

Exploring the Training and Practice Experiences of Male School Counselors

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Exploring the Training and Practice Experiences of Male School Counselors

Abstract

Males are underrepresented as school counselors and may experience stigma associated with being viewed as less masculine, sexual deviants, or unqualified. Despite these aspects, research has shown benefits for school stakeholders based in the diverse perspectives male school counselors can provide. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative research study was to understand the lived experiences of 25 male school counselors from across the United States. Based on the thematic analysis findings, we will discuss specific implications and recommendations for male school counselor training, supervision, and practice.

Keywords

male school counselors, gender stereotypes, school counselor education

As schools throughout the United States become more culturally diverse, the need to enhance the representation of faculty and staff to mirror these shifts has become evident. Increasing male representation in key educational positions is of particular interest to diversify educational experiences and challenge the societal definition of masculinity (Jones & Aubry, 2019; Owens et al., 2010). Despite the increased call by school administrators for more male representation in schools, challenges remain regarding the recruitment, training, and retention of this population (McGrath & Sinclair, 2013; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012). Greater participation of males in educational settings allows for a diverse variety of social, emotional, and educational experiences for students (Underwood et al., 2019; Wood & Brownhill, 2018; Zanetti, 2014). Further, the inclusion of more males in the early years of education can benefit society, the profession, and children while helping to shift gender stereotypes (Bryan & Browder, 2013).

Males in Education

As the world constantly shifts in the educational, social, and personal needs of PK-12 students and their families, schools must adapt to meet these needs in the most appropriate and inclusive means necessary. In recent years, there has been an increased interest in balancing the composition of educators in school settings (Jones & Aubrey, 2019; Underwood et al., 2019; Wood & Brownhill, 2018) where fewer than 25% of educators are male with males of color particularly underrepresented with only 2% serving in educational roles (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2021). Concerns also exist regarding the perception of male roles in education with most serving in traditional masculine roles such as administrator, disciplinarian, mentor, or coach (Bryan & Browder, 2013; McGrath & Sinclair, 2013; Wood & Brownhill, 2018); however, these roles have begun shifting with 54% of school administrators reporting as female (NCES, 2021). The societal ambiguity regarding male roles in education can cause a lack in understanding

with school stakeholders while reinforcing perceived masculinity stereotypes (Dos Santos, 2020; Michel et al., 2015; Waalkes et al., 2018). The lack of diversity in the number and roles of males in education is often related to social stereotypes of education as a female-dominated profession, parental concerns of male educators as unqualified or sexually deviant, and lack of competitive salary (Peterson, 2014; Zanetti, 2014). Further, studies have shown that males entering female-dominated educational training programs find it difficult to separate themselves from the high levels of stigmas experienced within the program, thus carrying those stereotypes throughout training and into their professional career (Jones & Aubrey, 2019; Michel et al., 2015). Despite these difficulties, male educators of diverse races and cultures are in high demand due to the rapid shift in student demographics (Ivers et al., 2012; Underwood et al., 2019). Although male roles in education have garnered attention and support, there continues to be a dearth of literature regarding men in the school counseling profession. Consequently, there is a need for further investigation into this population to understand their training, supervision, and practice experiences and needs.

Male School Counselors

With the increased call for mental health services in school settings, there is a peaked interest in addressing the lack of male school counselors (DeKruyf et al., 2013; Goodman-Scott et al., 2016). Regardless of the increased call for more male school counselor representation, hesitation still exists for males entering and staying in the profession. The difficulty for males in school counseling often begins with preparation for the career. For example, 76% of students in counselor education programs are female with male students reporting difficulties in maneuvering through their programs due to feelings of isolation and gender stereotypes (Ray et al., 2016). Navigating through such experiences during training and supervision can be troublesome because of the difficulty in developing a clear professional identity and meaningful relationships (DeKruyf,

2013; Goodman-Scott et al., 2016). Further, conflict remains associated with males in the school counseling profession despite 58% of male school counselors reporting high job satisfaction, along with more liberal social attitudes and feelings of prestige compared to traditional male careers (e.g., engineering) (Aydin & Odaci, 2020; Waalkes et al., 2018; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012).

Males continue to experience such difficulties upon entering the field through perceptions of their students, specifically those that come from single-parent family homes, along with other educators who expect male school counselors to serve as a surrogate role models (Dos Santos, 2020). Additionally, males who are conscious about the gender stereotypes in educational settings are hypervigilant in taking any precaution necessary to avoid appearing in an improper or unethical fashion when working with female students (Ray et al., 2016). Such relationships can be further complicated by the variability in the knowledge school stakeholders may have regarding the understanding and utilization of school counselors (Aydin & Odaci, 2020).

Notwithstanding these complications, male school counselors, especially those of color, can provide valuable insights and experiences in the educational setting. For example, African American students who experienced a positive male school counselor connection reported improved academic outcomes (Greer & Webb, 2020). Male school counselors of color can also assist with making more meaningful community connections with diverse families from African American and Latinx families (Ivers et al., 2012). Enhancing the diversity of males in the profession can further align with the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) (2020) goal for school counselors to actively engage in developing systemic change in the school setting where cultural diversity is fully embraced. The increased representation of male school counselors can further help in realigning societal perceptions of men in education resulting in more holistic school settings (Dos Santos, 2020; Wood & Brownhill, 2018).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research project was to gain insight and awareness regarding the lived experiences of 25 male school counselors throughout the United States. The participants' perceptions as males in their school counselor training and practice engagements were of primary interest. As such, the research was guided by the following questions:

1. What are male school counselors' experiences regarding their training and supervision?
2. What are the perceptions of male school counselors regarding their professional practice?
3. What are male school counselors' experiences working with school stakeholders?

Methodology

The researchers sought an epistemological understanding of the subjective experiences of male school counselors based directly in their counselor education training and supervision along with professional practice interactions with various school stakeholders including teachers, principals, and parents. The utilization of a phenomenological qualitative approach to research allowed for understanding and identification of the socially constructed lived perceptions, experiences, and insights of the participants resulting in deeper meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Grosseohme, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). Through this type of phenomenological qualitative inquiry, the researchers respected and honored the male school counselors as experts in the construction of their own experiences in a meaningful and relevant manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020).

Participants

A purposeful sample of 25 male school counselor volunteers was utilized for the research study. To meet inclusion criteria, each participant had to be a professionally credentialed school counselor with current or recent experience in a school setting, identify as male, and be a member

of the American School Counselor Association. The volunteers were recruited through the ASCA Listserv, the ASCA Scene, which is utilized by the preeminent professional organization for school counselors with 75,000 members throughout the United States and gender identity representing 87% female, 11% male, and less than 3% nonbinary or no response (ASCA, 2021). By reaching out to a national membership, a racially and geographically diverse population of participants was recruited to contribute to the study. The number of participants meets the qualifications for this type of phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020). The average years of experience for the male school counselors was 8.15 years. See Table 1 for additional participant demographic information.

Table 1 *Male School Counselor Participant Demographics*

Geographic Location	Community Setting	Current School Setting	Race/Ethnicity
Southeast (8)	Suburban (13)	High School (10)	White (19)
Northeast (6)	Rural (8)	Middle School (7)	Black (3)
Midwest (5)	Urban (4)	Elementary School (4)	Biracial (2)
Southwest (3)		Alternative School (1)	Latino (1)
Northwest (3)		K-8 School (1)	
		6-12 School (1)	
		District Office (1)	

Procedures

The principal investigator obtained approval from his university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to participant recruitment or data collection. The study met all requirements for the ethical treatment of participants as outlined by the American Counseling Association *Code of Ethics* (2014). Access to potential participants was granted through ASCA. The organization's listserv was utilized to send invitations requesting participation in the research study on three occasions. Members were provided a link to the questionnaire including the informed consent to be accepted before the questionnaire would commence. Participation in this study was completely

voluntary. The participants were provided with a \$25 gift card to a national retailer for completion of the data collection process.

An open-ended questionnaire created by the research team was utilized to gather data from the participants. This questionnaire was created to explore the particular areas of exploration pertinent to this research endeavor and was based in issues found in relevant literature. The questionnaire consisted of 6 questions regarding the participants' demographic information including geographic location, community setting, self-identified race/ethnicity, current school setting, previous school setting(s), and total number of years as a school counselor. The questionnaire further contained 7 questions/prompts exploring the perceptions and experiences related to being a male school counselor. The questions/prompts included the following: What was the primary motivation for deciding to become a school counselor? Describe your experiences researching, applying to, and interviewing for a school counseling position. Share some of your memories related to your experiences during your professional school counselor training and supervision as a male. Tell us about how you work with students as a male school counselor. Share some of your experiences as a male school counselor working with school stakeholders (e.g., administrators, teachers, parents). What do you see as some of the major challenges of being a male school counselor? Discuss your views on how your race/culture potentially affect your work as a male school counselor.

To ensure that proper questions and prompts were being utilized, the questionnaire was created in collaboration by the research team and an external school counselor educator. The research team met on two occasions to create the questions based in male school counseling literature along with their experiences in the profession. The questions were then shared with the external school counselor educator for feedback and revisions. Based on this information, the

research team held an additional meeting to develop the final set of questions. The questionnaire was administered through Qualtrics, a standard tool utilized to administer surveys and questionnaires. The site meets requirements for appropriate confidentiality and storage of private materials. The questionnaire and results were only available to the principal investigator and were password protected on a computer that is password protected.

The participants' questionnaire completion time averaged 30 minutes. A web-based questionnaire was utilized because of the familiarity with email, listservs, and the Internet for a vast number of individuals. Internet-based questionnaires are more cost efficient, tend to generate higher response rates and faster response time, minimize interviewer error, and allow time for more thoughtful or complex while avoiding potentially socially desirable responses (Fowler, 2014; Miles et al., 2020). An informed consent document was included and had to be reviewed and accepted before the questionnaire would commence to ensure that all aspects of the research process, including potential risks, benefits, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were covered. Participants had the ability to withdraw from the research process at any point in the data collection process. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The researchers utilized a thematic analysis. This approach is a flexible process that identifies, analyzes and reports patterns or themes within the data to organize and comprehend the perceptions, experiences, and potential needs of the participants (Braun & Clark, 2006; Guest et al., 2012). Thematic analysis is guided by Braun and Clark's (2006) six steps for analyzing data: (a) becoming familiar with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing the themes, (e) defining and naming the themes, and (f) producing a report of the results.

The research team reviewed all the questionnaire responses before the coding process began. In qualitative research, researchers completely immerse themselves in the data by constantly reviewing the materials, making notes as themes begin to emerge (Braun & Clark, 2006). An open coding procedure was used to examine the questionnaires for distinct segments and sort them into categories that emerge (Guest et al., 2012). Throughout this process, the data were dissected into recurring words and phrases that could create the basis of repeated patterns or themes. Subsequently, the research team collaborated on multiple occasions to discuss coding of the data and organize the categories and sub-categories that describe common themes that emerged from the process. The data were then grouped into new combinations by identifying relationships between the categories. Finally, the coding process linked the categories together into a specific set of categories to address the research question. The researcher team reviewed and refined the final results to ensure that there was a complete consensus on the thematic content and phrasing of the results.

Research Team

The research team consisted of the first author who is a White male assistant professor in counselor education with 10 years of qualitative research experience and 4.5 years as a school counselor. The team also consisted of the second author who is a Black female assistant professor in counselor education with 5 years of school counseling experience. Finally, 2 White female school counseling graduate students rounded out the research team. The external school counselor educator is a White female with over 25 years of experience in the school counseling and counselor education. The second author and graduate students were compensated through a university grant acquired by the principal investigator.

Trustworthiness

Throughout the data analysis process, several trustworthiness strategies were employed to establish credibility and rigor. For instance, the research team met regularly to discuss any potential assumptions and biases that could exist and influence the data collection and analysis processes. Assumptions based on personal experiences as counselors and counselor educators were identified. For example, the first author discussed his previous counseling work as a White male school counselor at the elementary and high school levels, as well as current work in counselor education with school counselors-in-training. The research team explored the impact of their experiences, beliefs, and potential biases to minimize any potential impact on the study. Identifications and acknowledgment of these assumptions implies that the researchers' beliefs have less chance of impacting the perceptions of the participants in the final results (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Member checking was also used in this study as a measure of the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data analysis (Miles et al., 2020). Each participant was contacted by email and provided findings of the data analysis to review and offer any additional feedback, information, or questions. Seven participants responded with consensus on the findings in terms of the accuracy of the ideas and comments. Final efforts that were employed to enhance the study's trustworthiness included reflective journaling for transparency, an audit trail of the data analysis process, and a constant comparison method during the data analysis to represent a rich and full immersion into the data (Guest et al., 2012).

Findings

Three overarching themes emerged from the male school counselors regarding their perceptions and experiences with training, supervision, and practice. The themes included: (1) masculinity in schools; (2) professional relationships; and (3) societal misconceptions. Each theme

is discussed below, with relevant quotes that illustrate the male school counselors' experiences and perceptions.

Masculinity in Schools

Throughout the male school counselors' responses, various aspects of masculinity emerged as a paramount theme. For many of the participants, male privilege was underscored in their experiences and perceptions. Examples of the male privilege varied regarding their awareness and acceptance among the participants. For instance, Tim stated, "I don't see any challenges regarding being male" while Eddie commented that he is "able to get away with saying more" and that "my opinions are more frequently sought out than my coworkers...females often get labeled as whiny or combative in situations where my responses are perceived differently." Similarly, Victor noted "It is crucial to hold an awareness of the biases or privileges that I might have as a white, male, middle-class professional." For Logan, the struggle with the conflict of male privilege came through with his statement:

Being a white, hetero, cisgen, male, I feel like I have to constantly be aware of how my input and actions may be perceived by other staff. I have a lot of experience and confidence in my role and can be very direct with my opinions and suggestions. I feel like in the past, this has come across as being a little forceful or aggressive...it is challenging to feel like I'm second guessing myself at times. I'm not sure if these situations were due to gender or to an insecurity of those around me.

An additional perceived benefit of male privilege noted by the participants related to employment in the school counseling profession. Comments regarding male privilege in seeking employment were offered by Nick and Wally who stated, "I usually have an easy time finding jobs when I need to" and "being a male put me in a more desirable position for employment" respectively. Despite seeming like a definitive benefit, some participants noted the difficulty in this scenario. For example, Sam recalled, "During my interview it [being male] was a point of conversation with my administration. Strangely enough, this caused me to feel pressure."

A related area that emerged from the participants' responses addressed physical masculinity expectations experienced as a male school counselor. For many of the male school counselors, being seen as an authority figure or disciplinarian was frequent. Eddie noted, "I often get asked to work with students who may be aggressive or be involved in disciplinary situations where there is concern for a student harming their own self or potentially someone else, rather than my female counterparts." This concern was further exemplified by Reed who shared, "Because I was male, my administrators wanted me trained in restraint techniques"; however, he also discussed the difficulties with this role as a school counselor stating, "I have no problem with verbal de-escalation, but I disagree with any counselor, especially a male, having to put hands on a student to restrain them. It damages the student-counselor relationship." Such perceptions went beyond administration as Steve shared, "I have noticed for myself teachers and other staff identify me as a discipliner instead of a counselor." Clark expressed concerns in his comment, "The stereotype that men have more 'control' over maintaining order removes us from our true school counselor role as a person of unconditional positive regard."

Related to experiences with masculinity in schools, perceptions regarding perceived male school counselor responsibilities as male role models also emerged. One example from Carter included the responsibility of perpetuating a positive male role model as he shared:

I find that a lot of the boys seek me out on a regular basis, probably more than they would a female counselor. This may speak to the lack of male presence at home or simply the uniqueness of being one of the few adult males on campus. Again, I try to be the best male role model that I can be for them and all the students.

Similarly, Miles noted, "I think they see receiving affirmation from a male is important because many of the students I work with do not have a positive male role model in their lives." This was also the case for David who said, "I think more males are needed in school counseling as we see so many fatherless homes. Boys and girls are in need of positive male role models, so I strive to

be that.” A final example was shared by Reed with his comment, “For the young males without male role models, I became that role model. In fact, it also applied to young females without a father in the home.”

The participants additionally perceived being a role model as influential from a cultural perspective. Barry noted his awareness of the importance of culture in his comment, “It is more challenging to initially break through the trust cycle with ethnically different students.” Similarly, John shared, “Sometimes being a male is more important than being the same race/culture as a student.” Miles was also cognizant of such differences as he relayed:

I would say that being white and from a middle-class family does not give me the full experience or understanding of where some of these students are coming from. Which is why I listen so much. I have to put in effort to really keep my own preconceived conceptions in check.

Reed shared a similar perception with his comment:

Male school counselors are needed especially at the elementary. Frankly, Black male counselors are needed the most. However, whatever the racial backgrounds are for the students, we need adults who look like and come from the same racial group and cultural background.

The impact of race also extended into the community for Arthur who noted, “Race/culture could play a big factor with parents and students who might feel that there is no way you can understand their situation if you don’t share their background. Past prejudices might prevent certain students from coming to you.”

Professional Relationships

The participants discussed the perceived impact of being a male school counselor regarding their professional relationships during training, supervision, and practice. For instance, being a male in the typically female dominated school counseling profession was evident for most of the participants from the onset of their training programs. While several of the participants were aware

of the difference yet noted little discomfort, some expressed the impact of being male. For example, Miles noted, "I never felt like an outsider and it was nice seeing other males in my online classes." Similarly, David shared, "There were noticeable fewer males in my graduate program, but not so few that I ever felt out of place. I suppose there were a few times my 'maleness' conflicted with the vibe of the class." Nick shared, "I was one of two males in my graduate program studying counseling. It wasn't a bad thing, but it did make for some awkward moments." For Wade, "It did always feel a little strange because of the differential in female colleagues than males. It makes you feel a little off." In Hank's case, race also factored into his experience with his comment, "I am one of few males, and usually the sole Black man in the room." Matt echoed this sentiment sharing:

I was one of only four males and one of only two Black males. I was often the token student when it came to class conversations about race and/or gender because the class typically experienced the perspective of White women...I remember having a conversation with one of my professors about my acceptance into the program and if it was only because I was a Black male.

The disproportion of male relationships was also prevalent in the supervisory experiences of the participants. Some of the participants discussed the difficulty of being a male in a female-dominated profession during supervision. In Victor's case, he noted, "Schooling and supervision was sometimes awkward or challenging because most of my colleagues were female. I made it a point to reach out to other male school counselors as well as colleagues so we could support each other." The potential contradictions of being a male school counselor was also experienced by Sam who shared:

One experience that comes to mind is from my internship. On the first day, I began by building rapport with many of the students in the school. One student felt comfortable and gave me a hug in the middle of the cafeteria during a 'Welcome Back' assembly. Not one to turn away a student who wanted to express their comfort in this way, I felt that this was a successful first step. However, another professional at the school spoke with my supervisor saying it was inappropriate. I felt this was strange because many others were

hugging students to welcome them back to school. This led to a long conversation with my supervisor on the challenges and benefits of being a male school counselor.

For many participants, however, their experiences were beneficial in addressing the nuances of being a male school counselor. In Eddie's case, this was demonstrated in his comment, "All supervision I received was from females. I remember having conversations with my site supervisor about how I would approach some conversations differently as a male." Logan also noted his positive experience sharing, "My site supervisor during my program was a female. She was a veteran counselor who was a leader at the local, regional, and national level so my experience of working with her was fantastic."

Upon completed their training and supervision requirements, the participants discussed their practitioner relationships in various school settings. For many of the participants, their perceptions were shaped by the school setting. For instance, Peter shared:

It really depends on the school/work environment. I was once part of a counseling staff that was fairly toxic toward males; I had two female co-counselors who would make fun of men. It was a common conversation for them to say that men make stupid decisions and it's better to have women in charge.

Logan had a similar experience, noting:

In my first building, I felt there was a high level of partnership, collaboration, and trust between myself, the admin (primarily male), and the staff. At my second building, I felt like there was a positive relationship with the families and most of the staff, but some tension and distrust at times between myself and the admin and a few key staff members (primarily female). In my last building, there was some poor communication that happened and some disagreement in leadership style and handling of a few circumstances that led to some distrust on my part.

Finally, Arthur talked about the differences between his call for services based on being male, "Teachers from other grade levels sometimes call me in to do a job when it is related to males. In the same situations, I am left out when they want someone to speak to a female student."

Societal Misconceptions

The final overarching theme that emerged from the participants revolved around the societal misconceptions of males in the education and counseling professions. A key area related to overarching societal constructs of males being dominant, deviant, or incompetent in educational or counseling professions. Related to these points, Ben noted, “The biggest hurdle I have to overcome is the stigma that I must be a weirdo because I am a male that enjoys counseling children.” Steve also shared his point, “Some major challenges would be avoiding the stereotypes of males being impatient or uncaring.” Similarly, Wade shared, “It’s an obstacle to feel like you are less caring or should be under more scrutiny just because you are a male entering the field.” Regarding incompetence, Matt related concerns of “being viewed that my gender makes me incapable of working with female students in the same way I can with male students.” Arthur also shared, “most people feel that it is a female dominant position so you might not know how to do your job.” Finally, Hank positively reframed these aspects along with racial implications in his statement:

As a Black male school counselor, I feel that I have to prove that I am equipped and competent enough to do the job. Parents challenge me to see I am up to par. Teachers at times even challenge me to see if I fully understand classes, grades, and content. These things have made me become a better counselor.

In conjunction with the societal perceptions of males in helping professions, males in the education field specifically emerged as significant for the participants. A similar perception regarding males in education was offered by Victor in his comment, “Perhaps we are labeled as too ‘feelings centered’ or even ‘touchy feely’ and people misunderstand the depth of issues we work with, trauma, suicide, self-harm, grief/loss, etc.” Sam also discussed dealing with such stigma in his comment:

I challenge the notion that some of my students have that men should not express certain emotions. Sadness and fear are the two biggest culprits. In working with all students and more specifically, young men, I focus on the point that we are emotional beings and

trying to suppress or avoid certain uncomfortable emotions can do more harm than good. Ben echoed the same perception in his statement, “I believe I have had an effect on the school population in general just by breaking that stereotype that women are the only ones that have to be nurturing and that ‘big boys don’t cry’. Seeing a male lets them know that it’s ok to have emotions and talk about them.”

Several participants discussed varied experiences with school stakeholders regarding concerns about working with students, particularly females. Carter shared, “On only one occasion has a parent informed the principal that they did not want either of their children to be alone with a male in an office.” While this was a singular incident for Carter, Peter noted that he “learned to keep my door open if I ever have a student in my office.” Similarly, Scott stated, “I protect myself when working with female students. I make sure that I have my door open and let other teachers know that I am working one on one with a female student.” Another example was offered by Arthur who stated, “I sometimes feel like some teachers watched me closely to make sure I was not getting too close with students, especially female students. This sometimes made me uncomfortable to have females in my office with the door closed.” The double standard for male school counselors was exemplified by Wade as he shared, “One of the APs called me in his office to say I should conduct my sessions with female students with the door cracked but the other two female counselors were safe and did not have to abide by that with males if they chose not to.”

Discussion

The study’s findings sought to broaden the knowledge of male experiences in the traditionally female-dominated fields of education and school counseling. In accordance with existing literature regarding males navigating through the school counseling profession (Ray et al., 2016; Underwood et al., 2019; Zanetti, 2014), the participants shared a variety of inconsistent

messages regarding their acceptance, roles, and responsibilities in the educational setting. In particular, the participants noted the expectations for males to partake in disciplinary roles regardless of educational position. Maintaining the mentality of males as disciplinarians perpetuates the definition of dominant masculinity in educational settings (Jones & Aubrey, 2019). Further, this role can be troublesome for school counselors as serving in a disciplinary capacity can negatively impact the counseling relationship they are trained to fulfill with students (ASCA, 2019; Wood & Brownhill, 2018). Serving in the capacity of male role model was also noted by several of the participants which aligns with the research documenting the benefits of students, especially at the elementary level, engaging in positive school interactions with males (McGrath & Sinclair, 2013; Dos Santos, 2020). Balancing such roles is vital for all school stakeholders to ensure proper utilization of male school counselors to alter masculine stereotypes while creating a diverse school setting beneficial for all students (Lane et al., 2020; Owens et al., 2010).

Many of the participants also shared their awareness of professional impacts of masculinity in the school setting. Despite the dominant majority of female educators, male privilege is inherent in current educational settings (Tucker, 2015). Several of the participants shared an awareness of such privilege while some did not notice any advantages. The noted examples of microaggressions regarding male competence and male privilege in leadership and professional interactions by the participants aligns with the existing literature on the topic (Bryan & Browder, 2013; Lane et al., 2020; Peterson, 2014). Addressing such differentials can aid in shifting the societal definition of masculinity and maternal rhetoric related to males in the education profession to a more inclusive and balanced narrative (Jones & Aubrey, 2019; Zanetti, 2014).

The male school counselors additionally communicated the need for diverse and supportive relationships during their training, supervision, and practice. Many of the participants noted the

lack of diversity in gender and race in their training, supervision, and practice experiences. The inability to engage with fellow school counseling professions who have similar backgrounds and experiences can result in feelings of disconnect (Peterson, 2014), a sense of invisibility (Michel et al., 2015), and lack of professional identity (Goodman-Scott, 2016).

While many of the participants discussed such relationships during their experiences, it was also evident that some levels of incongruence still existed because of the disproportionate female representation in the education profession, lack of understanding of professional responsibilities and duties, and appropriateness of interactions with students (Ray et al., 2016; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012). In accordance with the literature (Dos Santos, 2020; Jones & Aubrey, 2019; Underwood et al., 2019; Waalkes et al., 2018) and ASCA (2019; 2020), challenging the male school counselor stereotypes of inadequacy and perversion can enhance the educational and community setting to ensure a diverse array of students are getting their academic, social/emotional, and career needs met by a variety of professionals.

For several of the participants, connecting with students and stakeholders to address emotional and personal issues was paramount in building meaningful relationships while challenging the myth that males cannot deal with emotions. The participants emphasized that being allowed to engage in more appropriate school counseling duties, especially at the elementary level, could help students experience males as caring, supportive, and effective in their roles. Engaging in such professional endeavors can also enhance counseling self-efficacy resulting in more effective counseling outcomes, better job commitment, and high satisfaction (Aydin & Odaci, 2020). Additionally, the participants noted how enhanced engagement with diverse students as a male could potentially dissolve barriers with school stakeholders resulting in more educational and

community engagement. Such relationships with school counselors can play a pivotal role in helping students feel more empowered and engaged in their learning (Greer & Webb, 2020).

Implications

Addressing Masculinity in School Counseling

It was evident that some of the participants believed they could communicate differently with administration or had more benefits compared to their female colleagues. This perception of male privilege can have negative impacts on stakeholder morale if not addressed in school settings (Tucker, 2015). Male school counselors must constantly evaluate the impact of their gender on interactions with other stakeholders and address any inequities or discrepancies without haste. School counselor educators can address these privileges early in training programs to ensure male school counselors are made aware and can gain the skills necessary to confront them as they arise in the workplace. For instance, utilizing counseling and advocacy skills to have courageous conversations regarding noticed preferential treatment by administrators, teachers, or parents could be implemented into skill development and multicultural competency coursework. Likewise, male privilege should be assessed during the clinical supervision process to address potential issues while supported by supervisors and counselor educators. Male school counselors could also recommend in-service trainings to address topics of privilege and equity in school settings once in practice. Left unchecked, male privilege in the school setting can create a culture of male-dominance and inequity (Nilsson & Duan, 2007).

Clarifying Male School Counselor Roles and Responsibilities

An overarching area of concern of the profession in general, but of particular interest for the participants of this study was the understanding and utilization of school counselors in the most effective manner possible. With the increased call for enhanced mental health interventions for

school aged children (Lane et al., 2020), it is imperative that all school counselors advocate and educate school stakeholders on the benefits and capabilities they can provide to meet the academic, personal/social, and career needs of all students (ASCA, 2019). Considering the male school counselors in this study noted regularly being asked to engage in disciplinary actions, it is important to address advocacy roles in training programs and supervision to ensure that the male school counselor duties avoid the antiquated perception of guidance counselors, disciplinarians, and coaches for more focus on counseling based in empathy and unconditional positive regard (Wood & Brownhill, 2018). In particular, practicing school counselors, school districts, and counselor education programs can encourage the role of males, especially those of color, in elementary settings to challenge stereotypes and introduce younger students to caring male examples (Underwood et al., 2019; Zanetti, 2014).

Enhancing Recruitment and Inclusion of Male School Counselors

The findings of the study also spoke to the varied professional relationships that male school counselors may have and how they are impacted. Many of the participants perceived the disparity of male students compared to female students in training programs, and subsequently the profession. Many of the participants also shared that their supervisors were female which limited their ability to connect with students as they were guided based on the female approach. To address this concern, school counseling training programs and pedagogy should be more inclusive and purposeful in recruiting diverse male students as they are few within the profession. For instance, additional support and recruitment of male school counselors should also be occurring at the undergraduate levels, particularly at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), to address gender and racial stereotypes associated with education and counseling (Ivers et al., 2012; Jones & Aubrey, 2019; Zanetti, 2014). Current school counselors and school districts can work

collaboratively with counselor education programs to create recruitment strategies, identify viable resources for potential applicants, and develop curricula that encourage males of diverse backgrounds to engage in the profession. Once accepted into counselor education programs, it is essential that training focuses on developing a strong and clear professional identity for male school counselors (ASCA, 2020; Goodman-Scot et al., 2016). It is also vital that male school counseling students and practitioners be encouraged to share their unique racial and gender perspectives but to avoid expectations of representing the entire population. Opportunities to engage in continued supervisory or mentor relationships beyond training programs could positively impact school counselor job satisfaction and self-efficacy (Aydin & Odaci, 2020; Nilsson & Duan, 2007).

Deconstructing Stereotypes of Male School Counselors

The participants noted that their mere existence as a male on campus has caused a shift in how they are perceived as a school counselor. Many of the participants shared that they have been stereotyped and were assumed to be less competent in comparison to their female colleagues. In addition to competence, the participants reflected on their ability to be emotionally available and create a safe counseling space for both their male and female students across grade levels (McGrath & Sinclair, 2013; Petersen, 2014). In consideration of culture and the male presence, school counseling supervisors and counselor educators must ensure that conversations related to privacy and creating a safe environment occur. Although it is not ideal for most, many male school counselors are held to varying standards and therefore must abide by a different code of conduct such as exercising caution when counseling female students in private. It is vital that such differences along with methods of educating and negotiating with school stakeholders to ensure male school counselors can properly navigate educational settings while advocating for systemic

policy changes (Goodman-Scott et al., 2016). Counselor educators, supervisors, and practicing school counselors can also engage in conversations related to racial identity and competence and how biases may impede the counseling relationship while also addressing how being a male school counselor of color can benefit the educational and community settings (Greer & Webb, 2020; Ivers et al., 2012; Owens et al., 2010; Underwood et al., 2019).

Limitations and Future Research

There were some limitations present in this research study. The qualitative methodology employed in the study does not seek to infer generalizable results. Rather, the goal is to provide a thorough and meaningful exploration of the perceptions and experiences of the participants. The results may also be limited because of the voluntary, self-selected set of male school counselors potentially leading to bias. The 25 male school counselors were predominately White ($n = 19$) resulting in a potential limit in capturing distinct lived experiences from a racial diverse population. Finally, although the research team complied with the thematic data analysis process, a preconceived bias could possibly have influenced the analysis.

While this study is an attempt to bridge this gap in literature, there is a continued need to research the areas of male school counselor experiences. For example, future studies might include in-person interviews for a potentially richer data set. Studying the experiences and perceptions of students and school stakeholders with male school counselors could also help to broaden research on this topic. Researching the recruitment, training, supervision, and retention processes of counselor education programs and school districts related to males may also be beneficial.

Conclusion

The goal of this research was to gain awareness and understanding of male school counselors' experiences and perceptions in their training, supervision, and practice. The findings

indicated a need for further recruitment, training, collaboration, and resources to support both school stakeholders and male school counselors in understanding their roles, responsibilities, and capabilities. School counselors, counselor education programs, and school districts can utilize this resulting knowledge to develop more inclusive, supportive, and expansive environments for males to develop and maintain roles as professional school counselors.

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