of the diversity strivers were people of color who faced additional challenges to engaging in diversity work; yet, due to their own identities, they often retained a sense of responsibility in wanting to increase the diversity of the student body within their

programs. Some of them worked in rural schools, where they voiced challenges to even drawing in a diverse applicant pool, given the surrounding community's demographics. Here, I'll lay out how diversity strivers perceived the role of diversity within their programs and based on their own individual values, and key barriers that limited their diversity work.

Views on Diversity: Desirable, but Perhaps not Achievable

Diversity strivers spoke about the importance of diversity, even if they believed their programs had failed to achieve the strides regarding diversity that they themselves wished to see. Given that the majority of the diversity strivers were people of color, they often expressed the desire to do diversity work as something deeply personal and driven by their own experiences. Yet, challenges abounded in engaging in diversity work. Beverly, an Assistant Professor in Georgia and woman of color, noted, "There's definitely a desire" to do diversity work. But she immediately went on to describe limitations to the ability to do diversity work, including an overloaded schedule, which I describe below.

In some cases, however, diversity strivers indicated that while they valued diversity, their colleagues did not. In this way, they set themselves up as a contrast to their colleagues. Naomi, an Assistant Professor in Maryland, shared that she thought continually about how diversity initiatives and values could be incorporated program-wide. She said, "I'm really into, 'How do we infuse diversity and social justice, cross-curricular? How do we hold accountability for that?' Because a lot of programs say that they do that, but they don't. Our program certainly isn't there yet either." Within her program, Naomi was striving for diversity and was quick to say that diversity was critical to the program. Yet, as I explore below, barriers stood in the way to achieving her vision.

Diana was another Assistant Professor in Louisiana who contrasted how she valued diversity with the ways in which her (White) colleagues did. She specifically tied how she prioritized diversity to her own identity (a Black woman) and life experiences. She told me:

> "For someone else, [diversity] might be a 'good-to-have,' but for me, it's necessary…It's personal…I think I do feel a heavier burden to, you know, creates processes and practices like that will stand the test of time and create spaces where diverse students, and not just African American students, but diverse students, feel safe. And all of those things, like I feel like, because it's my personal experience, you know, that I don't know that some of my other colleagues, not that they don't have a desire to understand, but it's not their everyday reality."

Diana not only prioritizes diversity differently than her colleagues but brings to work a different set of life experiences that inform how she thinks about diversity in the classroom and in her program. This was a common theme among participants and potential participants; people of color were far more likely to respond to my request for an interview, and once interviewed, much more likely to fall into the "active diversity agents" or "diversity strivers" categories. This highlights the tension faculty can feel between their own personal values and experiences and the directives from administration or the incentive structures within their jobs; choosing between the two directions in which they are being pulled can be difficult and taxing.

Naomi echoed this concern in the differences between how faculty members thought about and acted upon their own identities. She said, "Those are…the inequity amongst faculty, right? And that's the challenge when sometimes you have a faculty that's not high on their own racial identity, that it falls upon the people of color in the department to [advise students of color]." This unequal burden on faculty of color led some of them to push away responsibilities

that centered around diversity. In talking about efforts to bring in diverse speakers for students, Erica, an Assistant Professor and coordinator of the program, said, "I'm gonna say this, I have tried, and I have gotten to the point that, it is like I said, I am done, I have been working harder than my students at times. And that is where I'm like, I am not going to dim my light anymore." Erica, who identifies as a Black woman, later told me that her number one recommendation to improve diversity efforts in her program was to "hire diversity faculty, and pay them for their work." The inequitable strain on faculty of color to engage in this work—that required time and emotional labor—led some active diversity agents to move to be diversity strivers, as they could not maintain the level of effort required to truly be an active diversity agent all the time (a phenomenon I will discuss more below in the section on boundary crossers).

Challenges to prioritizing diversity also came from students. Erica, who worked at a relatively rural, predominantly White institution in Louisiana, said that there was pushback among students to being taught by Black faculty. She recounted: "I've had some other students…who actually did not want to be taught by somebody who looks like myself or my colleague." Even as her department hired diverse faculty—an effort, as described above, can attract more diverse students—there were negative (perhaps unintended) consequences to these actions when individuals within the program did not share the same values around diversity. Erica also spoke to the challenges the surrounding community presented to doing diversity work on campus. She described: "I worry about being on the back roads at night, or, you know, I pass this number of [Confederate] flags…Do I have to worry about driving home late at night, or if I have to get petrol at a particular station?" No matter what Erica or her program did to attract diverse students, there were objects, symbols, and cultures within the larger community that could easily deter racially diverse students, who might similarly worry about their safety. This

created challenges for diversity strivers, who often worked in more conservative communities, as compared to the active diversity agents.

Demands on Time

A long list of responsibilities and competing priorities were the most common barriers diversity strivers mentioned to engaging meaningfully in diversity work. These other tasks were often compounded by incentive structures within the institutions that incentivized research, teaching, or journal publications over engagement in diversity work. Beverly, an Assistant Professor in Georgia, for example, spoke of this need to prioritize other responsibilities over efforts to diversify the program's student body and curriculum, despite her desire to do this kind of work. She told me, "I'm taking care of my class stuff, because that's the stuff that is going to get me tenure. That's what I'm going to be graded on and evaluated on." She later explained that to take meaningful steps around diversity, faculty needed support from administrators. She said, "And if universities and colleges and departments are not providing that support, then we're going to continue to fail in effectively and intentionally recruiting diverse students." In order to take the time needed for diversity work, faculty voiced the need for incentive structures that valued that work—they needed to know that they could still achieve tenure, even if they took some of the time they would spend on, say, writing journal articles, to engage in diversity work.

And the list of responsibilities that often took priority over diversity work was long for many of the participants I spoke with, especially those classifying as diversity strivers. Beverly described it as "drinking from a firehose." Tasks included teaching up to four courses, which involves preparing for those courses, designing curriculum, fielding student questions and grading assignments; advising students, both informally and formally; assisting with the accreditation process for the program; serving on dissertation committees or as chairs of

dissertation committees; overseeing practicum and field work; participating in the recruiting and admissions process, including attending recruitment events, reviewing applications, engaging in applicant interviews, and making admissions decisions; doing service work, including serving on committees at the program or university level; producing original research, gaining grants, and journal article publications; and, playing a role in the hiring and training of new faculty. While diversity work was sometimes embedded in these work tasks, it often took additional effort to incorporate diversity strategies, especially when those were not explicitly included in policies and habits within the department.

In addition to challenges with prioritization at the individual level, department-level priorities often focused on immediate crisis issues, rather than long-term goals. Therefore, diversity goals, which often did not see results until months or years later, were often pushed to the bottom of departmental to-do lists, even when there were good intentions among faculty. Diana talked about the department-level priorities, saying:

"It kind of maybe became a lower priority, not no one thought it was important…For us as a department, though, we've been hit with a lot of things all at one time…Like we had CACREP accreditation, this was our year to be reaccredited. We had all new faculty trying to learn new things, all at one time…So we kind of put that date [to discuss diversity issues] on the calendar, but we haven't reached that date yet, because we have so many other things. So yeah, I think it's not because of, there's not an interest. I think it's just a lot of other priorities right now."

Diana's thoughts were shared by other diversity strivers, who articulated that from a department perspective, there were immediate needs, such as accreditation status, that took priority over diversity work, which had no official deadlines or clear, concrete consequences if not completed.

With constantly changing needs in the department, it was easy for the aims around diversity to get pushed lower on the list, even though individuals within the department were diversity strivers, or supported diversity efforts.

Structural Challenges

Barriers to diversity also came in the form of structural challenges, which could hinder or deter progress on diversity. These structural barriers often came in the form of policies that were institutionalized by the department or university. For faculty of color, these barriers were especially pronounced and echo the findings in existing studies that speak to the centrality of race and racism for faculty of color (e.g., Walkington, 2017). For example, Naomi explained:

> "There's embedded levels of racism in terms of policy procedure, you know, again, gatekeeping, all sorts of stuff in the classroom. I mean, my students have told me about experiences that they've had in the classroom, in terms of tokenization. And you know, what I always tell them, look, there are things that I can't control, right, I can only control what kind of relationship you and I have."

Even as a faculty member with considerable power and resources within the department, Naomi could not stop all instances of racism or fully protect all students of color. She was limited by institutional barriers—and institutional racism—that pushed back her efforts in diversity work. She therefore had to focus her efforts on her one-on-one relationships with students, because she did not feel as if she had the power to fight back against racism on a more structural level.

Although diversity strivers often did what they could in terms of their allotted power and resources, they worried what would happen if diversity strivers like themselves left the school. This underscored the importance of diversity efforts taking the form of policies, procedures, and cultural shifts, rather than just one-off events. Diana reflected:

"We can have the informal conversations and do the advising, all of that is very

important. But at the end of the day, if, you know, I left or [another colleague] left, that

representation would no longer be there. The only thing that can keep the momentum

going is actual policies, procedures…And we don't have that, so at any point, we've had

budget cuts, you know, a lot of things could change our dynamic, and we don't have

anything to sustain the momentum."

If there are only one or two diversity strivers or active diversity agents within a program, their

absence or departure could completely shift how the department views and values diversity

work. Thus, participants noted the importance of the institutionalization of strategies to improve

diversity in order to ensure longevity and consistency, no matter who was working in the

department.

Status Quo Accepters

Status quo accepters often expressed the value of diversity; yet, unlike active diversity

agents or even diversity strivers, they were not engaging in strategies to diversify the student

population in their program, either individually or as a department. Many of these status quo

accepters pointed to a lack of diversity in the applicant pool as a reason why their programs

lacked diverse, and at times, they expressed "color-evasive" ideologies. In this section, I share

how status quo accepters talked about diversity and what they saw as barriers to diversity work.

Views on Diversity: A Broad Definition with Low Priority

When asked to define diversity and the role of it within the counseling program, status

quo accepters often resorted to ideas around diversity that focused on *accepting* differences,

rather than embracing or celebrating differences. Valeria, an Assistant Professor, said, "I think

diversity is everything from culture, to identity, to the ability to accept different, like diverse

cultures…And then I think it's important during the interview process to evaluate their ability to be open to other differences." This broader approach to diversity did not engage with the difficult sides of diversity, like challenging the status quo. Valeria's ideas around diversity were broadly inclusive; while that can lend itself to wider access, it can also cause a loss in focus on the communities that have been historically marginalized and need extra care.

When asked about how diversity played a role in various components of the program, status quo accepters often came up blank. Regarding recruitment, they were often in departments where there were no initiatives aimed specifically at students from diverse backgrounds. For example, when asked if there were any such initiatives, Valeria responded: "Honestly, I can't think of any." While she said that recruitment was an area in which her and her colleagues were trying to improve, she specifically noted that they had made no attempts to target diverse students, and she attributed the lack of diversity among students simply to the applicant pool's lack of diversity. She admitted it was an area in which they could "do better," but did not share any future plans to engage in that kind of work.

Color-evasive ideology[12] wherein individuals to not consider race when they make decisions (which ignores the permanency and prevalence of race and racism) also came up in interviews. When questioned if the COVID-19 pandemic affected diverse students differently than other students, Nina responded, "I actually don't to be honest with you. I just, I don't see it in those segments. I'm just saying that it's affected everyone, you know, regardless of SES, background, race, background, ethnicity." This perspective ignores the additional challenges that students from diverse backgrounds face in overcoming the negative effects of COVID-19, and

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[12] "Color-evasiveness" is a term coined by DisCrit scholars to replace the ableist term "colorblindness." (Annamma et al., 2017).

the evidence that the pandemic disproportionately impacted people of color (e.g. Tai et al., 2022). Color-evasive ideology affected how Nina and others who shared her perspective work to support diverse students. Later, when asked if she considers applicants' racial identities when reviewing applications, Nina said: "I don't, because it's not a requirement for them to state what their ethnic or racial background is. Quite honestly, I don't look at that. Because I can't, you know, if I see students that way then I miss a lot of the other things that I think are important, so I don't make it an issue." Here, Nina seems to indicate that even if she was granted insight into an applicant's racial identity, she would not consider it important to the decision-making process.

Barriers to Diversity Work

The most frequent barrier cited by status quo accepters to diversification was a lack of control as agents of a broader, more powerful institution. Status quo accepters expressed powerlessness to make changes that would impact the diversity of students within their programs and within the profession of school counseling. They explained that as faculty, there was little they could do to affect recruitment and retainment efforts; in fact, some noted specifically that that was a job for another person, like the individuals within the admissions office. There also was a sense that retaining diverse students was outside their modicum of control; they offered support where they could, but, at the end of the day, it was up to the student to seek out and/or accept help. When asked about retaining diverse students, Valeria shared:

> "And then, at least twice a month, we have program-level meetings where we also address potential student concerns, [and] we're constantly evaluating anyone that might be not performing as they were previously or might not be performing as they should in general, so that we can address it proactively. *I think that's really all we can do.* [emphasis added]"

This kind of attitude towards diversity underscores the "it is what it is" mindset, in which, as faculty, there was very little they could actually do to change the diversity of the student body or faculty within their program. This feeling of a lack of power or control was shared by Nina, especially regarding recruitment. She told me, "What I hope is that the recruitment is there, to make sure that we're seeing students coming in and applying from diverse backgrounds, but…I don't think that I have control over [that]." When participants—specifically status quo accepters—felt a lack of control, they tended to indicate that that absconded them from any responsibility to take action regarding diversity.

A lack of power and discretion was also reflected in answers where respondents attributed diversity (or lack thereof) to the population of the surrounding community or population changes. As noted above, Valeria thought the applicant pool's lack of diversity was the reason for a lack of diversity in the program and seemed to accept that as a fact that was unchangeable. Beverly spoke similarly about the applicant pool of her program, saying, "I attribute some of [the lack of diversity], in my opinion, to [the university] being rural. And just with, you know, in general, I think, fewer students of color going into school counseling, it just kind of is on a larger level because of the type of institution that it is." When Nina told me that the Latinx population had increased within her program, I asked her what efforts had led to that change. She answered, "It's just luck…I don't think that there was any specific effort on any one population for the institution." These responses indicate forces outside the agents' control that shaped the diversity of the student body, and a lack of action to try to work against (or with) those forces.

Boundary Crossers

Not all participants fit squarely into one typology; in fact, the majority of participants crossed into another category at one point or another, often due to external pressures. I call these participants "boundary crossers." The most common boundary crossed was between status quo accepters and diversity strivers. This phenomenon highlights both the flexibility of these categories and that certain external factors could push someone from one category into another. Here, I detail the factors that created these "boundary crossers," including institutional pressures and burnout—factors that were heightened among nontenured faculty and faculty of color.

Institutional Pressures

Even though faculty have resources, agency, and discretion to carry out their responsibilities (often in ways that align with their own values), pressures from the institution impacted their ability to do diversity work. This was especially the case when institutions did not prioritize diversity as highly as the individuals did. For example, Nina, a diversity striver/status quo accepter, spoke of pushback from administrators as a factor that limited her impact in diversity efforts. She explained, "And I hate to say it, but right now I'm hearing responses such as, 'Well, it's really not realistic to say that we can hire a diverse faculty for us." While some of the active diversity agents continued to fight even when administrators pushed back, for others this pushback was enough to move them, at times, from diversity strivers to status quo accepters, as they felt they did not have the power to fight against the administration.

The pressure around bringing in enough students to the program, which ultimately helped the university's bottom line, was also mentioned by faculty as a stressor that limited their ability to work on diversity efforts. Naomi, an active diversity agent/diversity striver, talked about the stresses of getting enough students into the program to turn around a profit for the university.

This pressure could sometimes force diversity to take a back seat throughout the application process, as they simply needed to fill the slots in the program. Naomi discussed: "We have to have a certain number. And it used to be a lot worse. But now again, you know, counseling is the cash cow…And so we got a lot of pressure, like, 'Hey, we need that money, right, because we're a for-profit institution.' And so that's part of the challenge." She later explained everything as a negotiation between herself and her faculty colleagues and the "higher powers" at the university. While at times Naomi was successfully able to negotiate to prioritize diversity work as an active diversity agent, at other times the institutional pressures pushed her into a diversity striver role.

Burnout

The pressures from the university administration, coupled with the laundry list of responsibilities and the challenges in doing diversity work, often led to burnout among faculty. Burnout is defined as a "psychosocial syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity" (Maslach et al., 1997, p. 192). The toll of their work was especially pronounced among faculty of color, who took on a larger burden in many aspects of their work, as compared with their White colleagues. Nina, who identified as a woman of color, spoke about (the lack of) efforts to recruit more diverse students, saying: "And so I am one who keeps bringing it, I'll bring it back to the department constantly." But this additional labor of having to be the person continually urging others to engage in diversity work was tiring, physically and emotionally, pushing her to become a status quo accepter at times, rather than continually engaging in this challenging work. She later told me:

> "One of the things that we do talk about is that faculty of color carry a lot of responsibility…And so when you look at all of that, being on diversity committees,

councils…It's sad, because the things that we do are not really considered worthy to actually gain those rank promotions. And so it's a sacrifice…I was very involved with diversity councils and diversity committees…And I was willing to do that until I recognized that I'm like, wait a minute, in addition to being a part of those very important activities, it's also important for students to see faculty who are full professors, who have tenure…So I don't participate in as many committees and councils as I used to…So yeah, it's tricky. It's a balancing act."

As she learned that the university did not value her work on diversity councils as highly as her other responsibilities, like her research, she began to pull away from that diversity work, acknowledging that she had to prioritize tenure over some of the diversity efforts with which she would have liked to remain engaged. This led to her crossing over from a diversity striver role to a status quo accepter role, as she grappled with the realities of the incentive structure in academia and what she felt was critical to prioritize for her own personal success.

Similarly, Erica, who straddled the active diversity agent/diversity striver boundary, noted that she felt burnout around the work she did in recruiting diverse guest speakers for the program. As quoted above, she began to withdraw from those efforts, saying she was not going to let a less-than-enthusiastic response from the students "dim her light." These examples underscore the drawbacks to having individuals as champions of diversity, or active diversity agents. While at times faculty have the capacity to bring changes to their institutions, this work can fall by the wayside or lack longevity if the agents fail to institutionalize their changes.

<center>**Conclusion**</center>

Discussion

My interviews with faculty in master's in school counseling programs revealed the array of approaches and perspectives faculty have in regard to diversity work. While the three typologies help conceptualize these various approaches, they also reveal the fluidity of the categories—fluidity that stems from differences in departmental policies and support, personal identities, and workloads. It is also important to note that the typologies were not clearly divided along racial lines; in other words, there were both White individuals and people of color that fell into each category. This lack of sorting along racial lines reinforces the idea that diversity work is not—and should not—be "owned" by people from a single racial identity. That is not to say that racial identity does not matter in this work, however. People of color within my study spoke passionately about the personal responsibility they felt around diversity work, and they faced forms of unpaid labor that their White colleagues did not. As compared to racial identity, tenure status seemed to be much more determinative of category; the majority of tenured professors were active diversity agents. Workload, which can often be related to tenure status, also was key in pushing individuals from active diversity agents to lower categories of engagement—the greater the workload, as explained by participants, the more likely they were unable to reach that active diversity agent status. Overall, this study reinforces the centrality of context and identity in faculty work and the additional burdens faculty of color, in particular, face when engaging in diversity work.

Active diversity agents were eager to highlight the role of diversity within their programs, from recruitment efforts to curriculum. It appeared that active diversity agents had assisted in incorporating diversity into institutional habits within their programs, explained by Ahmed

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(2012) as key to ensuring the longevity of diversity work. Active diversity agents expressed an unwillingness to let diversity aims fall to the wayside and were willing to push back against administration when values did not align. This finding echoes Ahmed's conclusions, where she notes that diversity work is challenging—and in fact can be a form of resistance—because it often involves "doing *within* institutions what would not otherwise be done *by* them" (Ahmed, 2012, pg. 25). Therefore, active diversity agents are critical to ensuring that diversity work continues, especially when that work is not already institutionalized. Yet, the critical role of active diversity agents also highlights one of the largest risks posed to diversity work; if such diversity practitioners leave the institution, then diversity goals may no longer be prioritized.

Most of the diversity strivers within the study similarly placed a high value on diversity within their programs; however, unlike active diversity agents, they lacked the institutional support needed to pursue diversity efforts. While the faculty had some power over their time (arguably one of their most valuable resources), they needed buy-in from the institution itself, echoing Ahmed's (2012) situating of diversity work within institutional life as central to the challenges diversity practitioners face. Diversity strivers often faced community contexts that were potentially unsafe to racially diverse students; these acts of racism that surrounded certain programs led to even greater challenges to diversity efforts, especially as institutional inertia set in (Ahmed, 2012). In situations like these, faculty of color stood out as even more crucial to acting as supports for students of color (Gildersleeve et al., 2011); but, faculty of color themselves are already overly burdened with work and reliance on them to serve as supports for racially diverse students is an additional form of unpaid labor.

Status quo accepters tended to approach their work using color-evasive approaches, a phenomenon that has previously been identified within the counseling profession writ large

(Gast, 2016). Yet, as Ahmed's research shows, naming the importance of race and calling out racism is the first step in engaging in diversity work. Without even acknowledging the role race plays in our society and within graduate programs, status quo accepters will continue to fail in advancing diversity goals. Relatedly, this study underscores the challenges in lacking a clear definition around diversity. The decision to not offer a definition of diversity to participants was intended to get a sense of what they thought of about the term diversity. However, this decision led to some confusion and a lack of clarity around what is truly meant by participants when they discuss diversity efforts.

Implications

The present study has implications for future research, policy, and practice, especially in light of the recent Supreme Court decision to ban race-conscious admissions in higher education (Hurley, 2023) and state-level attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (Chronicle Staff, 2023). Concerning research, the findings call attention to the need to continue to incorporate faculty voice in higher education research and listen to their experiences to better understand the complexities of their work, which consequently impact students. Qualitative research around diversity work at the master's level in higher education institutions should continue to explore what barriers faculty and administrators face in carrying out diversity efforts, and ways to lower those barriers. Research should also further probe the role discretion (and resistance) plays in the implementation of diversity policies and the ability of faculty to engage in diversity work. Given legislative and legal actions to curb or outright ban diversity work across the country, researchers should also consider how faculty approach engaging in diversity efforts in restrictive policy environments. The University of Southern California Higher Education Faculty wrote an opinion article on this topic in *Inside Higher Education*, which

provides a starting point for this important discussion (University of Southern California Higher Education Faculty, 2023).

In terms of policy and practice, this study's findings underscores that a desire to engage in diversity work is not sufficient; instead, faculty need the resources and support to carry out these efforts, while not worrying that engaging in such work could affect their own professional futures. If truly committed to diversification of their programs, universities should consider how to support and make space for faculty to be active diversity agents. This must include supporting untenured faculty who are balancing a host of competing priorities. Additionally, diversity efforts should be borne not by one individual, but rather by an entire department, and goals around increasing diversity should be incorporated into strategic plans and daily habits within the institution (Ahmed, 2012; Kezar et al., 2008; Liera, 2023). Aims around diversity should also be explicit in what they are trying to achieve and who they are targeting. As explored in this study, the term "diversity" can apply to a broad array of characteristics and identities. Being clear about what "a diverse study body" means can help push toward the realization of diversity goals.

But these recommendations are not straightforward in the context of the current legal and policy landscape. University administrators, admissions officers, and faculty will need to think creatively about how to continue to build diverse classes of students, while complying with laws that undermine diversity work. Leaders should also resist overreacting to the decision—a decision that still allows for race-conscious affirmative action in the areas of recruitment and campus programming. Universities should still encourage this work and avoid applying the decision to all aspects of campus work and life. Additionally, the Supreme Court decision specifically allowed for universities to still consider applicants' racial backgrounds when reviewing applications, if the applicant offers insight into how their racial background shaped

their life (Davis, 2023). Application and interview questions that probe at individuals' identities may become more important than ever, and as explained by active diversity agents in this study, these questions will need to be incorporated into every aspect of the admissions process. Others have proposed adversity scores as the way forward in a post-affirmative action environment (Saul, 2023); yet, these scores face criticism, both for their lack of specificity around the particular consequences of racial identity in the United States and for the requirement that students relive and share their trauma as a way to gain access to higher education institutions (Waller-Bey, 2021). As the implications of the Supreme Court decision become clearer and research continues to evolve, university leaders can look to leading scholars in this field to think about new approaches to diversity work.

Contributions

This study represents an important contribution to our understanding around the processes in the higher education space around school counseling that might limit the diversity of school counselors in the field. Despite existing evidence around how other educational programs recruit for diversity, no evidence focuses specifically on counseling master's programs, which we would expect to have differences from other types of graduate-level programs. By speaking with faculty who play important roles in the recruiting, admissions, and retainment processes in counseling master's programs, we gain a better understanding of how their work affects the diversity of graduate students within the field, which may in turn lend insight into the lack of racial diversity in school counselors across the country.

Concluding Statement

The school counseling profession has failed to diversify, racially and in terms of gender identity, in the past several decades. This study highlights some of the ways in which faculty in

school counseling master's programs think about and prioritize (or not) diversity work, offering

insight into challenges and opportunities for the future.

CHAPTER 3

"Everybody calls me for everything": A Phenomenological Investigation of Mississippi Black School Counselors' Lived Experiences

Introduction

School counselors work in nearly every school in the country and play a central role within the U.S. education system. They wear many hats, from offering college advising and assisting with class scheduling to providing mental health supports (Bryan et al., 2011; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; McKillip et al., 2012). Additionally, they are often called on to perform a range of tasks outside their job responsibilities (Blake, 2020). Given that research indicates that school counselors impact student outcomes—from academic success measures, like GPAs, to college decisions—it is important to understand how counselors experience their jobs (MacAllum et al., 2007; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Carrell & Hoekstra, 2014; Goodman-Scott et al., 2018; Lapan et al., 1997; Mulhern, 2022; J. Carey & Dimmitt, 2012). However, few studies focus explicitly on counselors' lived experiences and even less is known about the experiences of Black school counselors. This study aims to understand Black counselors' lived experiences working in school in Mississippi, how they specifically serve Black students, and what promising practices they might have developed that can increase Black student achievement.

Research suggests that counselors often view their work as requiring a color-evasive approach (Gast, 2016), which is defined by Annamma et al. (2017) as the denial of race as a critical factor to consider in everyday life and in individuals interact; yet, as outlined by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and other critical race scholars, race is a central feature of any education-related issue: "As we attempt to make linkages between critical race theory and education, we contend that the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system" (pg. 58). Indeed, the scholarship of critical race theorists, in part, motivates

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the current study as it positions race as vital to exploring the perspectives and work of Black counselors who are minoritized in the counseling profession and often pushed to the margins, despite the important role they likely play in supporting Black students.

The need for research on Black school counselors' lived experiences is especially important in the context of the counseling profession, which has articulated a clear need for increased diversity among counselors. For example, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), a professional group for school counselors, hired a Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the first time in 2020 in response to an internal report that asserted "the organization needed to double down on its work to end inequities in higher education and foster a more inclusive and diverse membership" (*National Association for College Admission Counseling,* 2022). Additionally, another school counseling professional group, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), issued a public diversity statement in 1988 that it continually updates ("The School Counselor and Cultural Diversity," 2021). Despite these calls for increased diversity, there is little evidence on how school counselors from racially diverse backgrounds experience their roles in schools.

Evidence from other professions indicates that racially minoritized individuals in workplaces can face higher rates of turnover, dissatisfaction, disconnection from colleagues, and fatigue (Smith & Calasanti, 2005; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Sloan et al., 2013; Bristol, 2020). In fact, a survey of school counselors found that counselors of color were in the highest stress group and more likely to respond that they planned to leave the profession (McCarthy et al., 2010). These patterns are troubling given how important counselors of color, including Black counselors, are to the success of students of color who are often marginalized in the U.S. education system (Yosso, 2005; McKillip et al., 2012; National Center for Education Statistics,

2018; Stanford's Center for Education Policy Analysis, 2022; Cooper & Liou, 2007; Carey, 2014).

Understanding how Black school counselors engage with Black students—students who generally face more barriers to academic success and college enrollment (Perry & Steele, 2004; Vega et al., 2015; Morales, 2014; Gavins, 2009; Harper et al., 2009)—can identify practices that may help these students thrive. The lack of research around Black school counselors faces renewed significance with new research suggesting that non-White students have better academic and postsecondary outcomes when matched with non-White counselors, as compared to matching with White counselors (Mulhern, 2022). As the enrollment in U.S. public schools continues to racially diversify, with the percentage of non-White students now in the majority, it is vital to learn more about how Black school counselors engage with Black students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022a).

This study aims to add to the scant literature on Black school counselors' lived experiences and how they interact with Black students by focusing on Black school counselors in Mississippi—the state with the highest proportion of Black students in the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022a). The findings and analysis are informed by a conceptual framework that draws upon the funds of knowledge theory, BlackCrit, and political clarity, which collectively deepen our understanding of Black school counselors' lived experiences. I employed a phenomenological approach, using both in-depth interviews and audio diaries of 6 counselors from different school districts and communities across the state. With an eye towards illuminating the lived realities of Black counselors and identifying promising practices they use to support Black students, the research questions are:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black school counselors working in Mississippi?

2. What might these experiences tell us about how Black counselors can support Black students?

Findings reveal the role of racial identity and community background that Black school counselors draw upon in their work to better serve students, particularly Black students. Yet, I also find that Black school counselors are at times both underutilized, especially when they are assigned non-counseling tasks, and exploited, often because of their deep funds of knowledge.

Literature Review

To better understand the motivation for this study and existing knowledge on school counselors and Black professionals working in schools, I describe the role of school counselors and existing evidence around the experiences of school counselors.

Role of School Counselors

Since the profession's inception in the 19th century as a response to the Industrial Revolution, the role of school counselors has shifted, oftentimes depending on broader societal priorities and needs (DeKrufy et al., 2013). Here, I provide an overview of how the roles of school counselors have been conceptualized over time. Although the profession began as one focused on vocational guidance, it has since expanded greatly, with counselors taking on the roles of mental health providers, college advisors, academic counselors, and more.

Concerted Gatekeepers

Originally, counseling was focused on vocational guidance, especially after the passage of the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act of 1917, which sought to place an emphasis on career-readiness for high school students and fund vocational training in schools (Carleton, 2002). From the early to mid-20th century, counselors were considered concerted gatekeepers, a concept first introduced by Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) in *The Educational*

Decisionmakers. The concerted gatekeepers model placed an immense amount of power in counselors' hands, especially around tracking at the secondary level and access to opportunities at the post-secondary level. For some, the concept of counselors as gatekeepers has persisted. For example, a qualitative case study in 2004 indicated, "At times, guidance counselors actually served as impediments to college access" (Corwin et al., 2004, pg.449). However, other theorists have pushed back against this model, arguing that pushback from parents during the mid-1900s forced counselors to shift their interactions with students.

Importantly, the profession at that time was a White institutional space, steeped in White supremacy. In Cicourel and Kitsuse's study of interviews with over 100 counselors, students, and parents, counselors embraced their role as gatekeepers. They told the researchers that "ability" was the key indicator that differentiated placement of students into classes and pathways (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963, pg.63). However, when the authors disaggregated student data based on test scores, they found that students' placement could not have solely been defined by test scores, due to inconsistencies. They later show through triangulation of student data, observations, and interviews that counselors instead relied on a number of other indicators— many of which are subjective-—including perceived social class, level of parental engagement, race, or teacher referrals to make critical decisions about the types of guidance to provide to students. In other words, despite claiming that their decisions were based on quantifiable facts, counselors often advised students based on deeply held biases about certain student characteristics, such as race.

Institutional and Empowerment Agents

Given pushback to the immense power of school counselors during the mid- to late 1900s, evidence suggests that counselors started to avoid the gatekeeping role. Rosenbaum et al.

(1996) write, "While the research from the 1960s and 1970s indicates that counselors overtly directed students away from college, recent studies imply that counselors' behavior has changed" (Rosenbaum et al., 1996, pg. 261). School counselors became not only career advisors, but academic guidance counselors, mental health professionals, and a source of knowledge around college opportunities for students. Spurred by the increased burdens on counselors, the profession also witnessed a rise in privatization and outsourcing of school counseling jobs (Dykeman, 1995).

While in theory this expansion of roles within schools and the counseling profession might have led to a decrease in inequities, an uneven distribution of services may have only perpetuated counselors' roles in reinforcing systemic inequities. Tyack (1992) explains that even though the new services provided by schools were initially aimed at low-income students, the actual implementation of those services lead to more privileged students benefitting from the services. Other scholars argue that the institutionalization of these services never actually occurred in most schools. As two researchers noted, "While schools have been willing to 'house' the social services, they have effectively resisted 'adopting' them" (Sedlak & Schlossman, 1985, pg. 372).

It was in part due to these changes that led to Stanton-Salazar's introduction of counselors as institutional agents in 1997. Rooted in an institutionalist perspective, this theory was designed to provide a framework for understanding how racially minoritized students were socialized. The theory viewed counselors as agents that had the power to decide which students would receive services and how those services would be delivered. Specifically, institutional agents are defined as individuals "who exert various degrees of control over institutional resources, such as bureaucratic influence, career-oriented information, and opportunities for

specialized training or mentorship" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, pg. 4). This theory also relies on the concept of social capital—or connections and resources stemming from personal networks that provides access to opportunities—as it focuses on the potential social and cultural capital that counselors are able to provide students.[13] In order for students to succeed, they need access to social networks that allow individuals to gain access to opportunities that promote economic and academic mobility (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Counselors are institutional agents who can grant access to these important social networks to minoritized youth who might otherwise not be aware of or have access to such social capital.

Stanton-Salazar built upon this theory in 2010 using concepts found in social work, defining counselors as not only institutional agents, but as potential *empowerment* agents that could reduce barriers that minoritized students face in accessing post-secondary options (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). However, Stanton-Salazar also recognized that institutional agents could impose barriers as well, noting that "trust can be institutionalized when the roles of school agents are 'inconsistent, contradictory and ambiguous'" (as quoted in Holland, 2015, pg. 247). Additionally, he wrote that institutional actors who failed to see their own role in the reproduction of social stratifications could push students to simply accept dominant cultures and privileged forms of social capital, rather than critically challenging those things taken for granted in our society (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). All counselors were institutional agents, but only those that recognized the inherent biases within the system could become empowerment agents.

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[13] I caution here that many of Stanton-Salazar's perspectives on social capital require a deficit framework for minoritized students, which is problematic and can hinder efforts to advance diversity and equity.

Impartial Cultivators

Not everyone was as convinced of the power of school counselors. In 1985, Powell et al. proposed a new theory of counselors as reactive and relatively passive individuals, who had fled so far in the opposite direction from their role as gatekeepers that now they were mere conduits of information around college-going and post-high school career options (Powell, 1985). This theory was later coined "impartial cultivators" by Smith in 2011 (pg. 794). In Powell et al.'s study (1985), multiple students note that counselors only reach out in extreme cases of emotional disturbance, or something similar. Otherwise, it was up to students to seek out information from the counselor. And even then, counselors were less than helpful in students' perspectives, as they "imagined their job as only providing crisis care" (Powell, 1985, pg. 48). The authors identified heavy workloads as one of the key problems that prevented counselors from providing more proactive help, in addition to the move away from acting as gatekeepers.

Rosenbaum et al. built upon the theory of impartial cultivators in 1996 when they interviewed 27 counselors in eight Chicago high schools. From these interviews, the authors conclude, "Counselors do not like giving students bad news about their future prospects, do not want the responsibility, and do not believe they have the authority to do it, especially when parents have opposing views" (pg. 257). Instead, counselors focused on encouraging all students to go to college, despite having concerns that such an approach could actually have negative ramifications for students in the future. While Rosenbaum et al. (1996) did not wish for the era of counselors as gatekeepers, they did worry that the loss of authority within the counseling profession could leave students "haplessly failing out of college without any forewarning" (pg. 278). Consequently, the authors saw potential problems from the inability of counselors to speak freely and honestly with students about realistic pathways for the future.

Lucas (2001) indicated that the withdrawal of counselors' overt guidance to students has led to student choice dominating the college decision-making process. He cited the growing evidence of counselors' passivity, noting, "Evidence suggests that students make enrollment decisions with comparatively less counselor input than previously, as counselors have retreated from the proactive role they formerly played" (Lucas, 2001, pg. 1649). However, despite what might seem advantageous about the increase of student choice, Lucas warned that this change has made students' social background matter even more.

The rise of the theory of counselors as impartial cultivators also coincides with the increasing realization that counselors have too heavy workloads, a lack of sufficient support, and ambiguous roles. Today's counselors are often uncertain about what their roles are in the school (DeKrufy et al., 2013; Hatch, 2002; Bryant, 2018; Butler & Constantine, 2005; Givens, 2009; Blake, 2018; Clemens et al., 2009). Hatch wrote, "Part of the problem rests in the controversy regarding what school counseling is supposed to produce, whether it is social adjustment, academic achievement, or career preparation as the profession came into existence through vocational counseling" (Hatch, 2002). In some cases, school leadership requires counselors to produce all of these outcomes, which leads to overworked, under-resourced counselors. While their jurisdiction expands, school counselors actually face diminished authority due to their diffuse and unclear roles (Blake, 2020)—offering further support to the idea that they remain impartial cultivators with little power over students' decision-making, especially as related to college choice.

Mediators of Opportunity

While the theory of school counselors as impartial cultivators has not vanished, there have been new theories proposed that aim to better describe school counselors in present day. In

2011, a new theoretical perspective was introduced by Dr. Vicki Smith, chair of the sociology department at University of California, Davis. She perceives counselors as mediators of opportunity. From this viewpoint, counselors "are intermediaries whose work is shaped and constrained by historically specific conditions that shift over time" (Smith, 2011, pg. 802). This perspective draws upon literature from the sociology of work, particularly around the definition of an intermediary, and illuminates parallels between counselors and other professionals who serve clients. Smith argued that six key trends have shaped counselors' work and led to this role as mediators of opportunity: increased caseloads; prevalence of college information from other sources; increased college enrollment rates and major demographic shifts; the rise of professional credentialing for school counselors; the profession's commitment to multiculturalism; and the focus on evidence-based results and accountability (Smith, 2011, pg. 797). She argued that while some counselors may still act as gatekeepers, this is not universally true, especially with the rise of personalized counseling.

The shifting theoretical perspectives on the role of school counselors throughout history grant us some insight into how counselors function within schools. While much of these theories do not focus explicitly on race, they do at times suggest that a counselor or student's racial identity could affect their roles. Better understanding how school counselors experience their work, especially Black school counselors, is critical to not only expanding upon and refining these theories, but also in explaining how structural components affect school counselors' roles.

The Role of Identity in School Counselors' Experiences

Despite the wealth of theoretical evidence around school counselors' roles, few studies highlight the voices of school counselors themselves and how their personal identities may shape their professional roles on a daily basis. In this section, I review the existing evidence that

centers the voices and experiences of school counselors, with particular attention to those studies that prioritize counselors of color.

In 2013, Dollarhide and colleagues used an exploratory approach to investigate the professional experiences of school counselors of color, a topic they noted had not yet been covered in the existing literature. The research team interviewed 19 counselors, 12 of whom self-identified as African American or Black. Some of the counselors noted their racial identity was a strength within their schools, explaining that their racial identity, which was visible to students and parents, made interacting with parents and students of color easier. The counselors of color also noted that they were able to serve as advocates and leaders in their roles, especially around increasing access for underserved students.

But the participants also noted that their racial identity led to costs for them at work. For example, all of the participants described negative experiences specifically related to their racial identity, "including bias and disrespect from teachers, students, parents, and administration" (Dollarhide et al., 2013, pg. 57). These negative, racially-charged events "exacted a high emotional cost…and were linked to reports of self-doubt, disempowerment, anger, and frustration" (Dollarhide et al., 2013, pg. 57). This study takes an important first step at considering the experiences of school counselors of color; however, the authors note the limitation of their study in having the majority of their participants come from a single district. The current study extends the work of Dollarhide et al. (2013) by providing an in-depth account of the experiences of Black counselors.

Clayton's (2019) qualitative research on the experiences of counselors who assist students in the college admissions process is another important addition to the literature around counselors' experiences. This study focused on the ability of school counselors to provide social

capital to students, drawing upon Stephan's (2013) model of social capital in college advising spaces. However, this study has limitations in the context of thinking about race, as only one participant is a person of color ("Adele," who identifies as Hispanic). Moreover, there is no insight into how Adele's racial identity affects her work as a school counselor. Yet, the study still offers some insight into how personal identity can shape counselors' experiences and approaches to work. One of the counselors interviewed in the study is a first-generation college student, and she speaks about using her own background to relate to the students she advises (Clayton, 2019, pg. 1413). In speaking about their work, the participants noted the impact the context of the school has on their work, the wide array of service they provide to students, and the need for increased training and professional development (Clayton 2019).

More recently, Savitz-Romer and colleagues (2021) explored how the pandemic shaped counselors' experiences through a mixed-methods study that utilized survey data and focus groups. Drawing upon role theory in organizational literature, the authors find that counselors faced significant challenges to doing their work during the pandemic, such as a shift in their roles to a greater focus on students' mental health and wellbeing to a feeling that they were not receiving the needed support from administrators. Sometimes, these challenges existed before the pandemic but were only amplified by the crisis. Similar to findings from other studies, participants highlighted the amount of time spent on non-counseling tasks, saying, "My role has changed from being a counselor to being just a secretary" (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021, pg. 10). In speaking to counselors about how they experienced their work during the pandemic, the researchers offer insight into how counselors react to external crises.

Other research studies draw upon counselors' voices as a way to detail students' experiences, particularly with college pathways. Even though student outcomes are often at the

center of this work, they can reveal insights about counselors' experiences. For example, Perna (2008) explored the role counselors play in shaping college opportunity. At each of the 15 high schools included in the study, Perna interviewed counselors, as well as students, parents, and teachers. In these conversations, counselors expressed concern about their high caseloads, saying, "It's overwhelming and it's unreal—the counselor to student ratio. And, you know, everybody—the teacher, the administrators, the community—expects all the answers to come from the counseling office" (Perna, 2008, pg. 142). Counselors also discussed how limited time and resources impacts their ability to assist all students, especially English-language learners and other underserved students, even as they recognize that minoritized populations may have the most to gain from counselors' services since they may lack other resources. The study thus offered evidence around the stressors counselors face in their work and where they additional supports.

Similarly, Farmer-Hinton and colleagues (2006) spoke to five school counselors—three of who identified as Black—in a single school to explore the role of school counselors in assisting Black students on the path to college. The counselors spoke about the importance of creating a college-going climate, especially given that many of the students they served had "limited experience and knowledge about college as a viable option" (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006, pg. 113). The interviews revealed the multiple roles that counselors were juggling to help Black students prepare for college, from providing extracurricular activities and resources, like college field trips, to addressing family and social needs of students.

As this small body of literature on counselors' experiences continues to grow, it is vital that Black school counselors' experiences are explored, especially given calls for an increase in diversity within the profession and the changing demographics of students in U.S. schools.

Without understanding Black school counselors' experiences, we lack the necessary information around obstacles—and wins—they experience in their daily work, as well as best practices they use to better serve Black students. Given that no existing study to my knowledge explicitly focuses only on Black school counselors' lived experiences, this study aims to fill that gap in a first step to increasing knowledge around how Black school counselors experience their work and how those experiences shape their own perceptions of their work as well as how they interact with Black students.

<div align="center">

Theoretical Framework

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I draw upon the funds of knowledge theory in order to conceptualize Black school counselors' funds of knowledge—knowledge that stems from their racial and cultural identities and experiences. Here, I describe the origin of the theory, its use in education research, and its contrast to traditional deficit frameworks. I supplement this theory with BlackCrit and political clarity, which assist me in interpreting findings in the context of structural racism and anti-Blackness, in particular.

Funds of Knowledge

The funds of knowledge theory was popularized in the education sector by Norma Gonzalez, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti in their book, *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*. The authors begin the book by outlining the theory's central premise: "People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (Gonzalez et al., 2006, pg. ix-x). The funds of knowledge theory recognizes the wealth of knowledge individuals bring to situations based on their own experiences and backgrounds, which are often influenced by cultural and historical contexts.

Originally, "funds of knowledge" was used in anthropology to explain the household economy and the resources at play within that economy (Wolf, 1966). However, it has since expanded to education circles, where scholars have typically theorized students and their home communities as funds of knowledge from whom teachers can learn. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2006) outlined the pedagogical approaches that teachers could utilize once they tapped into the wealth of their students and their students' communities. They focus on students' lived experiences and the cultural practices that occur within their households as funds of knowledge that build stronger teacher-student relationships and improve educational outcomes and equity (Gonzalez et al., 2006).

Funds of knowledge stands in direct contrast to deficit frameworks, which have historically minimized or ignored the cultural wealth and other important skills and knowledge that minoritized communities bring to the table (Hogg, 2011). Instead, the funds of knowledge theory posits that these communities are an incredible source of knowledge. To harness that knowledge, teachers must research the communities of the students they teach to be able to engage in culturally responsive teaching that will better serve students (Andrews & Yee, 2006). Some researchers have begun to apply the funds of knowledge theory to different actors; for example, Hedges (2012) proposes the idea of teachers' funds of knowledge, which are primarily gained through informal experiences, often outside of the classroom. Additionally, Stanton-Salazar has conceptualized institutional funds of knowledge, specifically in the context of students' aspirations for and access to postsecondary education (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

In the current study, I use the funds of knowledge central premise to reimagine Black school counselors' experiences and expertise that they bring to their work. As indicated by

Dollarhide et al.'s (2013) work, school counselors of color bring a host of life experiences and cultural knowledge to their roles that can shape both their interactions with students and coworkers and improve their ability to build strong relationships with students, particularly students of color. Due to their unique, abundant wells of knowledge, Black school counselors can serve students of color, especially Black students, in a different, and arguably more effective, way than White counselors. Understanding how Black school counselors experience their roles can not only highlight their voices, but also grant us insight into the practices they use to serve Black students. By using the funds of knowledge framework, I can make meaning of the experiences and resources that Black counselors may leverage that has not yet been thoroughly examined in the literature.

My application of the funds of knowledge theory can aid in understanding how counselors' identity and experiences inform their work and shape their interactions with students. However, it is limited in its ability to help me interpret the structural forces that influence counselors' work. For this study, the funds of knowledge theory cannot offer insight into the impact of anti-Blackness in the educational system and broader U.S. society. Specifically, the funds of knowledge theory has limited capacity to answer the study's research questions, which focus on Black school counselors' experiences in Mississippi schools.

BlackCrit

I supplement the funds of knowledge theory with BlackCrit, which offers insight into why "blackness continues to matter...[and] precisely how Black bodies become marginalized, disregarded, and disdained" (Dumas & ross, 2016, pg. 417). BlackCrit was created as a response to Critical Race Theory (CRT), as it became clear that the specific experience of being Black in the United States requires attention that cannot be relegated to the broader category of race as

considered in CRT. Dumas and ross (2016) explain that anti-Blackness is "not simply racism against Black people...[but] refers to a broader antagonistic relationship blackness and (the possibility of) humanity" (pg. 429). Anti-Blackness is the United States is prevalent, particularly within the education system. The U.S. education system was built for White people, on the understanding that White people had access to spaces and privileges based on their racial identity—spaces and privileges that were not open to Black individuals. BlackCrit can assist in interrogating White supremacy and White spaces. We can see the consequences of anti-Blackness in the historic and continued relegation of Black students to under resourced schools, the decision to place the majority of the burden of busing on Black students, the over-criminalization of Black children within schools, and in school curriculum, just to name a few (Meckler, 2020; Mallett, 2015; Grant et al., 2020). In fact, Dumas (2014) has characterized U.S. schools as a "site of black suffering."

Importantly, BlackCrit also centers the importance of love for Black children—a counternarrative to the violence borne by Black bodies at the hands of White people within the education system (Dumas & ross, 2016). Just as the funds of knowledge theory recognizes the wealth people have based on their identities and experiences, BlackCrit celebrates the ingenuity of Black educators in the face of anti-Blackness (e.g. Bell & Sealey-Ruiz, 2023). Warren & Coles (2020) write that Black people have a long history of "making a way out of no way, finding or creating place, symbol, time, and opportunity to dream and plot and heal and love one another in a world that thrives upon their death and dying" (pg. 393).

Using BlackCrit in this study is critical to understanding how Black counselors experience their work—work that takes place in Mississippi schools, sites that often perpetuate anti-Blackness. It helps me interpret why Black counselors face specific challenges in schools

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that their White colleagues do not encounter, and how systems and structures of anti-Blackness prevent Black counselors from realizing their full potential within their professional roles.

Political Clarity

I also draw upon the theory of political clarity: a "pedagogical consciousness about the historical and institutional nature of oppression and an understanding of teaching as a political, ethical, and relational endeavor" (McKinney de Royston, 2020, pg. 380). I adapt this theory, traditionally used in teacher research, to my analysis of Black counselors' lived experiences. Political clarity discusses the ways in which Black educators are aware of the structural racism that Black students face, and they use that understanding to shape how they serve and interact with their students. In fact, Beauboeuf–Lafontant (1999) argues that Black educators "use their knowledge of society's inequities and their influence to empower their marginalized students" (pg. 702).

Drawing upon this theory helps me interpret why Black school counselors behave in certain ways—for example, why counselors might choose to take action, challenge the status quo in their school, or devote additional time to Black students. Existing research using the theory of political clarity finds that Black educators are not naïve to their challenges Black students face (e.g. McKinney de Royston et al., 2021); this fact illuminates their actions and experiences. I suggest that a similar phenomenon is present for Black school counselors.

Together, the three theories—funds of knowledge, BlackCrit, and political clarity—allow for a more nuanced and critical understanding of Black school counselors' lived experiences. These theories allow me to interpret the findings in the context of social identities, anti-Blackness, structural racism, and other larger structures that impact the daily work experiences of Black school counselors working in Mississippi.

Methodology

This study contributes to the existing literature on school counselors through a phenomenological analysis of Black school counselors that work in Mississippi public schools. In this section, I discuss the phenomenology and describe key aspects of my methodological approach including sampling and participants and data collection and analysis procedures. I conclude with a discussion of my positionality and strategies for enhance the trustworthiness and rigor of the study.

Phenomenology

To answer the research questions of this study, I use a phenomenological approach, which explores "the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pg. 75). In other words, "Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (van Manen, 2007, pg.9). In this case, I was interested in exploring the lived experiences of Black school counselors who work in Mississippi (the phenomenon), which made phenomenology well-suited for answering my research questions. Speaking with Black school counselors in Mississippi through interviews allowed me insight into their everyday actions and how those actions can inform practice around Black student achievement.

Importantly, phenomenology "succeeds when it lets us see that which shines through, that which tends to hide itself" (van Manen 2007, pg. 130). Phenomenology tends to focus on a small number of participants, which allows for an in-depth exploration of their lived experiences. This method allowed me to capture the true essence of what it means to be a Black school counselor in Mississippi, something that has to this point remained "hidden" within the existing body of research. It also allowed me as the researcher to enter the space – schools in Mississippi –

without preconceptions of what it means to be a Black school counselor or how those individuals experience their daily lives.

Phenomenology relies heavily on the place in which participants live and work (Groenewald, 2004). In this case, the place of focus is the state of Mississippi, which serves the highest density of Black students in the United States. While phenomenological studies primarily rely on interviews with individuals, I supplemented the interviews with audio diaries, which counselors recorded weekly for one month. As I will discuss below, qualitative diaries can be helpful to understand the daily activities of participants and how participants perceive certain events (Cassell & Symon, 2004).

Sampling and Recruitment

In this study, my selection process focused on a targeted group, based on racial identity, given my aim to understand the lived experiences of Black school counselors working in Mississippi. However, the selection process was inclusive within the community of Mississippi Black school counselors in terms of seniority, gender, and other important dimensions of one's identity.

I first sent an email with a recruitment flyer to a counselor membership organization. I asked leaders of this organization to share the information through their email lists with Mississippi Black school counselors and provided my contact information so interested individuals could reach out to me about participation. My main form of sampling was criterion sampling, which is when "researchers look for participants who have shared an experience, but vary in characteristics and in their individual experiences" (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). This form of sampling is the most common approach used in phenomenological research. School counselors were assessed for inclusion/exclusion based on the following criteria:

- Identify as Black/African American

- Work at a public school in Mississippi

A short survey accompanying the consent form ensured these criteria were met prior to conducting an interview. My final sample size includes six participants. Each participant was compensated with a $25 Amazon gift card for their time participating in the interview and with another $25 Amazon gift card for completion of 4 diary entries (for a total of $50 in Amazon gift cards). I also utilized snowball sampling, asking participants at the end of interviews with whom else they suggest I speak (Parker et al., 2019). Together, these sampling strategies helped me recruit a diverse sample of Black school counselors from across the state, based on their gender, years of experience, grade levels served, region of the state they worked in, and specialization within counseling (e.g., students with disabilities).

Participants

All six participants work as counselors in Mississippi public schools and identify as Black/African American. To ensure confidentiality, I created a pseudonym for each participant. I provide more detail about each participant here, and below in Table 3.1.

Mariah is a Biracial woman, with one of her racial identities being Black, who works as a professional school counselor in a majority Black middle school in Mississippi (although she notes that the majority of the staff are White). She is licensed as both a social worker and a school counselor and has worked in various schools throughout her career. Mariah is especially interested in helping her students as they gain social skills, learn conflict resolution, and navigate adolescence. On average, she serves over 350 students. She grew up in Mississippi and has lived in the community where she works for many years.

Ruth is a Black woman who works as a professional school counselor in a majority White middle school in Mississippi. She is licensed as a school counselor. She previously worked as a teacher but has been in her current role for several years. While she originally got into counseling with a more mental health focus, she is also passionate about career guidance. Ruth serves approximately 300 students at any given time. She grew up in Mississippi.

Mia is a Black woman who works as a professional school counselor in a majority White middle school in Mississippi. She is licensed as a school counselor. She has worked at a variety of schools over her career and is particularly focused on providing socio-emotional support to students. Currently, she serves approximately 250 students, which she notes is a massive decrease from her former schools, where she would work with over 600 students at any given time. She grew up in Mississippi.

Terrence is a Black man who works as a professional school counselor in a majority Black elementary school in Mississippi. He has advanced degrees in counseling. Terrence has worked with students in high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools. Now, he specifically works with students with special needs, or students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), in elementary schools. He was born and raised in Mississippi.

Damien is a Black man who works as a professional school counselor in a majority Black elementary school in Mississippi. He is a licensed school counselor. Previously, he worked as a teacher. Much of his work is focused on emotional support and screening for mental health challenges. At any given time, Damien is serving 350 students. He was born and raised in Mississippi.

Tiana is a Black woman who works as a professional school counselor in a majority Black elementary school in Mississippi, although at times, she also other schools in the district.

Her expertise is in mental health counseling. She has been working as a counselor for several years and focuses on social emotional learning and students with special needs. For Tiana, religion plays an important role in her motivation for her work. She was born and raised in Mississippi.

Table 3.1: Participants

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	School Level	Racial Makeup of the Students at the School
Mariah	Female	Middle school	Majority Black
Ruth	Female	Middle school	Majority White
Mia	Female	Middle school	Majority White
Terrence	Male	Elementary school	Majority Black
Damien	Male	Elementary school	Majority Black
Tiana	Female	Elementary school	Majority Black

Data Collection

Interviews

Once a counselor agreed to take part in the study, he or she participated in a semi-structured virtual interview. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio and video recorded over Zoom, then transcribed. The interview protocol developed for this study was shaped in part by preliminary findings from a multi-case study analysis of Black students' college pathways and the effect of COVID-19 on those pathways of which I support. In addition, I conducted informational interviews with Black school counselors (separate from the participants in my study) to get their perspectives on the protocol. This provides some evidence that these questions are a good way to "measure" the experiences of Black school counselors working in Mississippi, which strengthens the validity of the study. These interviews gave me insight into the lived experiences of Black school counselors (RQ #1), as well as how these counselors interact with Black students (RQ #2).

The protocol focused on the counselor's background, how they were recruited for and applied for their current job, their current responsibilities (daily activities at work), and their interactions with Black students. The interview protocol also included text for the researcher to share with each participant at the beginning of the interview about the general plan for the interview and confidentiality assurances. The protocol used to guide interviews can be found in Appendix D.

Audio Diaries

To complement the interviews, the study employed diary methods, also called experience sampling. While interviews provide an initial understanding of the lived experiences of Black school counselors in Mississippi, phenomenology relies on a particularly deep understanding of these lived experiences, making diary methodology ideal. Data collected from diary methods provided more context for how the counselors navigate their jobs and allowed them to recount specific moments that may be difficult to recall during an interview or after a significant amount of time has passed. These data speak specifically to the lived experiences of Black school counselors, which is the primary aim of the study. I found that data collected from the diary entries were more focused on emotional reactions to their daily work experiences, whereas the interviews revealed more about their job responsibilities and how they serve students. In particular, burnout and emotional labor emerged more strongly as themes in the diary entries, as compared with interview data.

Originating in the field of psychology, diary methods intend to capture data about the daily lives of individuals (Hektner et al., 2007). Researchers in psychology began using this method in the 1980s as a way to challenge assumptions about how people experience daily life and to track moods of individuals, including indicators around health and anxiety (Gunthert &

Wenze, 2012). Importantly, these data are self-reported. Diary methods are often paired with other methodologies, such as interview approaches, as they "permit the examination of reported events and experiences in their natural, spontaneous context, providing information complementary to that obtainable by more traditional designs" (Reis et al., 2000, as cited in Bolger et al., 2003, pg. 580). Combining interview and diary methodology is a common approach called diary-interview methodology (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977).

Specifically, diary methods can be helpful when researchers seek to understand daily activities of participants or how participants perceive certain events, which is the intended goal of this study (Cassell & Symon, 2004). Diary methods also are advantageous given they are completed close to when the participant has a certain experience, thus "greatly reduc[ing] retrospection bias that is associated with usual survey design" (Iida et al., 2012). Diary methods have been used extensively to explore issues in education, especially in educational psychology. Specifically, they are often used when studying racialized perceptions and experiences. For example, Cheeks and colleagues (2020) employed daily diaries to examine racial discrimination and socialization in African American students. Citing a number of recent studies that use similar methods, Cheeks et al. argues that daily diaries methods are useful in exploring experiences that vary based on context (Cheeks et al., 2020). Diary methods can also be used to identify within-person changes over time. Seaton and Iida (2019) used daily diaries over the course of 2 weeks to explore whether within-person changes around racial centrality moderated racial discrimination experienced by Black youth. In Seaton and Iida's (2019) study they specifically note that daily diaries can be useful in capturing racialized experiences because they are less subject to retrospective bias. My study builds on the rich tradition of diary methods by expanding its use into school counselor research.

My study employs time-based diaries, meaning that participants responded to them based on a schedule (once per week) as opposed to immediately after a type of event occurred (Iada et al. 2012; Bolger et al., 2003). Mindful of the workload of counselors, I developed the diary instrument to elicit reports from participants once per week for a month rather than daily reports as has been used in other studies. This modified approach is supported by research that shows that compliance can be low when multiple daily assessments are required, especially when the study extends for several weeks (Broderick et al., 2003). I provided four prompts to guide the participants; however, I encouraged them to talk about whatever was on their mind that week. The four prompts were:

1. What worked well this week in your interactions with students?
2. What was a challenge you faced this week?
3. In your interactions with students from diverse backgrounds what were some themes that emerged from your conversations with them? (e.g., mental health concerns, excitement about college, indecisiveness about course selection)
4. If you could choose one word to describe your work week, what would it be?

I checked in with participants during the month in which they completed the diaries to gather feedback about their experiences and ensure the process was running smoothly (Cassell & Symon 2004). The audio diary recordings were transcribed using Rev.com.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved multiple rounds of coding and memoing that unfolded over several months. Immediately after completing interviews, I filled out a short reflection form to ensure that I captured any of my own immediate reactions or thoughts. Except for these short reflection forms, analysis of the interview and diary data were conducted simultaneously for each participant. For example, I did not begin coding and analyzing Participant A's interview data until he or she had completed the full month of diary entries. Once I had the data from both

methods, audio transcripts of interviews and diaries were cleaned and uploaded to NVivo. Data was coded using flexible coding, informed by Deterding and Waters' (2018) article that allows for "emergent" coding. Both index codes, which help tie the interview and diary data back to the interview protocol, and analytic codes, which combine emergent codes with pre-existing theories and literature were created (Deterding & Waters, 2018). For example, I included an index code of "non-counseling tasks," drawn from my interview protocol where I asked counselors about how much of their time was devoted to non-counseling responsibilities. However, as I coded the data, I added an emergent sub-code of "record keeping," as this was a non-counseling task that arose in the data. The same codebook was used for both interviews and diaries.

Once the iterative process of flexible coding was completed, I narrowed in my coding process to focus on the funds of knowledge theory which guided this study. Using Excel, I pulled quotes from interviews and audio diaries that exemplified the funds of knowledge theory. Throughout this process, I began to complicate the theory, as quotes arose that expanded upon specific aspects of that theory.

While NVivo was the main software used for coding and analyzing the data, I also used Excel to initially manage the data received from the diaries. This initial sorting of entries under key themes helped pull big ideas from the data before diving into the line-by-line coding process used in NVivo. In addition to coding the audio transcripts from the diary entries, I also used memoing to summarize each individual's diary entries, as laid out by Hyers (2018). These memos helped me reflect on each entry and organize my thoughts prior to writing the findings.

Limitations

As with any study, there are some limitations. The experiences of Black school counselors in Mississippi do not necessarily reflect the experiences of Black school counselors

working in other states. Mississippi has a unique culture, set of policies, political environment, and historical context that could influence how Black school counselors experience their roles. Similar research should be conducted in other states to see if there are any "universal" experiences across states of Black school counselors.

Establishing Trustworthiness and Rigor

Several techniques were used to strengthen the trustworthiness and rigor of the study. In the data collection part of the process, I sought participants from a range of geographic areas within Mississippi, as well as counselors that serve different roles within schools (e.g., mental health, academic, college advising). I also interviewed counselors that had a range of years of experience and worked at different grade levels, which serves as a form of environmental triangulation (Stahl & King, 2020). Interviewing individuals from different backgrounds ensured that a range of perspectives were captured. I engaged in methodological triangulation by collecting data through both interviews and audio diaries, which can help to establish patterns across participants and types of data (Stahl & King, 2020). Additionally, given that validity of qualitative research can be threatened by unchecked researcher bias, I used reflexive journaling to continually check my own privileges, biases, and identity (Cypress, 2017).

In the data analysis process, credibility was strengthened through the use of a form of member checking (E. Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). In this case, I sent each participant a copy of the drafted findings, highlighting sections where they were quoted. I asked them to read the findings and reflect on my use of their quotes in the paper. As much as possible, I use the participants' own words to ensure that I am faithfully communicating their lived experiences, rather than translating their experiences through my own perceptions. Even so, I asked

participants to let me know if any of the findings rang untrue for them, or if they felt I had misconstrued their sentiments.

Role of Researcher

As a researcher—particularly a White, cishet woman—I am cognizant that my social identity, biases, and lived experiences can affect the entire research process, from how I conceptualize research questions to how I conduct interviews to how I interpret findings. Using Milner (2007)'s work on dangers in research seen, unseen, and unforeseen, I have critically reflected on my role in this study, in my community, and in the research space in order to ensure that I am working diligently to "validate and give voice to people who have often been silenced, misinterpreted, misrepresented, and placed on the margins" (Milner, 2007). This is especially important given that this paper focuses on Black school counselors.

Growing up in the South presented a series of obstacles to me, as a progressive, non-religious individual, and those experiences with hatred (such as the slur spray painted on a political sign I made in middle school for our front yard) shaped my viewpoints. However, I have never faced discrimination in school or work due to the color of my skin or because of who I love. As I interacted with those who have different backgrounds than me throughout the interview process, I strove to remain open, accepting, non-judgmental, and aware of my own privilege.

I come to this research with a level of privilege that is not shared by the population with whom I am engaging in this research. Despite the robust support from my college counselor and my high school teachers, I felt unprepared when it came time to take my first exam at my undergraduate institution, the University of Mississippi. I began to wonder if other students had similar experiences to me, and that questioning led me and my peer to research college

preparation in Mississippi high schools. Having spent time conducting one-on-one interviews and focus groups in Mississippi public schools, I approached this paper with knowledge about the school system in Mississippi, as well as preconceptions about what the education system in the state looks like. My personal and professional experiences in Mississippi afforded me a level of familiarity with the people and structures within the state, but that familiarity is accompanied by biases. My experiences in Mississippi reflect the realities of my complex insider/outsider status, as explained by Merriam et al. (2001). Being a Southerner who previously lived and worked in Mississippi grants me some "insider" status; yet, as a progressive, non-religious, middle-class White woman who has since moved away from Mississippi and does not plan to move back, I retain many qualities of an "outsider" (Merriam et al., 2010).

I sought to continue examining my positionality, power, and representation, as outlined by Merriam et al. (2001), by using memoing to critically explore how my identity might be shaping the research. I also used bracketing, a tool that originated in phenomenology and is designed to facilitate the researcher's deep engagement with the work and identify biases that could affect the research. Specifically, I used reflexive journaling as my method of bracketing, which helps identify preconceptions throughout the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Together, these strategies are not meant to lead to a claim of complete objectivity or erase my preconceptions and identity; rather, they intend to ensure I am doing no harm in my work and remaining conscious of the ways in which my own identity shapes the research and findings.

Findings

Conversations with and audio diaries from the participants revealed that Black school counselors brought a wealth of knowledge to their roles, serving effectively as funds of knowledge that students and coworkers alike relied on for support. Yet, instances of

underutilization of Black school counselors' knowledge were demonstrated, especially in instances where school counselors were assigned extensive non-counselor tasks that took away from their one-on-one counseling time with students. On the other hand, there were also patterns of exploitation of Black school counselors' knowledge and backgrounds, such as when coworkers relied on the Black counselors to solve any instances of perceived misbehavior by Black students. Here, I lay out the role of Black school counselors' funds of knowledge, while complicating the theory with cases of both underutilization and exploitation.

Black School Counselors as Funds of Knowledge

The participants in this study brought not only expertise, but also knowledge—informed by their own backgrounds, experiences, and identities—to their roles in the schools. This knowledge manifested in a number of ways, from understanding the cultural behaviors displayed among students of color that were often misinterpreted by White colleagues to drawing on their own experiences growing up to build deep relationships with students. As funds of knowledge, Black school counselors could leverage their lived experiences to better serve students, particularly students of color.

Drawing Upon Aspects of Their Identities

The participants drew upon several aspects of their identities to serve as funds of knowledge that informed their interactions with Black students. I describe two aspects here in detail: community background and racial identity.

Community Background. Community background was central to how several of the counselors approached their students. Given that all the participants were raised in Mississippi, they drew connections between their own childhood experiences and the experiences of the students in the schools in which they worked. These shared experiences allowed them to better

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connect with students, particularly Black students, as they could relate to what students were experiencing. For example, Mariah, a Black woman who works in a majority Black middle school, explained:

> I can meet any of them anywhere because I come from a community like they are living in…Those experiences, being low [socioeconomic status], I can relate to. Yeah, my hair is straight today, but if I wet it, it's those thick, curly things…My experiences, like I said, I grew up in a community like they grew up in, so I know what it's like to... my shoes are dirty or I don't have enough of something.

Mariah noted that she grew up in similar circumstances to many of the students she engages with on a daily basis, which allows her a level of access and trust that she might not otherwise have. She expanded that this allowed her to meet students where they were, rather than trying to get them to meet her in a place they did not understand. By understanding what it is like to grow up at a low socioeconomic level in Mississippi as a Black individual, Mariah did not have to imagine what her students were going through; she could rely on her own lived experiences to inform how to best serve Black students in her care. Moreover, Mariah's own kids were raised in the community she works in, and she noted a particular investment in ensuring that students in that community succeed.

Being a parent in the communities in which they worked also helped counselors relate to and understand what Black students were experiencing. Several of the participants who are parents noted that they were involved in the school community in their parent role as well, which allows them another perspective for understanding how the schools run and what parent and family engagement is like. Terrence, a Black man who worked at a majority Black school, shared that he was very familiar with the district prior to beginning his role as a counselor there because

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he had served as a school counselor intern in that same district where he now worked. His experience in the district served as a fund of knowledge he could lean upon to better connect with the students he worked with, given his deep understanding of the broader school community.

Having connections to the broader community allowed counselors to leverage community resources. Counselors noted being able to make in-roads with community leaders, given their understanding of the structure of the community and the people who played a key role in it. These connections helped bring back resources to their schools and students, who could benefit from exposure to working professionals. Ruth, a Black woman who was particularly passionate about early career exposure for her middle school students, explained that the community became a source of experts to bring in for her students for mentoring programs and career fairs. Similarly, Terrence led the Career Day at his school and brought in Black professionals, leading to record-high engagement among students. He reflected:

> "I had a manager of the first Black-owned hotel and bistro here in [the city]...I had a few realtors and insurance workers, but they were African American women. I had the [local] police department to come by... they just happened to send somebody that was African American for that. I had a councilman to come and to speak and he's African American, as well... Everybody, almost everybody that was there, that was from the community, looked like them. And so again, I think it was just a different feel. The way the students were listening and interacting with them."

For students at this majority-Black middle school, they were excited to see examples of working professionals who shared their racial identity. By drawing upon his knowledge of and

connections within the community, Terrence was able to transform Career Day into an event that resonated with students.

Despite the positives associated with being from and/or intimately knowing the community in which they were working, one counselor identified a potential downside to that specific fund of knowledge. Tiana, a Black woman working in a majority Black elementary school, warned that "everybody know[ing] everybody" can negatively impact how school staff interact with students. She emphasized that students have their own identities, separate from that of their family members, and it was important to remember that distinction so as to not bring any biases or preconceptions to the students based on knowledge of their families.

Racial Identity. Racial identity was frequently mentioned by counselors as a fund of knowledge that they drew upon in their work with Black students. Shared experiences that stemmed from racial identity could serve as an entryway for Black counselors to open communication with Black students. While a conversation may start because the student comments on the cool sneakers that a counselor is wearing, that can then lead to more meaningful conversation around an issue troubling them in school or at home. As Damien, a Black man who works at a majority Black elementary school, described:

> "I had a student…he was thinking about growing locks and stuff. So he started talking to me about my hair. Like, 'Oh, why'd you do it? My mom won't let me get it.'…that conversation led into something else. There was a door opener. They felt comfortable just reconnecting on that level. And so that's one example."

Even without explicitly talking about their racial identities verbally, Black school counselors signaled to students that they were a source of knowledge on topics that stemmed from their racial identity—a fund of knowledge about cultural discussions and barriers that White

counselors simply could not possess. Damien later said, "Without me even opening my mouth...just the presence is a huge strength…from the student's perspective, and even parent perspective, some of them are flat out told me, 'Oh yeah, it's just good to see your presence in the school.'" In this way, Black school counselors also served as a fund of knowledge for their students in that they represented a professional career that now Black students believed could be open to them.

The importance of racial identity was amplified within majority White schools. In these White spaces, Black counselors could serve as a refuge for Black students, who otherwise might feel ostracized or alone in their experiences. Ruth, who works in a majority White school, discussed this, saying, "I think that at my school, like I told you there's very few minority students, so sometimes when they come talk to me, it makes them feel better to talk to someone that's the same as them." In this situation, Ruth is serving as a fund of knowledge for Black students who feel more comfortable speaking with her based on her shared racial identity. Without Ruth, Black students might feel unable to turn to any adults within the school, leaving them isolated.

Despite the prevalence of the topic of racial identity in my conversations with participants, a couple of the counselors were more reluctant to focus on race or talk extensively about the role of it. Although hesitant to focus on race, Mariah admitted that race does play a role in how she can relate to students, saying, "Let me say this; [race] does play a part in the... Just by history, just by the family practices culturally and even experiences, there will always be, 'I feel more comfortable with people that look like me,' kind of thing." While she underscored that race was only a part of the equation in building relationships with students, she acknowledged the historical and cultural components that stem from a shared racial identity that impact how

students perceive the staff within the school. Terrence cautioned that the focus on race often stemmed from the adults' mindsets, rather than how kids viewed the world. He said:

> "I think what I've come to find out is that children, especially those younger children, they seem to be more aware of care than they are anything...I've seen the kids, whether they're Black or they're White in our school, they don't even care about that type stuff... There is some significance in the outside appearance, but I think what comes from the inside, unless we've tainted them, is what matters the most."

Through his experiences working with elementary school children, Terrence believed that students are looking to see which adults care for them, rather than what racial identity they hold. He is not completely discounting the importance of race; but he is voicing concern that race is not the major indicator students are looking for in trusting adults.

Leveraging Funds of Knowledge to Serve Black Students

Equipped with funds of knowledge that stem from their community background and racial identity, Black school counselors were able to engage with and effectively serve Black students in their schools. The use of these funds of knowledge allowed them to both build trust with Black students and advocate for Black students.

Building Trust. Shared racial identities between counselors and students served as a foundation of trust from which counselors could build. Just as Black students showed higher levels of engagement after seeing working professionals who were Black, they reacted positively to seeing Black counselors in their schools. Rather than having to start from a place of distrust and work towards trust, there was automatically trust between Black students and Black counselors due to the shared racial identity. Mariah noted this trust, saying, "It's definitely important for our kids, for Black kids to see that there's someone Black that's helping them and

teaching them. I'm sure there's a level of trust when it comes to that because the person looks like them." This statement underscores the built-in trust that exists between Black counselors and students prior to any relationship-building work that occurs. Black counselors' racial identity is itself a fund of knowledge. Given that race is imbued with meaning by society, racial identity is accompanied by a set of cultural and historical norms and backgrounds that can build bonds of trust between those who share an identity.

This trust played a critical role in helping Black school counselors fulfill their roles to support Black students. Counseling requires that individuals are willing to be open and honest about their experiences, goals, and challenges; without trust, counselors will have little ability to effectively work with students. Tiana, who specializes in mental health, underscored that she could not do her job without gaining the trust of her elementary school students. Tiana remarked, "Once [students] trust you, they're very open, they'll tell you anything…All these children are looking for are people who are willing to listen, I don't care if they're telling you about the mud pies they made at home." She later added, "The main strategy that I use is [to] be interested, truly interested in what they're talking about…So one of the main strategies that I use is love, which I think is lacking." Tiana's focus on ensuring that students felt love from her was a useful strategy she cited in having a breakthrough with an autistic student, who was closed off to other staff at the school. Tiana's understanding of the importance of trust and genuine interest in her students' lived experiences allowed her to connect with students; while sometimes, students were simply revealing games they played or toys they wanted, at other times these conversations led to breakthroughs in a student's development or willingness to share what was going on outside the classroom. Her ability to build trust stemmed directly from her knowledge of the community and her students, cementing her as a key fund of knowledge within the school.

Mia, a Black woman working in a majority White school, spoke similarly about the need for trust in working with students in order to make progress. To build that trust, she had to draw upon her knowledge of being in their shoes, so that she could avoid coming off as overcritical. She explained:

"I try to genuinely show compassion for them and not be judgmental…I was raised like a lot of them were raised…So I think creating those relationships is what has the most impact. Just meeting them where they are and delivering compassion that they can feel so that they know that I am a person who really cares about them and what I'm telling them is actually beneficial."

Because she can relate to how some of the students are raised and the barriers they face, Mia is able to approach students with a kind of empathy that may be difficult for counselors who had not faced similar challenges to appreciate.

Advocating for Black Students. Sometimes, that shared understanding of cultural nuances helped Black school counselors advocate for, and in some cases, protect Black students. This phenomenon was more distinct in my conversations with counselors who worked at majority White schools, or with majority White teachers and staff. In those schools, counselors talked specifically about cases where Black students were subject to disproportionate discipline at the hands of White teachers or faced misunderstanding from White teachers regarding their behavior. One counselor who works in a majority White school, Mia, reflected:

"I feel like I advocate a lot for some of these kids who, it's like their teachers don't understand that a lot of the behaviors they see are cultural behaviors. The tone of voice that the kids use, it's just their culture. That's how their mothers talk, so that's why her voice is a little elevated or that's why she rolls her neck, and it's not meant to be

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disrespectful. So, I have a couple of kids, I feel like I've kind of saved them from being suspended or being disciplined just by having those conversations…with the staff…So I do feel that me being Black has allowed me to expose some things or highlight some things for teachers that maybe they didn't consider before."

Here, Mia highlights the knowledge she brings to her coworkers regarding cultural norms that might be misconstrued as misbehavior by White individuals. In doing this work of informing colleagues and having conversations with them about cultural norms, she is protecting Black students from unnecessary or excessive discipline. However, as I will discuss more below, the work of teaching her White colleagues about how to interact with Black students is an additional form of labor that disproportionately falls on Black professionals. Therefore, while Black students benefit from her extra labor, Mia herself does not receive compensation for doing that additional work.

Not all participants expressed that they had figured out the best way to protect Black students from harm perpetrated by White staff. Mariah—who works in a majority Black school, but with majority White colleagues—discussed the difficulties and sensitivities she grappled with while trying to advocate for her Black students. In one of her audio diaries, she said:

"There's still some complex issues that I'm dealing with to advocate for my students… [I'm] trying to figure out ways to advocate for my students without creating a worse situation for them in the classroom or jeopardizing a professional relationship with a colleague. But the main thing is just trying to advocate for those students…[so] they're comfortable without feeling afraid to ask questions or being yelled at."

Similar to Mia, Mariah felt a responsibility to stand up on behalf of the Black students in the school in an attempt to make their school experiences more enjoyable and productive. Knowing

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how to advocate for Black students is a clear fund of knowledge that Black school counselors hold, which can ultimately have positive consequences for Black students' experiences in school and educational and social/emotional outcomes. Yet again, there are costs to Black school counselors of engaging in this important, but uncompensated work on a regular basis.

Underutilization of Black School Counselors' Knowledge

Black school counselors' funds of knowledge allow them to engage with and advocate for Black students. But too often school leaders and staff do not solicit their advice or feedback, and thus are missing out on a key fund of knowledge within the school that could improve outcomes for students. In this section, I detail cases where Black school counselors are underutilized, whether due to assignments of non-counselor tasks or due to a lack of understanding around what their roles are in schools.

Taking on Non-Counseling Tasks

A common theme in the school counselor literature is the assignment of counselors to non-counseling tasks, such as bus or lunch duty. This theme was prevalent in my conversations with and the audio diaries of Black school counselors. These non-counseling tasks do not require the skills counselors were specifically trained to employ in their roles and take away from their one-on-one time with students. Mia, who has her Master's in School Counseling and Clinical Mental Health, put it bluntly near the beginning of our conversation, commenting, "It is a real thing where counselors are not being utilized. Our specialization, our degrees are not being put to use because they have us in other roles." Although all counselors have intensive training, typically through master's programs, too often their time is allocated to administrative tasks. For example, Mariah, who is licensed as both a social worker and a school counselor, noted, "And then of course there's 5,000 non-counseling tasks that I do: the scheduling, printing, honor roll

certificates." These non-counseling tasks ranged from filling counselor roles that had been left vacant—greatly increasing their student caseload—to picking up the slack of coworkers, including other counselors, teachers, and administrative staff. Ruth, who previously worked as a teacher, said, "I never catch a break, I never take a lunch break. It's like I have duty on top of duty on top of duty. I have to do this, I have to do that. And it's because other people are not doing what they're supposed to do." The majority of the counselors I spoke with described their roles as extending beyond counseling to serving as a "catch-all" for the other tasks that were being left behind by colleagues.

Most importantly, when counselors are spending time on administrative or other non-counseling tasks, their time doing counseling tasks is reduced. Ruth, who has her Master's in School Counseling and serves approximately 300 students, estimated that she only spends 25% of her work time actually counseling students, and Mariah, who is assigned to over 350 students typically, estimated 55-60% of her day was spent on non-counseling tasks. Mariah was clearly frustrated with this, saying, "We've got so many non-counseling things that it really pulls me away from the work that I'm so passionate about doing." Not only does it pull counselors away from what they are passionate about, but it also pulls them away from what they are *trained and hired* to do.

Lack of Respect for Counselors' Roles

The decision to take school counselors away from their school counseling tasks was often seen by participants as a lack of respect from administrators regarding what their roles meant. Rather than protecting counselors' time, administrators saw counselors as individuals who could pick up the tasks that were left behind by others. Some participants saw this as a reflection of the lack of clarity of counselors' roles and the misunderstandings surroundings what counselors do

on a daily basis. Mariah explained: "It's not like they don't have an idea of what we're supposed to be doing; [the roles are] clearly defined…. I don't know, it's almost like it's not important enough to say, 'Hey, we're going to take y'all off of all these things.'" When administrators fail to fully acknowledge counselors as funds of knowledge that need the space to do their counseling tasks, then counselors are unable to live up to their full potential as a counselor.

When counselors did have supportive administrators who were willing to protect their time, they spoke about the difference it made in their work. This gratitude was sometimes contrasted with previous roles they had had in other schools or districts where their time was not protected. For example, Terrence said:

> "Now, if this was the previous capacity…there would be quite a bit of impertinent tasks asked or requested. But the supervisor I have, he's my age, and he's been a counselor before, and so he, because of that, I believe has so much more respect for what I do…He speaks the language…I've enjoyed [more freedom] in this assignment than I have ever in the previous two school districts."

Terrence's reflection highlights the importance of supervisors in understanding counselors as a fund of knowledge that can benefit the entire school. In this case, the administrator previously worked as a school counselor, so his personal, lived experiences informed how he protected Terrence's time. In instances where the importance of the work of counselors' knowledge and time was acknowledged, my participants were free to do the work they were trained to do. Mariah argued: "I feel like the counselors are the heart of the school. I really don't think that schools understand how big of a difference we could make if you give us what we need, like the bodies, and take away the non-counseling stuff and give us the appropriate counselor-to-student ratio to work with."

Black school counselors recognized in themselves the wealth of cultural, professional, and historical knowledge they bring to the table—but when ignored by their coworkers or supervisors, they struggled in their roles.

Exploitation of Black School Counselors

Despite numerous examples of the underutilization of Black school counselors, there were also instances where these counselors were exploited, or taken advantage of, by coworkers or supervisors. In this section, I describe the ways in which Black school counselors are exploited precisely *because of* their deep funds of knowledge, including their racial identity and deep commitment to Black students.

Black school counselors' knowledge of cultural norms that stem from racial identity was a tool they could use to advocate for Black students; but this skill was sometimes taken advantage of by White colleagues who did not care to do the work needed to properly serve Black students. White coworkers saw Black school counselors as an obvious resource when they felt they could not "handle" Black students, which placed additional labor onto Black counselors. Ruth, who works in a majority White school, shared the following:

> "But [it] irks my nerves if a teacher has a kid in their class, a Black kid and has any type of issue, they'll come bring the kid in here…I've had a teacher to bring a kid to me because she was overweight and Black and she said, 'I think y'all will relate.' I don't know if they realize what they do, but it's ridiculous, some stuff. It's like some of them don't know how to react."

Ruth expressed frustration that her White coworkers would assume she, and she alone, had the skills needed to work with any and all Black students. This frustration was taxing for her, and she noted it later in the interview as one of her biggest stressors.

The lack of ability and/or willingness to engage with Black students on the part of White coworkers was commented on by other participants as well. Damien, who works in a majority Black elementary school, noted that some teachers, particularly White, female teachers, lacked the training and skills needed to work with Black students. Their lack of willingness to work to gain these skills led to increased work on his part, as there was an increased burden for him to either increase his engagements with Black students or offer advice to his White coworkers. He said, "Understanding how to work with an African American child, understanding how to work with, shoot, not just a child, but an African American male…I think we can do better at getting more training for that." While Black school counselors' wealth of cultural knowledge on best practices for interacting with Black students is clearly a net positive for the schools in which they work, this imbalance between their culturally relevant knowledge and the knowledge of their coworkers led to a disproportionate burden of labor.

Because of the wealth of knowledge and skills that Black school counselors possessed—as well as their passion for serving students—they often found themselves struggling under a mountain of work. Ruth, noted that even during breaks, she was unable to turn her mind away from work. She explained, "It feels like my stuff never ends.". This never-ending to-do list was further prolonged by her coworkers constantly asking her for help. In fact, during our interview, we were interrupted at least three times over the course of an hour with people asking her for things.

The participants often felt that they were the go-to people when colleagues needed additional support. While this is a good recognition of the strengths they bring to their roles, it also resulted in extra labor. Mariah shared that despite the workload being a major stressor in her job, she felt wary of turning down anyone asking for support. She told me, "I guess the thing that

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stresses me out is there's so many needs, and I'm overloaded because I'm only one person. I want to get it done…. But I just feel like everybody calls me for everything." She later explained that when asked to take on responsibilities outside of her role, she never said no because she felt a pressure to always agree to help. This commitment to ensuring that students were cared for was prominent among my participants; they felt a deep responsibility to work as hard as needed to provide support for students, particularly Black students who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

Some of this pressure stemmed from their connections to the community and Black students in their schools. For example, Terrence noted that he felt it hard to leave work in the school building, because of pressure to perform highly. He spoke of coworkers and administrators believing in him more than he believed in himself; and while that kind of support is critical, it also created stress for Terrence to never make a mistake. Thus, it was difficult for him to stop working when the school bell rang at the end of the day. He explained, "[A major stressor] is not knowing when to stop sometimes." Similar to Ruth and Mariah, Terrence found challenges with setting boundaries due to the deep commitment they shared to supporting students.

The need to offer support extended beyond students; some participants noted that they engaged with parents and other community members regularly as an extension of their daily duties at the school. Damien reflected in one audio diary that he had to offer emotional support not only to students, but teachers and parents as well. He said, "It was a hard week in the sense of taking on a lot of negative or mournful feelings that others have and others are going through and trying to hone those in and maintain a professionalism so that I can be strong for students and parents and even teachers." Damien, due to his skills and expertise in providing support, was

serving as a counselor not only to his students, but to other adults, which added to this already hectic workload. He later noted that being a Black male made him a "rare commodity," which meant that others were constantly looking to him to fulfill a variety of roles beyond the ones listed in his job description. In this case, this reliance on Damien's knowledge seemed to be amplified by his racial and gender identity.

Tiana more explicitly pointed out some of her colleagues as a reason why she felt overworked. She said, "You have teachers who want to take advantage and not work with you…. Now teachers think that you work for them too." In this case, Tiana identifies some of her coworkers as a reason why she can feel taken advantage of at work. Though teachers may be identifying her as a key resource in the school, their eagerness to see her as a subordinate that they can task with other responsibilities leads to negative consequences for Tiana. Overall, the exploitation of Black school counselors in their roles as funds of knowledge complicates the idea that funds of knowledge is solely a positive denotation for the individuals labeled as such.

Conclusion

Discussion

Conceptualizing Black school counselors as individuals with vast funds of knowledge, this study considers how these counselors experience their jobs, and how those lived experiences impact their interactions with Black students. Drawing upon their funds of knowledge that stemmed from community background and racial identity, Black school counselors were able to serve Black students through trust-building and advocacy. Existing research on Black teacher-student relationships aligns with this finding; these relationships are often centered around caring (e.g. Milner, 2006). Evidence also supports the idea that Black counselors bring knowledge that their non-Black colleagues cannot offer to students. As Pang & Gibson (2001) write, Black

educators "bring diverse family histories, value orientations, and experiences to students in the classroom, attributes often not found in textbooks or viewpoints often omitted" (pg. 260).

Further, some counselors described their work as a form of shield that protected Black students in their care from unnecessary discipline at the hands of White coworkers. Given Black counselors' political clarity on the realities of anti-Blackness that their students face within and outside the U.S. education system, they engage in strategies to protect Black students. These are similar to strategies that Black teachers use to shield Black students from abuse or racism at the hands of White individuals (McKinney de Royston et al., 2021; Shirrell et al., 2021; Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019).

Yet, Black school counselors' wealth of knowledge went underutilized in many cases, as they spoke extensively about the time spent doing non-counseling tasks and the lack of respect offered by colleagues and administrators of their roles. Rather than spending the majority of their time in one-on-one interactions with students, several of the participants asserted that most of their time went to administrative tasks and various duties, like lunch or bus duty. Partly, the assignment of such duties to counselors reflected a lack of respect for the specialized training counselors brought to the table; rather, they were seen as a "catch-all" that could easily be pulled away from counseling tasks to ensure that other responsibilities were not left unattended. The underutilization of Black counselors echoes existing research on Black educators more broadly, which finds that they are often relegated to roles such as disciplinarians (e.g., Bristol & Mentor, 2018).

Exploitation of Black school counselors, often due to their specific funds of knowledge, especially those that stemmed from their racial identity, occurred as well. This exploitation also stems from the anti-Blackness prevalent within U.S. schools. Black school counselors were often

looked to as the person who could solve any issue that a teacher or administrator had with Black students, absconding White colleagues from doing the work necessary to effectively serve Black students and protect them against larger structural racism. The counselors' deep passion for and responsibility to their work was taken advantage of, as counselors worked long hours, had few breaks, and felt that they were working not only for students, but for parents and community members as well. Drawing upon the tenets of BlackCrit, it is clear that Whiteness continues to be privileged in schools in ways that undermine the ability of Black counselors to do their work.

Many of the findings presented in this study align with existing evidence around school counselors. The centrality of school counselors within the school building—and the overreliance on them to solve issues that their colleagues choose not to engage in—is reflective of findings by Perna and colleagues (2008), which showed that counselors were looked to as a key source of knowledge within the school building. Despite the recognition by colleagues and supervisors that school counselors possess useful knowledge, counselors' time is too often occupied with non-counseling tasks. Time use is a recurrent topic of investigation in the literature around counselors, and my findings speak to the use of counselors' time to engage in non-counseling tasks. Allocating counselors' time to non-counseling tasks is a missed opportunity for schools, as counselors' funds of knowledge go unutilized. Given the funds of knowledge possessed by Black school counselors, as highlighted by my participants, it is critical for Black school counselors, to be given the resources and space to utilize their full capacities. Anti-Blackness can stifle their efforts to serve their students, and thus, specific strategies to counter anti-Blackness should also be undertaken.

My conversations with participants and their audio diaries also highlight the additional, uncompensated, racialized labor that Black school counselors are tasked with, something that has

not been explored specifically in counselor literature. Yet, these findings are consistent with themes found for Black professionals in other fields (e.g. Lerma et al., 2020). The additional forms of labor, not shared by their White colleagues, leave Black school counselors overloaded with work, frustrated by the microaggressions involved in this labor, and burnt out. School counselors remain in short supply, and some new reporting indicates school counselors are leaving schools due to the "impossible" nature of the work (Shen-Berro, 2023; Prothero & Riser-Kositsky, 2022). In order to recruit and retain Black school counselors, they need to have the space to engage in their counseling tasks, free from the additional racialized labor placed upon them by their White colleagues and supervisors.

Contribution and Implications

This study represents an important contribution to the limited evidence on school counselors' experiences, particularly the experiences of Black school counselors. By centering the voices of Black school counselors in Mississippi, we gain a better understanding of how their complex social identities shape their role in schools. Additionally, I begin to identify how these Black school counselors approach and interact with Black students. Specifically, by using a phenomenological approach, the study allows us to understand the essence of what it means to be a Black school counselor working in Mississippi public schools.

The insights here have numerous implications for research and policy. In terms of research, the need is clear for more qualitative studies that center for voices of Black school professionals, particularly Black school counselors. Their expertise and experiences remain central to the experiences of students and others within schools, and we can learn so much from what they share. BlackCrit is a powerful framework for interpreting their experiences, and BlackCrit should continue to be used in studies that focus on Black counselors. Future studies

should consider exploring the lived experiences of Black school counselors working in other states, perhaps outside of the Deep South. Research could also consider how political environments affect the experiences of Black school counselors, especially in light of increasing efforts to ban discussions of race in K-12 schools (Hinger, 2021).

Overall, there is also a need for more research on school counselors' experiences, no matter their racial identity. Existing literature tends to focus on student outcomes as a result of counselors, rather than the experiences of counselors themselves. To improve student outcomes, we need to better understand how counselors experience their roles, and where they believe improvements can be made. Given that school counselors serve as a primary resource for students on issues ranging from course selection to college pathways, it is critical that researchers and policymakers alike understand the school counseling profession and how counselors interact with a diverse class of students (Carrell & Hoekstra, 2014; Lapan et al., 1997; Goodman-Scott et al., 2018; Lapan et al., 2012). Additionally, we should care about the experiences of counselors separate from their impact on students—they are working professionals who deserve to work in roles and workplaces where they feel valued, respected, and heard. This is especially important for Black school counselors, who face anti-Blackness in their workplace.

In terms of data collection tools for future research, audio diaries should be prioritized as a key method for understanding counselors' lived experiences. Audio diaries could be a great way to understand how counselors experience their roles on a weekly, or even daily, basis, and how they allocate their time to various tasks. Importantly, they can offer spaces for counselors to reflect on their work and how they emotionally respond to various situations they encounter at school. For Black school counselors, who are tasked with additional emotional labor and are

forced to combat anti-Blackness on a regular basis, the opportunity for reflection and processing is especially vital.

Future work also should consider how Black students perceive their counselors, especially when they have Black counselors. As argued in this paper and in other recent work (i.e., Mulhern, 2022), Black school counselors can serve Black students in unique and powerful ways; but we need to hear the voices of students who experience that relationship first-hand, and how it impacts their perceptions of the level of support they receive from their schools.

In terms of policy—at the state, district, and school level—continued efforts should consider how to clarify the roles of counselors and protect their time. Some state-level policies have striven to ensure that counselors spend the majority of their time with students (Wadhwani, 2018), and further efforts should be made in this respect. Relatedly, state-level policies should continue to fight to lower student-to-counselor ratios. Additionally, policies at both the state, district, and school levels regarding diversity training should be mandatory for all school counselors, so that White counselors can at least be equipped with the knowledge around cultural norms that can help them to better serve students of color.

Findings also reinforce the need for school counselors, especially Black school counselors, to be given the space to reflect on their own work. There were multiple instances throughout my interviews with participants where they noted they had never considered their impact. In fact, across all interviews, the question that stumped participants the most was: "What would you describe as your biggest accomplishment during your tenure as a school counselor?" In audio diaries, participants often ended the recordings by expressing gratitude for having a space to share their experiences and reflect on their work week. Again, this highlights the importance of spaces of reflection for counselors. That space can allow counselors to recognize

the strategies that are working with their students, celebrate their wins, come to terms with barriers they are facing, and give them the confidence to speak up when needed.

Concluding Statement

Black school counselors' experiences, identities, and passion for their work are immense strengths that can help students, especially Black students, thrive in schools. The support of these counselors and continued exploration of how they experience their roles is critical to ensuring the continued diversification of the school counseling profession and the success of Black students.

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Appendix A: Tables

Table 1.1: State Mandates

State	Mandate Counselors in Schools?	Mandate Maximum Student-to-Counselor Ratios?	Code/Legislation	Date Enacted
Alabama	Yes	Yes	Section 16-13-232	Could not determine
Alaska	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Arizona	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Arkansas*	Yes	Yes	A.C.A. § 6-18-2003	2019
California	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Colorado	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Connecticut*	Yes	No	Public Act No. 19-63	2020
D.C.*	Yes	No	§ 38–2807	1999
Delaware	Yes	No	Admin Code Title 14:500	Could not determine
Florida	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Georgia*	Yes	Yes	O.C.G.A § 20-2-182	2000
Hawaii	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Idaho*	Yes	No		1994
Illinois	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Indiana*	Yes	No	Admin Code 4-1.5	1995
Iowa*	Yes	No	Iowa Code section 256.11(9a)	2007
Kansas	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kentucky*	Yes	No	KY 158.4416	2018
Louisiana*	Yes	Yes	LA Rev Stat § 17:3005	1991

Maine	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Maryland*	Yes	No	Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.05.05.02	2019
Massachusetts	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Michigan	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Minnesota	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mississippi	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Missouri	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Montana*	Yes	Yes	Accreditation Process: 10.55.710	2002
Nebraska	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nevada*	Yes	No	NRS 389.180	1991
New Hampshire*	Yes	Yes		7/1/2005
New Jersey	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Mexico	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
New York*	Yes	No	§100.2(j)	2019
North Carolina	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
North Dakota*	Yes	Yes	North Dakota Century Code 15.1-06-19	2010
Ohio	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Oklahoma*	Yes	Yes	Accreditation Standards: OAC 210:35-44, OAC 210:35-7-43, OAC 210:35-9-43	2006
Oregon	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pennsylvania	No	N/A	N/A	N/A

Rhode Island*	Yes	No	Basic Education Program	2003
South Carolina*	Yes	Yes	A88, R102, H3155	2005
South Dakota	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tennessee*	Yes	Yes	Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-303	1999
Texas*	Yes	Yes	TEC §33.005	2019
Utah*	Yes	Yes	Rule R277-462	2002
Vermont*	Yes	Yes	2121.5	2014
Virginia*	Yes	No	8VAC20-620-10	1996
Washington	Yes	No	WAC 392-348-245	1965
West Virginia*	Yes	No	§18-5-18b	2017
Wisconsin*	Yes	No	Administrative Rule PI 8.01(2)(e)	1991
Wyoming	No	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Indicates that the state was coded in the analysis as having an observable state mandate around school counselors, as confirmed by officials in that state, and fell within the years for which we have CCD data available

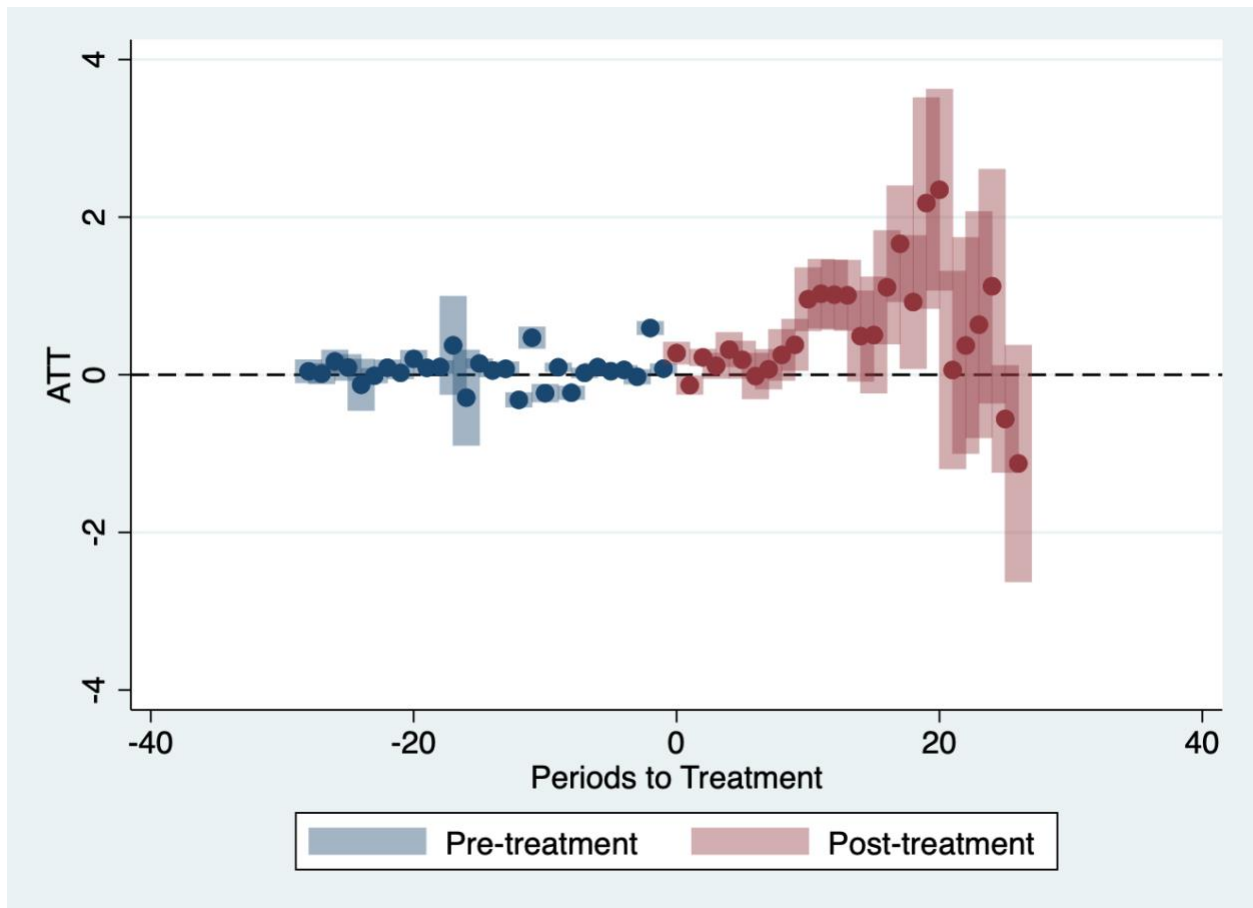**Appendix B: Figures**

Figure 1.3: Event Study for Model 1
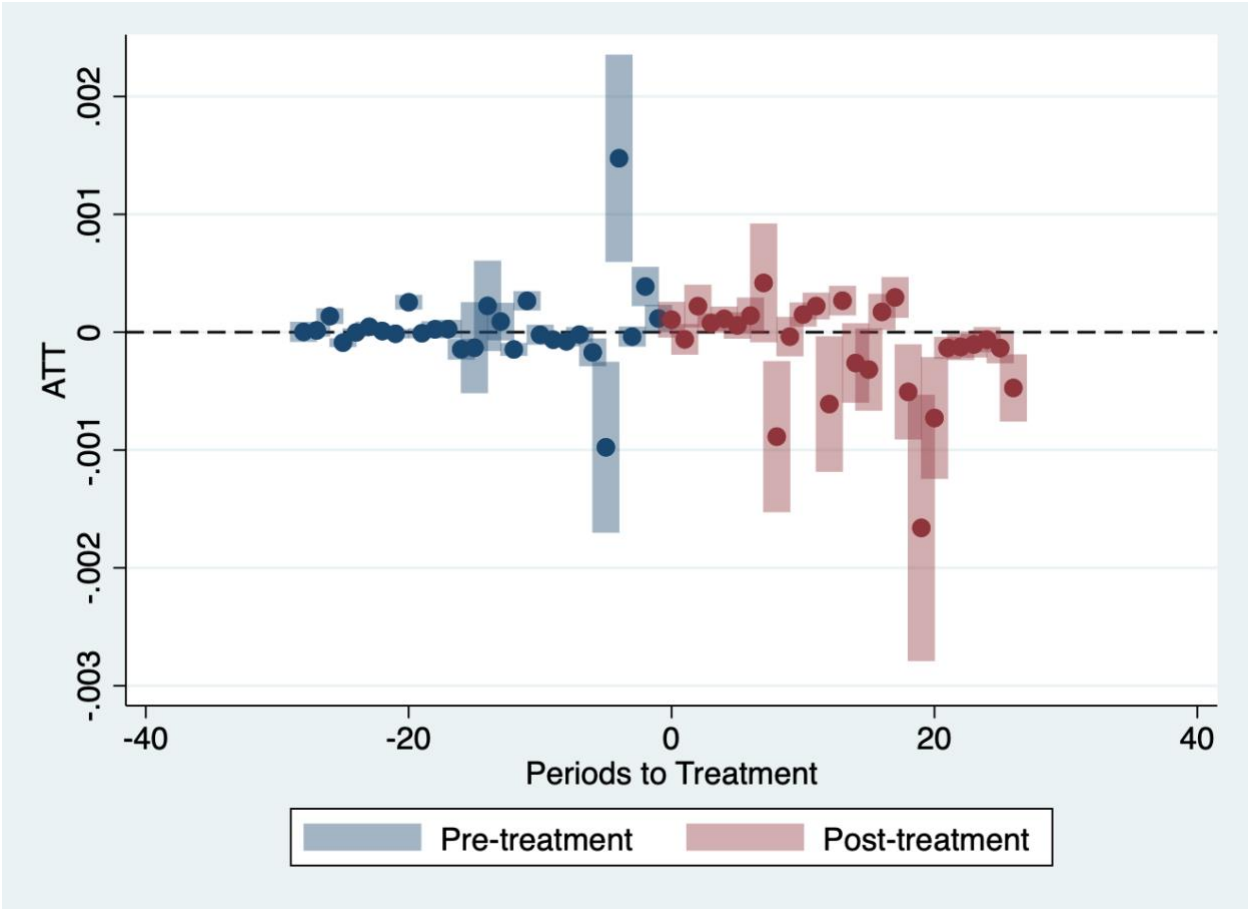
Figure 1.4: Event Study for Model 2

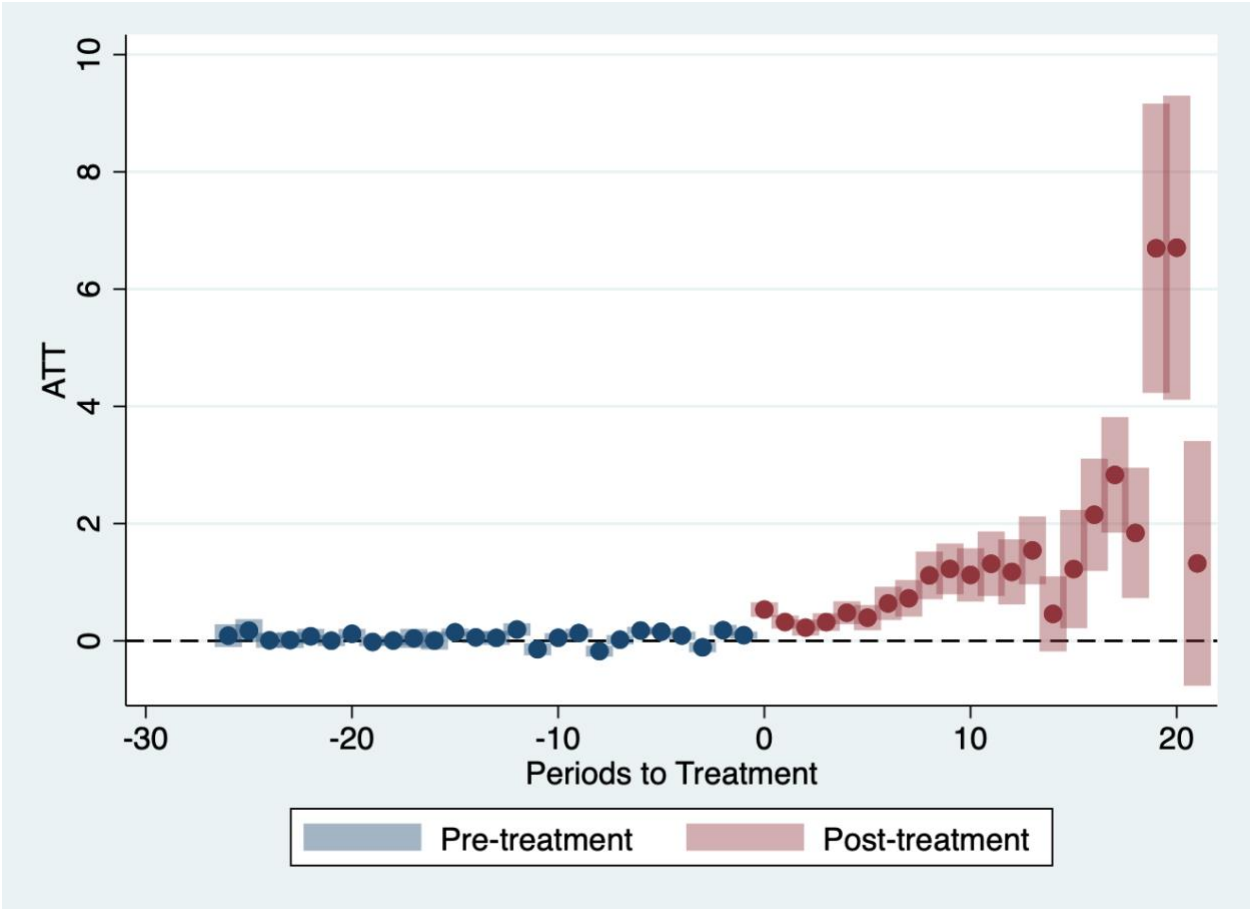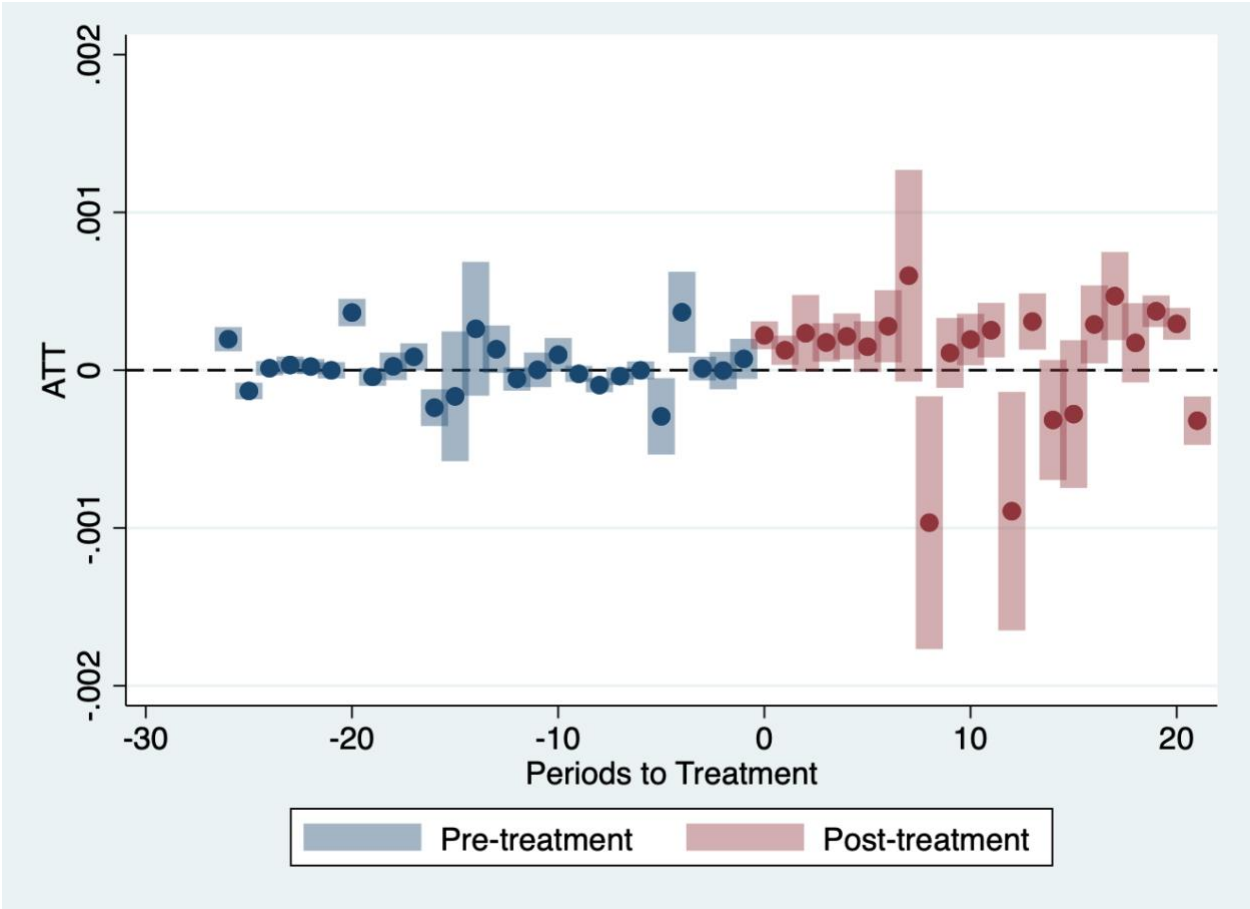**Figure 1.5: Event Study for Model 3**

Figure 1.6: Event Study for Model 4

Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Faculty

INTRODUCTION
1. Thank participant for their time.
2. Describe the goals of study.
3. Review IRB document that participant already received via REDcap. Confirm consent to audio-record the interview; mention benefits for accuracy in transcription and in my attention during the interview.

I'm interested in your perspective because of your role as faculty member working in a school counselor master's program. So, there will be three main topics I would like to discuss: I want to learn more about your (1) background; (2) your specific responsibilities; and (3) how you and your colleagues work to recruit and retain Black students. If there are any questions you prefer not to answer, please feel free to pass. And, if you need to end the interview early, that is completely fine, too; it will not in any way compromise our research study. As documented in the informed consent document, I also want to assure you that your name and [University/College] will be anonymized for any public documents or presentations on this work, to ensure your confidentiality. Do you have any questions? Great, well I'll go ahead and get started.

To start our conversation today, I want to learn a bit more about your background and how you came to work in your current role.

Start by asking for name, where they work, and title.

Background
1. Did you attend a postsecondary institution? If so, which one?
    1. What did you study at this institution?
2. Have you held any jobs before this one? If so, what were they?
3. What brought you to [NAME OF UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE]?
    1. How many years have you been working here?

Current Responsibilities & Department

Now, I want to switch to talking about what your work is like on a day-to-day basis and the program in which you work.

1. Could you describe a typical day for you working as a faculty member?
    1. Who, if anyone, is involved with your day-to-day work?
        1. If yes: How are they involved?
    2. How do your duties shift throughout the year?
2. What does your advising caseload look like?
    1. Probe: Does this change from semester to semester?
3. Can you talk to me about the demographics of students within your program?
    1. Probe: Racial identity, gender identity, nationality/country of origin, sexual orientation

4. Do the demographics of the faculty mirror that of the students?
5. How many credit hours are required of students? What is the average time to completion for students?
6. Is there flexibility in when students can take classes (e.g. at night)?
    1. How do you think that flexibility (or lack thereof) affects the type of students who attend your program?
7. What does a typical admissions cycle look like? When does it begin and end?
8. How would you describe your office's approach to admitting graduate students?
    1. Probe: Holistic review? Who reviews the files? What is your policy on the use of standardized tests, like the GRE?

Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Class

Next, I want to talk to you about how you recruit and retain students, and how you think about those efforts in terms of building a diverse student body.

1. What does diversity mean to you?
    1. Probe: If I say that a program has a diverse student body, what characteristics would you be looking for?
2. We know that even before an institution reviews applications, they are working to connect with students through outreach and recruitment activities. Can you talk a little bit about what that normally looks like?
3. Can you describe any outreach or recruitment events that are geared towards students from minoritized backgrounds?
    1. Probe: When does this happen? Where? How often? Whom on the staff is engaged in these efforts?
4. Reflecting on recruiting experiences—both general recruitment and yield recruitment—what appear to be some of the attributes about the program that diverse students seem excited about? Are there patterns across groups?
5. Likewise, are there particular aspects of the program that seem to be least appealing to diverse students?
6. Do you or your colleagues participate in any efforts to retain students once admitted to the program? Are there any efforts around retaining diverse students in particular?
7. Do you help coordinate with local school districts to help with post-graduation placement of your students?
8. Are there any specific courses around diversity or equity in the program curriculum?
9. How has the COVID-19 pandemic and the discourse around Critical Race Theory in our society affected your ability to recruit diverse students, if at all?
10. What do you think you and your colleagues are doing well right now in terms of recruiting diverse students?
11. What changes, if any would you recommend to improve efforts to recruit and retain diverse students?

I want to be cognizant of your time, so just one final question: **Is there anything I haven't asked about that you think is important for me to know about your experiences?**

Thank you very much for your time - I really appreciate it. I understand this is a busy time for you. The insights you shared will allow me to better understand how faculty in master's-level school counseling programs think about the recruitment and retention of diverse students.

Please do follow up if you have any questions or have additional thoughts you would like to share.

INTRODUCTION
1. Thank participant for their time.
2. Describe the goals of study.
3. Review IRB document that participant already received via REDcap. Confirm consent to audio-record the interview; mention benefits for accuracy in transcription and in my attention during the interview.

We're interested in your perspective because of your role as a school counselor in Mississippi. So, there will be three main topics I would like to discuss: I want to learn more about your (1) background; (2) your specific responsibilities; and (3) your interactions with Black students. If there are any questions you prefer not to answer, please feel free to pass. And, if you need to end the interview early, that is completely fine, too; it will not in any way compromise our research study. As documented in the informed consent document, I also want to assure you that your name and school will be anonymized for any public documents or presentations on this work, to ensure your confidentiality. Do you have any questions? Great, well I'll go ahead and get started.

To start our conversation today, I want to learn a bit more about your background and how you came to work in school counseling.

Start by asking for name, where they work, and title.

Background
1. Did you attend a postsecondary institution? If so, which one?
    1. What did you study at this institution?
2. Have you held any jobs before this one? If so, what were they?
3. What brought you to [NAME OF SCHOOL]?
    1. How many years have you been working here?

Recruitment and Interview Process for Current Job

Thank you. It's always great to learn about your background and what brought you to where you are today. For this next set of questions, I want to focus on the recruitment and interview process that brought you to your current role.

1. How did you first hear about this role? (e.g. online posting, friend)
2. What appealed to you about working in school counseling? What appealed to you about working in this role in particular?
3. What was the interview process like?
    1. Probe: How long did it take for you to hear back after you first applied? How many interviews did you have before being offered the position?

Current Responsibilities

Now, I want to switch to talking about what your work is like on a day-to-day basis.

9. What does your role look like daily?
10. School counselors can be tasked with a lot of different responsibilities. I am going to list some, and I'd like you to tell me how much of your time is spent on each task. For example, you might estimate about 30% of your time is spent on college counseling. So, the tasks are: academic advising, course selection, college advising, mental health counseling, test proctoring/management, and administrative duties (e.g. bus duty).
11. Can you talk about the demographics of the students your serve (e.g. racial, socioeconomic status)?
12. Are the demographics of the staff who work in the school reflective of the demographics of the students?
13. Do you think it makes a difference if students and staff share racial identities?
14. Who do you work with on a regular basis (e.g. other counselors, teachers, parents)?
    1. Probe: How do those interactions shape your perceptions of your role? Is collaboration encouraged at your school?
    2. Probe: Can you tell me about the relationships you have with parents? How are often are you talking to parents? What would you say the level of involvement is from parents?
15. Are there any community organizations that you work with or refer students out to?
16. When you have questions about your role or need support, who do you rely on to provide that - either inside the school or outside?
17. How would you describe the level of support you receive from colleagues, including fellow counselors, teachers, principals, or other administrators?
18. Do you receive any professional development, either from the school, school district, or any other sources?
19. Do you receive regular feedback on your job performance?
    1. Probe: If so, from who? How does this feedback affect your work?
20. Do state-level or national-level politics affect your job? If so, in what ways? Can you give an example?
21. What are stressors in your job (e.g. high caseloads)? How do those stressors affect your ability to accomplish your goals? How do you manage those stressors on a daily basis?
    1. Probe: Can you give a specific example of a stressor and how you managed it?
22. How would you describe your satisfaction with your current job?
    1. Probe: Can you share a story that exemplifies your perception of your job as a school counselor?
23. During the COVID pandemic, many people experienced high levels of burnout in their jobs. Do you feel that you relate to that experience of high levels of burnout? If so, what are the main contributors to your burnout?
24. What are the major challenges that your students are facing?
25. What would you describe as your biggest accomplishment during your tenure as a school counselor?
26. What is the biggest challenge you have faced as a school counselor?

Interactions with Black Students

Given that Mississippi serves the largest proportion of Black students in the country, I want to talk to you specifically about how that plan affects your work and how you interact with Black students.

1. Do you receive any specific training or professional development focused around meeting the needs of Black students?
    1. Probe: How often? Who leads them? Do you think they are helpful?
2. In interacting with Black students, do you draw from personal experiences to inform those conversations? Can you give an example?
3. What practices have you found especially effective in your work with Black students?
4. What additional supports do you need to be able to best support Black students?
5. What do you think [NAME OF SCHOOL] is doing well in regards to serving Black students?
6. What do you think [NAME OF SCHOOL] could do better?

I want to be cognizant of your time, so just one final question: **Is there anything I haven't asked about that you think is important for me to know about your experiences working as a school counselor in Mississippi?**

Thank you very much for your time - I really appreciate it. I understand this is a busy time for you. The insights you shared will allow me to better understand how Black school counselors experience their work in the Mississippi and how they specifically provide support and guidance to Black students.

<u>Please do follow up if you have any questions or have additional thoughts you would like to share.</u>