Using Grounded Theory to Examine the Readiness of School Counselors to Serve Gang Members

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The purpose of this grounded theory study was to understand and explain how training and work setting experiences influence readiness of professional school counselors for serving gang members in schools. A purposeful sample consisted of secondary school counselors (n = 5) and school leaders (n = 7) in a southeastern metropolitan school district. Blended themes from the counselors and leaders were: (a) professional development attitudes, (b) actual and potential roles when working with students in gangs, and (c) counselors' collaborative role in discipline process. The Collaborative C.A.R.E. theory that emerged from the thematic analysis highlighted the absence of collaboration between school counselors and leaders. Specific findings identified reasons for the lack of collaboration and led to recommendations for practice and further research.

Keywords: **gang members, school counselors, grounded theory, Collaborative C.A.R.E, discipline**

On a daily basis, professional school counselors (PSCs) are expected to engage in a variety of functions in order to enhance the academic, career, personal, and social development of all students (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012b, 2014). Serving all students can be very challenging given the disproportionate number of PSCs to students in the United States and the number of non-counseling functions often imposed on PSCs (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). ASCA (2012a) recommends a counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250. Despite this recommendation, findings have indicated that the accurate ratio is closer to 1:491 (ASCA, n.d.). Responding to the "serve all students" expectation can be even more challenging when attempting to serve gang members, who are considered members of marginalized populations that are excluded from the social, economic, cultural, and political mainstream (McCluskey, Baker, & McCluskey, 2005).

Research on the PSC's role was conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and much of the research is generalized to include the role of the PSC (both perceived and actual) with little consideration for the contextual differences in jobs (e.g., elementary, middle, high school; Brott & Myers, 1999; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). A paucity of data exists in recent research examining the role of PSCs with specific groups of students based on cultural and environmental contexts, and their role since the introduction of the ASCA National Model. Gang members are students with norms related to language, rituals, and membership (Gibbs, 2000). The presence of gangs in schools reflects a need to examine the role of the PSC in serving this culturally marginalized population.

Gang members are often viewed as outsiders associated with "outlaw organizations" engaged in deviant behaviors (Gibbs, 2000, p. 73). On the other hand, from the inside, members find structure, ritual, and norms specific to their gang structure. This study was designed to attempt to fill these gaps by examining the role of the PSC with a contemporary, marginalized population.

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According to the National Gang Intelligence Center (2011), there are approximately 1.4 million active gang members representing more than 33,000 gangs in the United States. This represents a 40% increase compared to data collected in 2009. The data support an assumption that there is an increasing presence of gangs in both rural and urban communities (Brinson, Kottler, & Fisher, 2004). Unfortunately, there are several negative outcomes associated with the presence of gang members in the schools, including harassment, vandalism, aggressive recruitment of new members, irregular attendance, decreased motivation to succeed in school, and criminal activities. Consequently, gang presence can adversely affect the school environment, lower levels of academic achievement, and negatively influence perceptions of safety (Brinson et al., 2004). In and of itself, gang membership is not a crime, and gang members who are enrolled in public schools are eligible for all of the services that other students are receiving, including those offered by PSCs (Kizer, 2012).

As gang membership increases nationally, the presence of gang members will continue to expand in the schools and surrounding communities (Coggeshall & Kingery, 2001; Kingery, Coggeshall, & Alford, 1998). A recent survey of 12- to 18-year-old students indicated that 18% stated there were gangs in their schools (Robers, Kemp, Truman, & Snyder, 2013). This phenomenon will increase the exposure of PSCs to gang activity (Gündüz, 2012; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988). Because of their training, PSCs appear to be in a unique position conceptually to offer services to gang members and to the schools where gang members are present. Potential resources include individual and group counseling competencies; core curriculum programming knowledge and skills; availability for providing helpful consultations; and the overlying quest to enhance the academic, career, personal, and social development of all students (ASCA, 2012b, 2014).

The first author's exposure to gangs increased in her role as a PSC. Perceived lack of training and preparation to work with gang members and an absence of professional literature on the role of PSCs with gangs motivated the first author to conduct a preliminary investigation. Participants in the pilot study were PSCs in a southeastern urban public school setting. The pilot study consisted of two phases of inquiry consistent with the grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory generates data based on "participant experiences" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 288).

The first phase of the pilot study was a focus group of PSC participants with data being transcribed by the researcher, hand-coded, and analyzed. The second phase consisted of individual interviews completed at the respective job sites of three practicing PSCs. The interviews and observations from the second phase provided further evidence, more variation, and a greater understanding of the role of the PSC working with students in gangs across elementary, middle, and high school settings.

The preliminary investigation suggested further research in the school counseling domain. The participating PSCs appeared to experience ambiguity and lack of decision-making authority related to working with students who are gang members. Decisions on professional development opportunities and the PSC's role were influenced by school-based leaders, such as principals, whose views tended to focus on disciplinary issues rather than academic, career, personal, and social development with regard to gang members. Consequently, the pilot study revealed a need to further explore the PSC's role in working with gang members based on perceived and ideal roles, their professional development needs, and the influence of their educational administrators and supervisors.

Although uniquely positioned to offer something of value, there are impediments to fulfilling that role. Developing and defining the role for PSCs continues to be a challenge for PSCs, their school leaders (SLs), and national professional organizations that offer recommended roles for PSCs (Foxx,

Baker, & Gerler, 2017; Griffin & Farris, 2010; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Some SLs determine the tasks that define the role of their PSCs with little to no input from counselors (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012). These decisions are not aligned with ASCA's PSC role recommendations and indicate misunderstandings about how their counselors were trained and failure to collaborate on PSC role definitions (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005). Collaboration between PSCs and SLs is essential in the development of comprehensive counseling programs designed to support the academic goals of the school (Armstrong, MacDonald, & Stillo, 2010; Foxx et al., 2017; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012).

An additional challenge is a lack of professional development related to working with gang members after one's graduate training program. Caldarella, Sharpnack, Loosli, and Merrell (1996) found that many PSCs do not feel adequately trained or equipped to deal with gang activity and gang members in their schools, and almost half of the sample had no training related to gangs. Relatedly, our preliminary investigation found PSCs were trained to recognize the presence of gangs yet knew very little about how to engage with gang members and offer their services. Believing that one is unprepared and not competent to deliver counseling services to gang members may cause feelings of helplessness, apathy, and little or no desire to serve them (Ibrahim, Helms, & Thompson, 1983). As a marginalized population, students in gangs compound the unique challenges PSCs face, including role ambiguity (Burnham & Jackson, 2000), constant changes in student and school characteristics and needs (Reising & Daniels, 1983), and disconnects between training and practice (Brott & Myers, 1999; Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

The purpose of the present grounded theory study was to further understand and explain how training, perceived roles, and work setting experiences (e.g., professional development, working with students in gangs) influenced the readiness of PSCs in a large urban school district to serve gang members. Given the challenges PSCs experience related to serving gang members, the following research questions were derived in order to attempt to explain a conceptual linkage via a grounded theory based on understanding perspectives of a sample of PSCs and SLs via the interplay of context, conditions, and the PSC's role (Hays & Singh, 2012): How do PSCs and SLs describe perceived and actual roles of PSCs regarding services to gang members? How do PSCs and SLs describe previous training related to working with gang members? and How do PSCs and SLs describe circumstances that influence opportunities PSCs have for serving gang members?

Method

Participants

A total of 12 participants were included in this study. Five participants were PSCs and seven were SLs. Of the PSCs, four were female and one was male; four were White and one was African American. All of the PSCs had master's degrees and school counseling licenses. The mean age of the PSCs was 52 (*SD* = 8.57), and the mean years of counseling experience was 14.8 (*SD* = 7.69). All of the seven SLs were male. Six were White and one was African American. Four had master's degrees in educational leadership, one had a bachelor's degree in science, and two had doctoral degrees in education. Two of the seven SLs were based in the school district's central office. The mean age of the SLs was 42 (*SD* = 7.23), and the average years of experience was 10.4 (*SD* = 3.26). Each participant is represented by a pseudonym in the findings.

Consistent with grounded theory, stratified purposeful sampling was used to identify PSCs and SLs serving at the same school to voluntarily participate (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hays & Singh, 2012). PSCs possessed state professional licenses in their fields and were employed in secondary school settings. Specific criteria for the SLs were that they be assistant principals, principals, or central office

staff members. SLs possessed state professional licenses in their fields. An additional advantage of this approach was being able to triangulate data sources by acquiring data from different perspectives, including central school office members.

Instrumentation

Demographic questionnaire. Information related to age, ethnicity, education, and experience was collected from PSC and SL participants via a brief demographic questionnaire that asked identical questions.

Interview questions for participants. Two sets of open-ended questions were developed for semi-structured individual interviews. Topical areas addressed in the current study included role perception, professional development, and barriers to serving students in gangs. The following questions were presented to the PSC participants: (a) What factors determine the role you play in your school? (b) Who is involved in determining your professional role? (c) In your opinion, what role do professional school counselors currently play in identifying gang presence and providing intervention in your school? (d) Tell me what role you think counselors may play in identifying and providing interventions for students currently involved in a gang or considering gang membership. (e) What role has the school or school district played in providing professional school counselors with training specific to gang activity in the schools? (f) During your graduate school training, were you provided any opportunities to learn about gangs in schools? (g) Since graduate school, have you been provided or sought out opportunities to learn about gangs in schools? (h) In your own words, describe your work with students in gangs. (i) What barriers exist impacting your effectiveness in working with students in gangs? (j) In what ways do you seek out information to inform your work as a professional school counselor? (k) How might the ASCA National Model support your efforts to prevent or intervene with students in gangs? and (i) Is there anything you care to add?

The following questions were presented to the SL participants: (a) What factors determine the role school counselors play in your school? (b) Who is involved in determining their professional role? (c) In your opinion, what role do professional school counselors currently play in identifying gang presence and providing intervention in your school? (d) Tell me what role you think counselors may play in identifying and providing interventions for students currently involved in a gang or considering gang membership. (e) What role has the school or school district played in providing professional school counselors and school faculty with training specific to gang activity in the schools? (f) During your graduate school training, were you provided any opportunities to learn about the role of the school counselor? (g) Since graduate school, has your perception of the role of the school counselor changed? How so? (h) In your own words, describe your work with students in gangs. (i) How might the ASCA National Model support your school's efforts to prevent or intervene with students in gangs? and (j) Is there anything you care to add?

Interviewer/Investigator. The first author was an insider who worked for the school district as a PSC. At the time of the study, she was working full-time and was a doctoral student in a counselor education program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. She was a 37-year-old White female with nine years of school counseling experience. She is a licensed school counselor, licensed professional counselor, and a National Certified Counselor (NCC). She had access to data that would not be available to an outsider. An advantage was her familiarity with the participants.

Subjectivity statement. On the one hand, the first author lacked personal gang awareness and was sensitive to the participants' lack of knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). On the other hand, she had observed disruptive incidents created by gang members in her schools and was conflicted about how to deal with gang members as a professional. This led to a preliminary literature review that suggested ideas about how PSCs may serve gang members in their schools via both responsive services and core curriculum responses. The potential biases were role ambiguity and professional development. These biases were addressed during the data collection and analysis through the use of a journal to record immediate reactions to completed interviews.

Reflectivity during data collection is a valuable tool and is "considered essential to the research process" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 31). A journal housed field notes after each interview regarding participants' body language, physical environment, and interviewer's immediate thoughts and impressions. Journaling allowed for the constant comparison of data, looking for more data, and initial coding of collected data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Procedure

Data collection. Established university research policies for the protection of human subjects and the research policies of the school district were followed in order to gain access to schools and participants. After receiving institutional review board approval from the first author's affiliated university and the school district's research department, data collection was completed via interviewing participants, journaling, and reviewing documents. The primary source of data was individual semi-structured interviews using an open-ended questions approach and an interview guide (Patton, 2002). Observations of the school setting, participants, and reflections of each interview were noted by the first author/researcher in her journal (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition to journaling, policy manuals and public relations documents were accessed from the school district's website for the triangulation process (Patton, 2002). The school district's documents informed the researcher of existing procedures and policies and potential access to related training opportunities.

Participants were provided the interview questions in the moments immediately preceding the beginning of the interviews, giving them the opportunity to view questions and consider answers or emerging thoughts as needed. They were offered an opportunity to answer all questions. In order to enhance the analysis of the role of the PSC, interviews were conducted with SLs and PSCs working at the same schools. The interviews were conducted at the jobsites of the PSCs and SLs or at mutually agreeable locations. A digital voice recorder was used to record all interviews.

Data analysis. The recorded interviews were played and reviewed immediately after face-to-face interviews, allowing for constant comparisons (Schwandt, 2001). Each individual audio-recorded interview was transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Following transcription, the interviews were read twice by the first author before themes were highlighted and noted in the margins. Interview data were individually read for all PSCs with themes noted in the margins. Then, interview data were individually read for all SLs with themes noted in the journal. Finally, interview data were reviewed for each PSC and their corresponding SL with themes of each pairing noted by the researcher. Hand-coding was used to analyze data gathered from transcribed interviews with a focus on capturing essential concepts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The process of hand-coding involved deriving codes and the emerging themes to be organized into discrete categories leading to theory development (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the first or open coding stage, large general conceptual domains were identified in the reflective journal. Then, the researcher searched for relationships among the domains during the

axial coding stage. Finally, the selective coding stage involved: (a) explaining story lines, (b) relating subsidiary categories around the core categories by means of paradigms, (c) relating categories at the dimensional levels, (d) validating the relationships against the raw data, and (e) filling in the categories that may need further development (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Triangulation was used as a means to increase the trustworthiness in the present study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Patton, 2002). Four data sources were used to inform theory development: interviews with PSCs, interviews with SLs, a reflective journal, and related school district documents (e.g., discipline policies, in-service training programs). Grounded theory is built upon the cyclical and constant analysis of data (Hays & Singh, 2012). The use of multiple data sources in this study enhanced the development of codes, categories, and theory, and strengthened the trustworthiness of the study's findings (Merriam, 2002). The transcribed interviews were reviewed by the researcher to ensure that professional jargon was accurate. A reflective research journal was kept throughout the entire study. Each participant was offered an opportunity to member check the transcribed data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In addition, an audit was conducted to attempt to reduce the potential for personal biases influencing the data analysis. The auditor was a White female with a doctorate in educational leadership and previous work experience as a PSC. The auditing process consisted of quality control: (a) assuring ethical concerns were addressed, including the use of pseudonyms to protect participants; (b) reviewing the data to insure the study proposed and conducted matched data reported; and (c) proofreading, including clarifying professional jargon. Data saturation was achieved after the eighth interview; however, to affirm category development, complete interview pairings, and ensure triangulation of data sources, the interviews continued through 12 participants. As stated in the introduction, the purpose of the present study was to construct a grounded theory based on the data.

Findings

Grounded theory study data analyses provide central categories that bring all of the codes together (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The central thematic categories in the present study were: (a) professional development attitudes, (b) actual and potential roles when working with students in gangs, and (c) PSCs' collaborative role in the discipline process. An integration of the three central categories caused a *Collaborative C.A.R.E.* theory to emerge. *Collaboration* was the category both present and notably absent in the stories of the PSCs and the SLs. The C.A.R.E. acronym emerged out of the categories that developed during the axial coding process. The categories revealed a lack, or the presence, of *communication* with community stakeholders. The data suggested a need for PSCs working in secondary school settings to *advocate* for policies, procedures, programming, and *educational opportunities* to clarify their role in providing *responsive services* for students in gangs. What follows are excerpts of the data in the voices of the participants presented via the three central themes.

Professional Development Attitudes

PSCs are increasingly overwhelmed by their day-to-day responsibilities, leading them often to not engage in professional development that may take them away from campus. In addition, the interview data revealed that PSCs were not engaging in professional development related to working with gang members because of a lack of interest in working with this population, a concern for personal safety, unclear counseling roles, and the cost of professional development.

Beth (PSC) noted in her time as a PSC that different initiatives drive the training offered in the local district. She recalled a "push" four or five years previously to identify the presence of gangs at her school, but since that training she noted, "It's not an interest of mine" and she will look to other staff

members to "handle that stuff." Beth's response demonstrated a lack of engagement as a result of a lack of interest.

As noted, Beth expected other staff members, primarily SLs, to address the needs of students in gangs. In contrast, Sasha's (PSC) gang awareness training at the school level had occurred in other counties. She noted that the school district in the present study "maybe has had something," but "I don't think the school has provided anything." She went on to say, "I don't think I've done anything in this district." Sasha added that possessing knowledge of gangs in schools is "just not the highest on the list of priorities."

Sasha's supervising SL, Joe, noted the training from the district is "probably limited, to be honest." Joe stated as an SL: "I don't receive training for gangs or gang-related activity. Most of what I know is either self-taught or stuff that we pick up along the way because we're placed into that position as administrators." Joe elaborated that much of what he had picked up was reactive: "Unfortunately it's reactive, but that's also predicated upon the levels that we deal with here, which is not very much . . . so some of that [training] is from our SRO [school resource officer]."

Beyond having experienced awareness training, the PSCs expressed repeated concerns about their lack of intervention tools. Sasha said she was in need of "strategies" to work with gangs. She asked, "Are you working on trying to get them out of a gang or are you working on how do you cope with being part of a gang?" She followed with an insight: "it's . . . how it's affecting them in the school and so, generally, it leads to academics and attendance and if there are discipline issues or . . . . But it still has to have the school slant to . . . work with them." Judy (PSC) concurred that training had "been mostly awareness and information," and a lack of urgency to learn more left her deficient in skills and techniques to intervene.

Although awareness training appeared to be somewhat useful, specific prevention and intervention strategies were lacking in any of the training in which PSCs had previously participated. Stacey (PSC) stated that the limited training she received had been "one or two instances" consisting of "signs or signals." Sasha noted she had not been trained to intervene, and she believed part of the problem was the nature of gangs because they may be "generational, and I don't think anybody really knows how exactly [to] intervene. " When speaking about the role of training, Judy quite frankly stated, "If you're going to provide . . . training, does that imply that I then own the problem . . . if you're training me, you're giving me the problem and how am I supposed to solve it?"

Actual and Potential Roles When Working With Students in Gangs

The perceived and actual role of working PSCs has been studied extensively. Recommendations for serving students representing specific populations may vary (e.g., different ethnic groups, various exceptional populations, sexual minorities). On the other hand, ASCA (2014) is explicit in its petitioning provision of services to all students to address long-term goals and "demonstrate personal safety skills" (p. 2). The findings in this study suggest a possible actual role and provide ideas for a potential role for serving gang members.

Beth's SL, Stan, said, "I would say they [PSCs] don't really have a specific role in identifying gang presence" and "it wouldn't be something that I would put under their job description." Beth also noted that interactions with students in gangs were limited to an awareness that students may be involved with a gang because any intervention or interaction was something "that the assistant principals work with." Stan's comments mirrored those of his PSC. He stated, "If it's a discipline

issue, then it [the student issue] would stick with the administration." Stan's PSCs would be involved if the student needed "more of a counseling-type component where the student needs assistance or is seeking help from . . . the school."

Sasha said she worked with students in gangs, but their gang affiliation was "not what we're working on." Beth agreed: "The thing is . . . if a kid is coming to you with a specific problem, you help them with that specific problem whether he's a gang member or not." Beth stated her actual role as a PSC limited her ability to interact because in her opinion, "if a kid was deeply entrenched in a gang, we're not going to be able to get them out of that gang." Derek (SL) agreed that the degree of involvement complicates the intervention because "once they reach a certain point, it is going to be very difficult—I'm not going to say impossible—but it's going to be very difficult to get [them] back."

Because the immediate need for a student to seek a PSC's assistance was rarely, if ever, gang-related, Beth noted her form of intervention was about helping the students obtain their diplomas. Beth went on to say, "If he is here and attempting to get an education, behaving himself and not fighting . . . then my role would be to help him get what he needs from the school system as long as he is playing by our rules." Her view of services for gang members seemed focused primarily on academic counseling.

PSCs' Collaborative Role in Discipline Processes

Jake (SL) identified collaboration as a function in the PSC's role when working with students in gangs, although he noted that the level of collaboration would be limited by the degree of the student's gang involvement and its impact on the school environment. Jake stated, "I don't know that they play a role in identifying gang issues unless somebody comes to them with a situation."

Stacey, a PSC at Jake's school, concurred with his assessment when she noted, "We don't do a lot in identifying the gang presence . . . administration and the resource officer tend to be the ones dealing with that." Stacey went on to say that addressing students in gangs was handled by administrators, and there was no communication with the PSCs about those students that may be involved in gangs. Communications related to students in gangs among SLs, PSCs, and teachers did not exist at Stacey's school. She explained, "I can't remember anyone here ever talking about making that kind of referral."

Like Stacey, Trevor (PSC) did not expect referrals related to gang membership coming to him from teachers. The PSC participants reported that those students violating school policy were referred to administrators. Most referrals for confirmed concerns related to gang members based on attire or language were directed to the administrative teams if they came to the counseling office first. As a counterpoint, Trevor's SL, Frank, stated, "I can't say I've ever met a counselor I would trust to even give me that type of information." He went on to say, "So I'm not very trusting of that [information coming from PSCs] at this point. I don't think they're [PSCs] involved."

The degree of collaboration in the actual role of PSCs was mentioned frequently. There seemed to be a lack of collaboration and shortage of referrals from SLs to PSCs, especially when the student gang members had committed infractions leading to disciplinary consequences. When SLs disciplined gang members, there often was no follow-up with PSCs. The SLs in this sample seemed not to view PSCs as contributors to their disciplinary and safety maintenance functions. Because of their focus on safety and discipline issues when thinking about gang members, it seemed not to occur to the SLs that PSCs could contribute to the academic, career, personal, and social development of gang members via their traditional professional functions.

Limitations

Given the impact of the school calendar and its restricted timeline on data collection, it is possible the researcher was dependent upon acquiring participants from a limited population of busy professionals. Rather than relying on power analyses to determine the sample, qualitative researchers rely on evidence of data saturation, which may not have occurred in this study, to ensure sample sizes are sufficient. Further, qualitative researchers continue interviewing if repeated themes or codes are not present in the interviewing and follow emerging themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). In the present study, the sample size was smaller than some sources recommend for grounded theory studies. Fortunately, obvious signs of saturation were noted after the eighth participant was interviewed.

Racial diversity was limited to one African American in each sub-sample. Gender diversity was not achieved in the SL sub-sample. Consequently, the voice of a female SL's perspective was not present in this study because there were only five female site-based SLs in a district with 25 high schools. The lack of diversity might have impacted the lens by which they led or worked with marginalized populations. Meeting the age diversity selection criterion also was a challenge. The average age of the PSCs indicated that the views and experiences of younger professionals were understated. The extent of the participating PSCs' exposure to the ASCA National Model (2012a) was not assessed in the demographic questionnaire. Consequently, recommendations promoted in the National Model such as serving all students; offering comprehensive school counseling programs; enhancing the academic, career, and personal/social development of students; and collaboration with stakeholders, may have been limited, therefore impacting their perceived and actual roles accordingly. Participants may have self-censored responses as a result of being interviewed by a school system colleague or by knowing that a colleague in their school with more power was also being interviewed. Utilizing a researcher without ties to the school district might have enhanced the responses. Having colleagues from the same school participate was an important component of the study, a limitation that had to be accepted in addition to the population and sample being limited to one school district.

Discussion

The perceived and ideal role of PSCs has been extensively studied; however, a search of the professional literature demonstrated a paucity of research on the role of PSCs with specific, marginalized student populations (e.g., exceptional children, homeless), and the present study was designed to address the work of PSCs with one such group (i.e., students in gangs). The researcher attempted to understand the participants' perspectives related to how participating PSCs and SLs described their actual roles, their previous training, and opportunities for further training with regard to serving gang members.

Consistent with previous research (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Ibrahim et al., 1983; Lambie & Williamson, 2004), the findings revealed a perceived role for the PSCs' work with students in gangs as academically focused and reactive. PSC participants noted not knowing what counseling strategies to employ in order to assist students in gangs, implying there is no ideal role for PSCs within that domain. A lack of engagement in professional development, concerns for personal safety, unclear or absent roles for working with students in gangs, and, notably, a limited role imposed by SLs, negatively impacted their potential for working with gang members constructively.

Insights Based on the Circumstances That Led to the Study

As stated in the introduction, motivation to conduct the study was based on the first author's

limited previous professional experience with gang members, suggestions from a literature search, and results of a pilot study. The first author reported having observed the influence of disruptive gang members in her schools, leading to conflicted thoughts about how to serve them. Consistent with previous literature on role confusion (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Lambie & Williamson, 2004), PSCs in the present study also seemed conflicted about serving student gang members, and SLs seemed to consider the role of PSCs from a limited perspective. The perspectives of the two sets of professionals were somewhat different because their respective broad professional goals differed. Although SLs were more likely to focus on maintaining order and ensuring safety for all students, PSCs were more likely to focus primarily on their own safety and secondarily on providing limited responsive services to gang members (Sindhi, 2013).

Consequently, when SLs considered the role of PSCs, their perspectives were narrowly focused on safety and disciplinary issues, and PSCs were not viewed as being expected or able to contribute to those goals. They were not prompted to consider the PSC's role from a broader professional perspective, nor did they think of it (Cobb, 2014). It seemed as if most of the PSCs also responded from a safety perspective, feeling unprepared and unwilling to be involved in that kind of role, especially if it would involve discipline or attempting to get students to leave their gangs. Two PSCs (Sasha and Beth) mentioned providing limited responsive services if requested (i.e., personal issues and academic counseling) and if the students were behaving themselves. This finding also mirrored those of the pilot investigation that prompted this study.

Related contributions to the professional literature indicated dissonance about the perceived and actual roles of PSCs (Brott & Myers, 1999; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Ibrahim et al., 1983; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The findings in the present study were quite similar to those of Caldarella et al. (1996) almost two decades ago—that is, the PSCs did not feel adequately trained to work with gang members. And the attitudes expressed by the PSC participants in the findings mirrored the apathy about and disinterest in serving gang members reported by Ibrahim et al. (1983) over 30 years ago. Unfortunately, the findings highlighted apparently limited potential for PSCs to address the academic, career, personal, and social development needs of students in gangs in the targeted school district because of their current settings and frames of mind.

Implications for Professional School Counseling

Limited range of counselor services. Implementation of the ASCA National Model (2012b)throughout the school system represented in the present study apparently had little influence on the role PSCs played in serving gang members. Considerable interview content from PSCs and SLs seemed focused on safety and discipline issues rather than on the academic, career, personal, and social development of student gang members. Mention of providing academic services came from two of the PSCs. Limiting counseling services to academics alone does not fit into the proactive, "serve all students" framework supported by ASCA (2012b). The perception that PSCs are solely academic counselors may cause them to feel boxed in professionally, therefore limiting their ability to advocate for counseling services for students in gangs and causing them to determine over the course of their professional careers that their role is fixed and rigidly academically focused (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

Insufficient training. Three of the PSCs reported lacking sufficient training as a barrier to their working with students in gangs. Four of the five PSCs had not received training related to working with students in gangs during their master's degree programs. Two of the five reported attending workshops after graduate school, and the remaining three had not sought training. Training provided by the school district on gangs in schools was limited to enhancing awareness, and there was no

coverage of counseling-based techniques designed to reach students in gangs. A significant obstacle to training was time away from work and the cost of attending training. Although obstacles to training were reported, there seemed to be an underlying sense of frustration about the training that had been offered. The training from the district and from professional conferences was designed to make school personnel aware of the presence of gangs in the schools. This perceived lack of training designed to intervene and engage in counseling services for students in gangs is consistent with Brott and Myers' (1999) work noting the need for experiential learning to enhance professional autonomy. The participants reported not knowing what to do with students in gangs and wondering what the goals of the counseling relationships would be if students were involved with gangs. This limited response model appears to have negatively impacted the way that PSCs viewed gang members. Neither the PSCs nor the SLs wanted PSCs involved in a discipline-focused mode.

   PSC collaboration and advocacy. The Collaborative C.A.R.E. grounded theory presented at the beginning of the findings section suggests that PSCs respond to the challenges presented above via collaborating with others in their educational communities to advocate for policies, procedures, programs, and educational opportunities designed to clarify their role in providing responsive services to students in gangs. Although PSCs will benefit from more informed policies and richer educational opportunities, they also have advocacy competencies acquired in their training programs that should be of value when serving all students, including gang members. It appears as if the best way to serve students in gangs is through targeted responsive services designed to remove barriers and promote equitable access to counseling services (Trusty & Brown, 2005). Fortunately, most PSCs will not have to work differently in order to work with students in gangs via these approaches. Therefore, it appears as if the major changes needed are attitudinal. Believing that students in gangs deserve their services and advocacy efforts and can be served through existing services and competencies is essential. Overcoming safety concerns seems to be a very important goal. Students in gangs are members of a unique cultural group and equally worthy of positive regard and empathy. Becoming familiar with the nuances of this culture also seems to be an important goal for PSCs.

   PSCs are challenged to be able to approach counseling sessions with student gang members in the same way as any other student client. Sasha noted she had not been trained to intervene with gang members; however, she likely is capable of building empathic relationships and aiding in goal setting and future planning for all student clients. The challenge might be to accept gang members as they are and attempt to help them focus on something of value that they want to be in their future and attempt to help them achieve those goals.

Recommendations for Practice and Research

   Training preparation recommendations. The role of the PSC is continuously evolving via numerous influences, such as changing school policies and new initiatives at the local, state, and federal levels. Over their professional careers, PSCs may see a shift in the issues their students bring to the counseling relationship. For example, 15 years ago, PSCs were not dealing with cyberbullying. Cultural and economic shifts lead to changes in the issues students are forced to address, and changes in the lives of the students challenge PSCs to expand their expertise in order to be more effective practitioners. PSCs should be offered and encouraged to attend training based on a variety of issues impacting their work with 21st-century students, including enhancing the academic, career, personal, and social development of gang members.

   As PSCs prepare to respond to evolving issues and shifting demographics, graduate training programs are challenged to provide instruction to prepare future PSCs for the realities of school

settings and the diverse populations served. By no means can graduate training programs prepare graduate-level students for all of the nuances of practicing in a school; however, a careful review of the populations being served in 21st-century schools may guide the development of training modules designed to work with unique populations, including students in gangs. A training module of this type also can be developed and implemented in school districts in order to provide professional development for practicing PSCs.

Research recommendations. The paucity of research related to students in gangs and school counseling provides rich opportunities for future studies that might include examining the professional development needs of PSCs, addressing personal safety concerns, and exploring the impact of school-based stakeholders on the self-efficacy of PSCs. Until PSCs feel secure in the role they were trained to fill, they may continue to accept the non-counseling roles often expected by SLs and experience low levels of self-efficacy in working with diverse populations, including students in gangs (Dahir, Burnham, & Stone, 2009).

Responsive services address the immediate needs and concerns of students and incorporate both direct and indirect service modes (ASCA, 2012b). Further research involving responsive services may address the following questions: How is role development impacted by existing procedures and policies? How is the role of PSCs different in districts with procedures for addressing the needs of students in gangs versus districts lacking the same procedures? How effective are PSCs who collaborate with their communities when working with gang members?

Of all the research needs regarding students in gangs, knowledge acquired from the gang member's perspective seems most needed. Without gang members as participants, the voice of students in gangs will continue to be silent. Studying students in gangs in order to understand how school staff can enhance their development may provide valuable information for both responsive and core curriculum services that can be provided by PSCs.

Conclusion

ASCA's National Model (2012b) advocates for comprehensive school counseling programs designed to serve all students. Gang members are a unique student culture to be included within the "all students" framework and can benefit from school-based counseling services designed to enhance their academic, career, personal, and social development. Unfortunately, the findings in the present study revealed that there are impediments preventing PSCs from serving gang members. It seems as if the PSCs in the present study lacked role clarity in working with students in gangs, and there was a lack of intervention-based professional development. Not serving students in gangs led PSCs to believe they have nothing to offer those students through traditional counseling services, and this lack of efficacy may impact their role as advocates. Although this study was limited to one school district, the experiences and perceptions of PSCs and SLs in this study might not be unique. PSCs are uniquely trained and strategically located in school settings to provide valuable services to gang members that can help them feel accepted for who they are at the moment, while also helping them to focus on finding a meaningful pathway to their futures.

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