

“BEING AVAILABLE”: THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR IN PUBLIC AND
PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOLS

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On my Honor
I have neither given nor received
unauthorized aid on this thesis

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author examines the role of counselors in public and private high schools. This study aims to identify if there exists a discrepancy in the role and responsibilities of counselors based on the type of school, whether high- or low-achieving, upper- or lower-class, private or public, etc. and what the implications of this possible discrepancy may be. Utilizing qualitative interviews of five counselors practicing at five unique schools, the study illustrates inconsistencies in the role and responsibilities of counselors at these contrasting schools. Similarly, this paper exposes a potentially significant positive relationship between socioeconomic status of public high schools and their increased similarity with private high schools over their public counterparts, and suggests the involvement of counselors in the elimination of larger social problems.

According to Pierre Bourdieu, “Every institutionalized education system owes the specific characteristics of its structure and functioning to the fact that...it has to produce and reproduce the institutional conditions whose existence and persistence...are necessary to the fulfillment of its function of reproducing a cultural arbitrary...the reproduction of which contributes to the reproduction of the relations between the pupils or classes” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977:54). In other words, the educational system produces and reproduces inequality by legitimizing the culture of the dominant or upper class, thus ensuring that the dominant class maintains power, and continuing the social hierarchy. Bourdieu studied the reproduction of inequality within the education system in great depth, and many other sociologists have further researched this topic. This paper as well sheds light on potential inequalities related to the role and responsibilities of counselors within different school contexts, however, this paper primarily sought to examine and understand this role and responsibilities variation in relation to the current social system and climate.

During the process of this research yet another school shooting occurred at this time Arapahoe High School on December 13th, just a day before the one year anniversary of the Sandy Hook school shooting in Connecticut. “It has become a tragically familiar scene in American life: law enforcement officers descending on a packed school where a gunman is on the loose. A procession of students, their hands raised, slowly making their way out of the danger zone,” reported Ray Sanchez of The Cable News Network (2013). This incident occurred less than 10 miles from the scene of the 1999 Columbine High School shooting. Since Columbine and other more recent school shootings, new response procedures and protocols have been designed

and executed around the United States. Colorado has implemented changes to gun control, including limiting the size of ammunition magazines and instituting universal background checks (The Associated Press 2013). Similarly, according to The Associated Press (2013), in this last year Colorado appropriated more than 20 million dollars on mental health hotlines and local crisis centers. In an interview with Rebecca Kaplan of CBS news (2013) just following the Arapahoe High School shooting, Colorado Governor Hickenlooper stated, “Things like universal background check (*sic*), I think they are going to make it safer, but in this specific case aren’t going to make a difference at all.” Indeed, it seems as though the efforts Colorado and other states have taken, while improving the response to these incidences, are doing little to *prevent* the shootings from occurring. Considering the fact that these shootings are occurring at schools, it seems only essential that we begin to look *within* the school in order to identify individuals, systems, and programs that may be able to contribute to the prevention and elimination of these school shootings. School counselors seem the most apparent individuals with which to begin this examination into the school system, as they are in the unique position of advising and supporting students with social/emotional/personal issues, in addition to the academic advising their job entails.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the American School Counselor Association (2012), school counselors “are uniquely qualified to address all students’ academic, personal/social and career development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student

success (p.1).” Many studies outline the extensive and holistic role of the counselor, defined by influencing and aiding in students’ development and growth in multiple domains related both to academic and cognitive growth, as well as personal, social, and emotional growth and achievement. (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, and Pierce 2012; Rayle 2006; Scarborough and Culbreth 2008; Shephard, Salina, Girtz, Cox, Davenport, and Hillard 2012). Lam and Hui (2010) emphasize the many emotional, personal, and social struggles, including drug problems, peer relationships and conflicts, self-esteem issues, and other difficulties experienced by students in their teenage years. These hardships are often exacerbated for teens living in families with low socioeconomic status. Shephard et al. (2012) stress that minority and low socioeconomic students often face “low graduation rates, gang violence, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse (p.49).” Counselors are often the professional individuals that offer guidance on these issues related to personal and social conflicts and assist students in developing skills and problem-solving abilities to deal with and address these difficulties, as well as provide them with the tools to become more self-confident (Fitch and Marshall 2004; Lapan et al. 2012). Studies have outlined the additional role of counselors in relation to post-secondary or career counseling and guiding. While some schools employ counselors whose role is specifically to advise on post-secondary opportunities, many schools rely on the expertise of the primary counselor to provide this information in addition to his/her other responsibilities (Alexitch, Kobussen, and Stookey 2004; Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy 2011).

Generally counselors are seen as individuals with the capacity and position to influence student success (Hayes, Nelson, Tablin, Pearson, and Worthy 2007). However, in a study conducted by the Public Agenda (2010), approximately half of the study's sample of young adults reported feeling that their school counselor saw them as "just another face in the crowd (p.3)," yet 47% (p.3) reported that their counselor really tried to get to know them on a personal level and provide guidance to them. Similarly, Reddick et al. (2011) cited one of their interview participants responding to a question about her counselor, saying, "I think I only went to her office one time and it was about changing my schedule...only my teachers helped me (p.607)."

Factors Influencing the Role of Counselors

The role and purposes of counselors have changed and expanded tremendously throughout the years (American School Counselor Association 2012; Bemak 2000; Dodson 2009; Scarborough and Culbreth 2008), and as responsibilities have been added, few have been removed (McKillip et al. 2012). In recent years, the role of counselor has changed from a position-focused provider to a more comprehensive, developmental-guidance specialist (Dodson 2009). Overall the changing social and cultural climate in the United States consistently presents school counselors with new goals, tasks, and challenges (Rayle 2006). Similarly, the National Center for Transforming School Counseling, the No Child Left Behind Act, as well as national standards and models set by the American School Counselor Association and other similar organizations and acts, have influenced the profession

of school counseling (American School Counselor Association 2012; Dodson 2009; Lam and Hui 2010; Rayle 2006; Scarborough and Culbreth 2008).

Counselors are being held increasingly responsible for creating school contexts in which all students can be successful (Fitch and Marshall 2004; Hayes, Nelson, Tablin, Pearson, and Worthy 2002). However, in addition to the many changes in recent years that have affected the counselors' role, there are a number of other factors that influence counselors' ability to perform their responsibilities. These include the discrepancy in how counselors perceive their role compared to other school personnel, the lack of consistency in how the role and responsibilities are defined and implemented within schools, the ratio of students to counselors, the level of collaboration within the school, the socioeconomic status of the student body, to name a few.

The role and responsibilities of counselors are clearly defined by the American School Counselor Association and other related professional organizations that support school counselors. However, in many cases they remain problematic in terms of interpretation and implementation (Fitch and Marshall 2004). This is in part due to the fact that not all school counselors adopt or are even aware of comprehensive programs such as the National Model recommended by the American School Counselor Association (Dodson 2009; Rayle 2006; Scarborough and Culbreth 2008). Similarly, many school districts, administrators, and individual schools implement their own role guidelines and in some cases are unfamiliar with the American School Counselor Association and state counseling standards (Fitch and Marshall 2004). McKillip et al. (2012) found in their research that "counselors vary

greatly in their reports of day-to-day duties...which likely has an impact on counselors' effectiveness" (p.51). In other words, there is some confusion and discrepancy in the definition and execution of counselors' positions and responsibilities (Fitch and Marshall 2004; Gewertz 2011; Scarborough and Culbreth 2008).

This discrepancy and lack of clarity has many implications (Gewertz 2011; Scarborough and Culbreth 2008). If the role is not defined clearly and personnel within the school setting have different interpretations of the role of the counselor, counselors will continue to be seen as "free agents with flexibility in their schedules to take on assignments no one else in the building will cover" (Dodson 2009:486). The American School Counselor Association recommends that counselors spend at least 80 percent of their time in direct and indirect service with students, involving face-to-face, in person interactions as well as services provided for students including "referrals for additional assistance, consultation, collaboration with parents, teachers, other educators and community organizations (American School Counselor Association 2008:4). However, often counselors report that they spend a large amount of time performing tasks that undermine their ability to actually implement the counseling-related responsibilities that involve direct, in-person interaction with students (Johnson, Rochkind, and Ott 2010; Scarborough and Culbreth 2008). McKillip, Rawls, and Barry (2012) found that, "a counselor's ability to work effectively with students could be improved with a more explicit definition of high school counselor roles and duties" (p.51). At the same time schools vary greatly in context and what may work at one school may not have the same effect at another.

These rising demands, paired with a decrease in funding for counseling positions and programs is having a detrimental impact on counselors, resulting in greater levels of job-related stress and lower levels of job satisfaction (McKillip et al. 2012; Rayle 2006). Similarly, in response to funding cuts, counselor positions are being reduced, and in some cases completely eradicated and replaced by outside community mental health agencies, or the few remaining employed counselors are acquiring additional administrative responsibilities (Dodson 2009; McKillip et al. 2012). This places a number of constraints in terms of being able to adequately advise vast numbers of students, given the lack reduced number of supporting counselors, the short hours they are employed, and the doubling-up of counselor positions with other administrative positions in the school (McKillip et al. 2012).

Students who are living in poverty often have reduced support from parents, in terms of time and financial resources placing an heightened responsibility on counselors, who “can be vitally instrumental in acting as social agents within school cultures” (Nassar-McMillan, Karvonen, Perez, and Abrams 2009:195). Children living in poverty are found to have increased behavioral issues, school drop-out rates, developmental difficulties, as well as a greater likelihood of anxiety, depression or other mental-health related issues, among many others (Hayes et al. 2002; Suh, Suh, and Houston 2007; Taylor and Karcher 2009). For example, in a study of 481 Missouri schools, Lapan et al. (2012) found that those with higher percentages of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch programs had lower rates of graduation and attendance, lower ACT scores, and increased disciplinary incidents. According to Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007), these factors present a great challenge and added

difficulty to the jobs of educators and counselors. Many studies have identified the increased duty of the counselor in their ability to provide social capital for students who, due to their socioeconomic position, do not have access to the various factors that contribute to social capital (Amatea and West-Olatunji, 2007; Hines and Holcomb-McCoy 2013). In one longitudinal study of over 4,000 nationally representative high school seniors, Byran et al. (2011) discovered that school counselors may serve as an important and often sole source of social capital for these students, in terms of providing college-related information or social support for students from lower SES backgrounds.

The role of the counselor as outlined by the American School Counselor Association, emphasizes the importance of engaging in a collaborative effort that addresses student success (Dodson 2009). Collaboration among counselors with teachers, principals, and other staff and administration can aid in clarifying the role of the counselor, and can allow for the implementation of a more comprehensive guidance program that fosters student growth and development towards success (Dodson 2009; McKillip et al. 2012; Hayes et al. 2002; Lam and Hui 2010; Scarborough and Culbreth 2008). Clark and Amatea (2004) found through their interviews with 23 teachers located at schools throughout the southern United States, that the theme of collaboration came up multiple times, with one teacher saying, “Collaboration and team unity are vital. The staff as a whole needs to be involved with the student, and communication among staff members is essential” (p.138).

The American School Counselor Association recommends a 250 to 1 student to counselor ratio (American School Counselor Association 2012:1). However, in

reality this ratio is often far higher, reaching over 1,000 students per counselor in some states. High-poverty schools are even more likely to have higher ratios (Lapan et al. 2012; Lapan, Whitcomb, and Aleman 2012). Student to counselor ratios are of particular importance as lower ratios promote academic, social, and personal achievement and are significantly associated with higher graduation rates, especially in schools that have a student body disproportionately low in socioeconomic status (Lapan, Whitcomb, and Aleman 2012). A study conducted by Lapan et al. (2012), found that schools with lower student to counselor ratios had higher percentages of seniors graduating from high school, as well as fewer disciplinary incidents and higher rates of attendance.

High-poverty area public high schools have been found to lack opportunities and resources in terms of college planning and guidance (Farmer-Hinton and McCullough 2008; Lapan et al. 2012). Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008) found that charter schools and other elite college-preparatory schools are beginning to provide more comprehensive college programs and support that provides increased social capital for students who are racial/ethnic minorities. However, it is worth noting that these schools typically serve white and affluent students and while the few students of racial/ethnic minorities attending these schools may receive support, there remain a vast number of students in these high-poverty public high schools who remain at a disadvantage (Farmer-Hinton and McCullough 2008). In terms of college counseling specifically, extensive research has found that counselors tend to offer college guiding based on the race and socioeconomic status of students (Alexitch, Kobussen, and Stookey 2004; Hoover 2006; Linnehan, Weer, and Stonely 2011).

Specifically, Linnehan et al. (2011) found that counselors are more likely to recommend post-secondary opportunities including community colleges to black students, and 4-year institutions to white students, further reproducing social inequality. Additionally, Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008) found that predominantly white and affluent school “counselors offered more high-volume social capital such as extensive student advising, detailed discussions on the types of schools for students to apply, and hands-on assistance with completing the application packet and essay” (p.80).

Contributing to this already extensive role of counselors is the findings that high-poverty schools have less experienced and skilled teachers as well as less support for these young new teachers, resulting in high teacher turn-over rates and thus, lower quality teaching, which ultimately places increased responsibility on counselors (Amatea and West-Olatunji 2007). High-poverty schools report having fewer resources in terms of textbooks, administrative support, and programs including career or college guidance programs that support the counselors’ responsibilities (Amatea and West-Olatunji 2007). The need for information regarding how to support or mitigate the factors that contribute to an underrepresentation of low-income students and racial minorities in post-secondary education is increasingly important as the U.S. population becomes more racially and ethnically diverse (McKillip, Rawls, and Barry 2012).

A number of studies have researched the impact of high-poverty schools on the job breadth of counselors. One study conducted by Fitch and Marshall (2004) aimed to compare the school counselor’s role in high- versus low-achieving schools.

The most significant finding of their research was that counselors in high-achieving schools spend significantly more time on program management, coordination, evaluation, and research, and adhering to professional standards. Similarly, the study conducted by Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008) provides insight on the differing levels of college or post-secondary advising in predominantly white and affluent schools compared to less affluent schools and those with populations of primarily minority students. However this as well as the majority of the other research relating to the role of counselors has utilized quantitative methods. The few qualitative studies have focused on *how* counselors advise on career and post-secondary educational opportunities.

My work aims to fill this gap in the research by utilizing qualitative methods to build on Fitch and Marshall's (2004) attempt to research the impact of high- versus low-achieving schools on the role and responsibilities of counselors. Qualitative research has the potential to identify personal accounts and experiences, and thus discover underlying themes and influencing factors that may not be accessible through the use of solely quantitative methods. This study aims to qualitatively identify how the context of a school, in terms of size, public versus private, racial breakdown, and socioeconomic breakdown impacts the role of the counselor. More specifically, my research aims to examine whether there are factors that influence the type of guidance provided by the counselor and to which aspects of guiding they devote most of their time. Given this information, this study aims to identify if there exists a discrepancy in the role and responsibilities of counselors based on the type of school, whether high- or low-achieving, upper- or lower-class, private or public, etc.

and what the implications of this possible discrepancy may be in terms of class reproduction theory and Bourdieu's theory of the reproduction of social structures within the educational system. It also aims to shed light on the role and responsibilities of counselors in relation to mental health and school violent acts within the school setting.

METHODS

For this study, three public high schools were selected, based on their unique populations in terms of the variation of race and socioeconomic status of the students attending these schools, as well as their convenience in terms of proximity. Two distinctive private high schools, one boarding school and one religiously affiliated school, were chosen in order to provide comparative insight on the differences and similarities between public and private high schools, as well as the interplay of religious components. Emails were sent to multiple counselors at these five schools, and meetings were arranged with the first counselor to respond from each of the schools selected. Interviews took place on site at the individual schools, in the offices of the counselors interviewed, and ranged from 15 minutes to 40 minutes in length. The interview questions were grouped into four main themes: specific advising elements, logistical information, job definition and collaboration, and personal experience. See appendix B for full interview schedule.

Table 1: Most Recent Data on Percent (n) of Students in Demographic Categories by School

	Lower-class public	Middle-class public	Upper-class public	Religious private	Boarding private
Total Student Population	956	1975	1342	196	242
Racial Breakdown				*	
white, non-Hispanic	31 (294)	59 (1165)	79 (1054)	87 (170)	74 (180)
Hispanic	43 (414)	22 (435)	12 (163)	5 (11)	9 (9)
black, non-Hispanic	19 (179)	6 (118)	2 (30)	5 (10)	2 (5)
Asian/Pacific Islander	6 (54)	2 (40)	5 (69)	3 (5)	15 (36)
American Indian/Alaska Native	1 (11)	2 (40)	0 (6)	0 (0)	1 (3)
Two or more races	.4 (4)	7 (138)	1 (20)	0 (0)	3 (9)
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	70 (669)	36 (711)	8 (107)	N/A	N/A
Graduation rate class of 2012	75 (717)	78.95 (1559)	93 (1248)	100 (196)	100 (243)
ACT composite score	17.39	20.86	23.65	26.5	28
Counselors on staff	3	7	4	2	1
Student to counselor ratio (about)	318 to 1	350 to 1	335 to 1	148 to 1	243 to 1

* Racial breakdown based on entire K-12 student population

ANALYSIS

The data in Table 1 provide information on the context of each school. For the purpose of this research, ACT test scores and graduation rates were used as a measure of achievement and free or reduced price lunch eligibility was used as a measure of socio-economic class. Racial breakdown at each school, number of counselors employed, and student-to-counselor ratios is also provided as those elements provide additional information on the context of the school, in terms of the challenges that arise with an increasingly diverse population, a greater student caseload, and fewer employed counselors. It is important to note that the racial diversity of the school, as well as the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, decrease moving from the lower-class public high school towards the boarding private high school, while the ACT composite scores and the graduation rate increase.

In analyzing the data from the interview transcripts, six subthemes emerged: job description and role definition, collaboration among school personnel, counselor involvement in classes, academic counseling, social/emotional/personal counseling, and case load and logistics. Often the main differences occurred between the public and private high schools. However, in many cases the highest achieving, or upper-class public high school aligned more closely and shared more similarities with both private high schools. In regards to the job/role description and definition, collaboration, involvement in classes, parental involvement, social emotional issues most prevalent, and type of social/emotional/personal counseling provided, the upper-class public high school shared more similarities with the private high schools.

Job Description/Role Definition

All counselors were generally familiar with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) model and standards recommended for high school counselors. However, the specific body determining and assigning the role and responsibilities varied between each school. All three public high schools are required by the state of Colorado to have all students fill out an Individual Career and Academic Plan, known as an ICAP. This in itself determines a significant portion of the job of counselors in public high schools, as they must allocate time to administering and helping students complete this plan over all four years of high school. Among the public high schools, only the middle-class public high school counselor is required to follow the ASCA model. The lower-class public high school, while still utilizing the ASCA model as a general guideline, also employs a pay-for-performance model that outlines the role of the counselors at this school and supplies them with a rubric of exact percentages of

time they must allocate to different duties and tasks. The counselor at this lower-class school explained, “I’m to align my day based on what the district finds important which is defined in this rubric...It doesn’t matter how many years experience you have, or how much education you have.” Her role appeared the most precisely determined compared to all other counselors interviewed, although the role of counselor at the middle-class public high school was also fairly rigid given the comprehensive guidelines of the ASCA model.

The counselors at both private high schools and the upper-class public high school appeared to have a more flexible and self-determined and defined role. The religious private high school counselor shed insight on the relaxed nature of how his responsibilities are defined at his school. Unlike the other counselors, he was unaware of his exact job description, other than that the Association of Christian Schools International and North Central generally determined his role and duties, along with two accrediting bodies. “I mean years ago; it’s in one of these file cabinets; I saw the job description and the things I need to do. It’s a pretty universal job description. It’s just that you have to tailor it to your unique population which is what we’ve done,” he reported. Similarly, the counselor at the private boarding school said that often she isn’t very good about filing her paperwork, and sometimes is required to breach confidentiality. Overall, their responses framed their job as fairly open to their own interpretation of responsibilities and flexible in terms of deciding how to best implement their counseling duties, as well as a sense that they are not held accountable to the extent that the lower resourced public high school counselors are held.

The counselor at the upper-class public high school also expressed a significant level of autonomy in relation to his job. He noted his personal belief in the ASCA model, highlighting the difficulty of implementing it in full detail, and explaining that this upper-class school has their own model that the counselors themselves helped develop. He explained, “As a team we derive what we do along with our principal. What is [*sic*] our job responsibilities, what should we do and what does this environment expect and need from us.” Similarly, he asserted that the ASCA recommends a ratio of one counselor per 100 students, a ratio recommended by a version of the ASCA model that dates back to before 1995, the year it was changed to one counselor per 250 students. His description of how this upper-class school defines the role of the counselor reflects a much more independently formed standard and role description, defined by the administration, the community, as well as the counselors themselves. This agency of the counselors at this school in defining their role and responsibilities falls more in line with the private high school counselors, rather than the other public high school counselors interviewed.

Collaboration Among School Personnel

Collaboration among the team of counselors was a common theme across the board. However, collaborative efforts among counselors and teachers differed between the lowest-achieving public high school and all four other schools. The counselor at the upper-class public high school expressed that counselors and teachers collaborate to an extent, where teachers inform the counselors when students are struggling and may need to be tested for learning disabilities or accommodation needs. He also shared that the counselors work closely with deans to manage what is

going on with the students in terms of the academic, behavioral, and social/emotional/personal realms. The counselor at the private boarding school noted that in other schools you find that the counselor isn't involved in the decision making process, and their views and opinions aren't valued. She explained that at her school she feels very connected with other school personnel, saying, "This place is amazing. I feel very involved with the rest of the administration and the Dean of Students and I talk all the time." At the middle-class school, the counselor emphasized the extensive collaboration between social workers and counselors, as well as with teachers, principals, and administration. "It's all about the kids and what we can do for them," she said. The counselor at the religious private high school echoed this collaboration at his school, saying, "It's a pretty tight knit staff," and went on to express the great deal of support among the counselors and teachers that exists at his school.

However, unlike the other counselors, the counselor at the lower-class high school responded that while there is significant collaboration among the three counselors at her school, there exists a lack of clarity in terms of how teachers see the role of the counselor, and in many cases the counselors at her school are simply a support to the teacher. "The teachers think, 'oh the counselors just sit down there, chat with students'; no one really knows what you do," she explained.

Counselor Involvement in Classes

The counselors at both private high schools as well as the upper-class public high school mentioned physically going into classes to speak with students, teach classes, or implement testing. The counselor at the private boarding school noted that she teaches a class on self-care, curiosity, and awareness to freshman and another

class to sophomores, involving discussions on values, interests, and personalities, in order to help them begin thinking about college. The religious private high school counselor as well mentioned teaching a course at his school, and the counselor at the upper-class public high school also noted going into 17 different classes to administer the Individual Career and Academic Plan, ICAP, to all of his sophomore students. While both the lower- and middle-class public high schools are required to have students fill out the ICAPS, the counselors made no mention of physically going into the classes. Overall, the private high school counselors and the upper-class public high school counselor identified a greater presence in the school, compared to the other two public high school counselors. As noted by previous research, a lack of presence can be problematic in terms of students not feeling adequately supported by their counselors.

Academic Counseling

All school counselors, with the exception of the counselor at the private boarding school, identified similar academically related advising duties. These included creating and changing schedules, administering testing for Advanced Placement classes, sending out college applications, writing letters of recommendation for college applications, administering SAT/PSAT, ACT, and other standardized tests, coordinating and overseeing career and college fairs and related events, and creating ADA and Section 504 accommodation plans. All counselors, again with the exception of the private boarding school counselor, determined that the majority of their job is devoted to the academic side of counseling. The counselor at the lower-class public high school determined that she spends about 80 percent of her

time performing academically related advising duties, and only 20 percent on the social/emotional/personal related components. The counselor at the religious private high school echoed this saying his job is more heavily weighted on post-secondary and academically related advising. The counselor at the upper-class public high school also noted that his job entails more academic advising, adding that the academic focus is due to the fact that parents expect and demand this.

There appeared to be a significant differentiation in the academic advising relating to college or post-secondary information. The counselor at the lower-class public high school emphasized that many students don't pursue a college education, noting the difference between students involved in the school's AVID program, that is designed to support students through the process of applying for colleges and provide them with tips and skills to succeed, compared to students not involved in this program. She compared these two groups of students, saying that the AVID students are incredibly prepared and on top of the college application process, whereas the non-AVID students are failing their classes and aren't sure if they even want to go to college. This greatly contrasted with the religious private high school, where the counselor noted that 95 percent of the students go on to college right after high school, or take a gap year often involving mission trips or involvement in other religiously affiliated programs.

There also appeared a significant difference in terms of parental involvement at the individual schools, primarily in terms of parent presence on the school campuses, as well as individual parental support in the students' academic lives. The counselor at the middle-class public high school said, "I think many parents are

intimidated to come into the school. I think a lot of times they feel like they're being lectured and they don't want to be lectured to." She went on to say that she didn't think all of the parents would show up for the upcoming meetings with credit deficient 11th graders, despite having called every one of them. This differed greatly from the religious private high school and the upper-class public high school. Both of these counselors emphasized the parental involvement and support that they receive from the community. The counselor at the religious private high school expressed that at his school, the community provides significant support due to the fact that the families want to be at the school and therefore want to help out. The counselor at the upper-class school also emphasized parental involvement at his school, noting that the high parent participation is appreciated. He explained that the parents are very involved in their students' academic success, saying, "The number of interactions I have every day is enormous and it's a lot of 'my son or daughter is not doing well in a particular class'."

This coincides with previous research on the positive relationship between low parental support and low socioeconomic status, and the increased responsibility of counselors, in terms of being one of the few individuals providing these students with social capital in regards to information about post-secondary opportunities. The counselor at the middle-class school again emphasized the increased responsibility of the counselor in situations where parental support is lacking or parents simply don't have adequate information to provide their children. She exemplified this by sharing that on the day of our interview, she had met with a student and found out that the information he and his parents had in regards to the GPA requirement of one of his

college choices was incorrect. This highlights the vast difference in terms of parents being very involved in their student's academic careers and equipping them with guidance in addition to what the counselor provides, compared to families who haven't done the research, or simply don't know how to support their children academically.

Social/Emotional/Personal Counseling

In the social/emotional/personal realm of counseling, all counselors appeared to deal with a similar array of tasks including mediating conflicts between students, among teachers and students, providing students with emotional support, and making necessary recommendations to outside or additional mental health services. However, there existed a variation in terms of what the counselors determined to be the most frequently experienced issues at their respective schools. Similarly, the causes of these issues differed across the schools.

The counselors at the lower- and middle-class public high schools noted the high number of students with difficult family situations. At the lower-class school, the counselor referred to filing cases with the Department of Human Services and also noted that one of the students she had met with on the day of the interview had just lost her mom, and yet she was in school the very next day. Similarly, the counselor at the middle-class school identified the prevalence of students dealing with family problems given the prominence of divorced and splintered families, as well as cutting and suicide as the most common social/emotional/personal issues for which students seek her help and advice.

In contrast, the counselors at both private high schools, as well as the upper-class public high school identified depression, anxiety, and stress as the most common issues that students face with at their schools, and noted pressure as the cause of these situations. The counselor at the upper-class public high school explained that the high amount of anxiety and depression was due to the high academic and extracurricular expectations, as well as the peer, student-to-student expectations that exist at his school. Likewise, the counselor at the private boarding school spoke to this as well, identifying the pressure that students place on themselves, as well as the pressure from parents that causes stress, anxiety, and depression among students at her school. She mentioned that in situations where a boarding student is in a serious situation and needs more significant help than she can provide, she will take him/her to a hospital, yet this didn't appear to be a common occurrence. Overall it appeared that at both private high schools and the upper-class public high school, severe situations arose with less frequency than at the lower- and middle-class public high schools. The counselor at the religious private high school spoke about how his school attracts a lot of "solid" and "goal-oriented" families and therefore he deals with fewer situations that he identified as arising from "broken families." On the occasion that students do come to him with social/emotional issues, he noted that generally the issues are more trivial and along the lines of, "I'm having a problem with a friend...or so-and-so said this about me. Typical teenage kind of things," he said. And while he mentioned getting an occasional suicidal ideation or case of depression, these are infrequent.

A difference was apparent in the resources provided by the school as well as the actions taken by the counselors to address the social/emotional issues experienced by students. The counselors at the upper- and middle-class schools informed that that their schools employ a social worker who provides an increased social/emotional support. The counselor at the middle-class public high school stated that she and the social worker utilize a collaborative tag-team effort for the social/emotional guiding, and when students come to her for advice she usually handles it and then introduces the student to the social worker so that the individual has multiple people to go to for advice and support. The counselor at the upper-class school also emphasized the impact of having a part-time social worker employed. In contrast, the lower-class public high school and both private high schools do not have a social worker on staff. The counselor at the lower-class public high school mentioned that her school works with a local medical facility that provides students with free mental health help. Similarly, the counselor at the private boarding school reported not having a specific social worker, yet the school employs three on-call nurses with whom she works in collaboration. The religious private high school counselor also noted that his school doesn't employ a social worker either, and made no mention of working with outside mental health agencies, and although the school does employ a chaplain, he didn't refer to the chaplain during the interview.

While the counselors at all schools generally had the same task of handling social/emotional issues, they all had fairly unique ways of handling situations. The counselor at the lower-class school emphasized using "brief therapy" (ten minute sessions), saying that it was not what she learned to do in college, but noting that she

felt it was effective. The counselors at the upper-class public high school and at the religious private high school mentioned advising some students to enter professional therapy. Specifically, the counselor at the upper-class public high school reflected on the normalcy of therapy at his school, saying, “There’s a ton of kids that have therapists. Even sophomores in high school.” The counselor at the private boarding school as well mentioned encouraging some students to enter therapy, while the counselor at the religious private high school noted his use of a unique method of counseling that involves a religious component, consistent with the philosophy of the school. “When a kid comes in and has personal issues in life, I mean, I can hold this up,” he said, reaching for the Bible on his desk. “The scriptural truth I can bring in to issues that they’re dealing with,” he continued. Overall, when issues arose at the private high schools and at the upper-class public high school, the situation was much less dire, and allowed for a slower, more continual method of working through issues in therapy, whereas at the lower- and middle-class public high schools, the counselors seemed to employ a more immediate solution. The counselor at the lower-class public high school emphasized this saying, “I don’t have time to be proactive,” and noted that she really only has time to be reactive in situations.

Both counselors at the private boarding school and the upper-class public high school noted involving parents in situations where students were dealing with social/emotional issues beyond what the school could provide for them. The counselor at the upper-class public high school explained that the counselors at his school help students find balance and normalize their experiences, yet in situations where students are returning frequently, they will get involved with the parent and

advise that the student seeks extra support from the community. The counselor at the private boarding school as well emphasized talking to parents frequently, saying, “If a student is coming back multiple times then I always try and contact the parent.”

Although the counselor at the religious private high school made no mention of parental involvement in the mental health side of his job, he did note the general high involvement and support of parents.

Case Load and Logistics

The counselors at all three public high schools, as well as the religious private high school mentioned the busy nature of their schedule and the long hours they devote to their job in addition to the designated hours of the school day. However, the two private high schools have a much lower student to counselor ratio compared to the public high schools. The three public high schools reported having the highest student-to-counselor ratio, averaging around 325 to 350 students per counselor compared to the two private high schools that report a ratio of 150 to 240 students to every counselor. This was consistent with both studies conducted by Lapan et al. (2012) and Lapan, Whitcomb, and Aleman (2012), and the findings that high-poverty schools are more likely to have higher ratios.

Similarly, this study found that the number of students seen per day on average, as well as the amount of time spent with each student at the various high schools, varied greatly. The counselor at the middle-class public high school noted seeing around 15 students per day on average and defined the hectic nature of her schedule saying, “every day you will say, ‘okay, this is what I’m doing. X, Y, and Z.’ If you’re lucky you’ll probably get to X and Y.” The counselor at the lower-class

school echoed the business of the average day, saying, "...most days I don't get lunch. I sit here [at her desk] all day...it's very very busy." She continued, "I'm on the clock in my mind. I've got like ten minutes with this kid, cause I've got however many else out there waiting." The counselor at the upper-class public high school as well emphasized his busy schedule saying, "We're just so overloaded with activities, with job responsibilities, customer services demands, being available." He noted seeing around five to ten students per day, more on the days where he goes into specific classes and administers testing. Comparatively, the counselor at the private boarding school noted seeing around ten students per week, and feeling as though her schedule allowed for time to plan programs for the future. While the counselor at the religious private high school didn't specify the number of students he typically sees per day, he was clearly not in a rush to end the interview. The other private high school counselor also appeared to have plenty of time on her hands, offering to show me around the school's campus following our interview. In contrast, all three public high school counselors reported having met with a student just before the interview, and the lower-class and middle-class high school counselors mentioned having a meetings directly after the interview. This coincides with previous studies that have examined the expanding role of the school counselor, and in accordance with McKillip et al. (2012), the majority of the counselors interviewed, including all three at public high schools, noted the busy nature of their schedules due to the many various tasks and responsibilities they were juggling.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study shed insight on the variation of the role of counselors in private high schools compared to public high schools, and high- versus low-achieving or lower-class versus upper-class public high schools. One of the more notable findings of this study was the discovery that the counselor at the upper-class public high school shared more similarities to the counselors at the private high schools in many ways. The counselor at this upper-class public high school had significant agency in his role definition and responsibilities, he was involved in classes, he experienced high parental involvement, and his methods of advising students in terms of encouraging struggling students to seek outside professional therapy, proved to be more in line with the counselors at the religious private high school and boarding high school than the other two public high schools. In other ways though, such as the apparent busy nature of the counselor's schedule, the high caseload, and the responsibilities involving testing, this upper-class public high school was comparable to its other public high school counterparts.

Regardless of the socioeconomic status of the school, all counselors expressed great fulfillment in their jobs and an immense love for the work they are doing. Although many of them mentioned the tediousness of filing required paperwork, they all appeared generally satisfied with being a counselor and noted the great joy when they feel they have helped a student in some way. However, while this love and passion for the job is certainly important, these horrifying recent school shootings exemplify the unfortunate fact that some children continue to slip through the cracks.

Numerous studies have declared that the role of the counselor is changing, in order to correspond with the current social climate within the United States, and perhaps these times are changing more drastically and in different ways than initially anticipated. Given all these recent shootings that have frequently occurred within school settings, maybe it's time we re-imagine the role of the counselor in these situations. Increased gun controls have been implemented and budgets have been allocated to mental health crisis centers and hotlines. Yet, as long as someone can go out and purchase a weapon relatively easily, and that same person doesn't seek the mental health help provided by these crisis centers or hotlines, can we really determine that school shootings will cease?

This study shed light on the difficult nature of the counselor's job, one that isn't consistent across all schools, and that is increasingly challenging at lower-resourced schools. And while many of these students who initiate school violence and school shootings are from relatively upper-class families and are attending well-resourced and high-achieving schools where the counselor does have increased agency in their job and role definition, greater resources, and generally more collaboration and support, these situations are still occurring. Counselors are currently held accountable for handling circumstances involving the social/emotional/personal wellbeing of students, yet the way the current structure is established presents them with a number of constraints. In order for any initial action to take place, counselors must first become aware that a student is dealing with a social/emotional/personal issue, either through a student coming to the counselor on their own initiative, or through information from a teacher, which requires some sort of collaboration. For a

counselor to do anything in this situation, more than “brief therapy” is necessary, and if the student requires more help, the school must be equipped with either a social worker or an outside mental health facility where they can refer the student. Even with a referral, parental support is crucial, without which the student may not have access to the mental health facility or therapy office, or the financial means follow through with the referral. These few barriers are only some of the difficulties that are embedded within the current structure of counseling.

It is irrational to place the counselor at the heart of preventing these school shootings, given the current system. However, clearly counselors are in a position to influence and impact the lives of students they see and meet with, and given the impact, or lack of impact, of the current resources allocated to preventing school shootings, perhaps its time to look within the school setting. The data from this study show that counselors, above everything, want to help students, and provide them with the support and help they need in order to be successful. Given all this information, it seems only necessary to re-evaluate the role and responsibilities of counselors and remodel the system so that all children and young adults within schools are heard and seen, and given the attention, time, and resources necessary.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study has many limitations, it does provide insight on significant differences between the role of counselors at public high schools compared to private high schools. In addition to exploring the role of the counselor in relation to these situations of school shootings, there are a number of other ways in which this field of study can be expanded. Further research in this area is necessary to

discovering potential ways in which the role of counselors can be improved in order to promote increased success of all students, at both public and private high schools, as well as high schools with all different populations. Similarly, with more extensive research in this field of high school counselors and education, we can begin to uncover possible ways to decrease the inequality reproduced in the education system, and implement lasting changes that may increase equity within the structure of education. Future qualitative research may benefit from a larger sample size that is more representative of all public and private high schools. It may be beneficial to include other various schools into the sample, such as Catholic schools located in urban settings where one could study the interplay between a religiously-affiliated school context and a more racially and socioeconomically diverse student population. Further study in this field may also utilize an increased number of interviews that are more extensive in question content and length, and perhaps the inclusion of students and parents of students in the research and interviews in order to understand student and parent perceptions in relation to the role of the counselor.

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APPENDIX

Qualitative Interview Questions.

Specific Advising Elements

1. a. Can you tell me about the specific elements of your job?
 - b. What are your responsibilities?
 - c. Can you break down the estimated percentage of time you spend on the different responsibilities?
2. a. Could you go into more detail on the academic-related aspects to your job?
 - b. What kinds of things do you do in terms of guiding students with their academics?
 - c. Is College advising involved in this part of your job?
3. a. Could you go into more detail on the personal/social-related aspects to your job?
 - b. Do students tend to come to you with difficulties in terms of their social or personal life?
 - c. What kinds of issues do students tend to come to you about?
How do you advise or provide guidance on these issues?
4. In addition to this direct counseling, does your job involve a lot of paperwork, or other administrative tasks?
5. In addition to one-on-one advising, do you oversee any sort of group or peer advising, as well as any programming on campus in relation to academic or social/personal guidance?

Number of Students Advised and Time Allocated

6. a. How many students do you advise?
 - b. What kind of exposure do you have?
7. a. How often do students come to see you in a given day?
 - b. How much time do you spend with an individual student?
8. a. Do you think that's adequate or that they could serve from using your services more?
 - b. Do you think that students utilize your services/the programs you oversee?

Job Definition and Collaboration

9. a. How is your role defined/who defines your responsibilities?
 - b. Does the school have guidelines set out, or do you follow national standards set by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) or other associations?

10. a. Do you feel as though your co-workers and the administration support you and your role in the school?
 - b. How so?
 - c. Is there collaboration among other teachers, administrators, and other school personnel?
 - d. Are there other counselors in the school as well?

11. a. Does the school employ any mental health counselors or social workers?
 - b. Is there any collaboration with these individuals?

Personal Experience

12. a. Have you worked as a counselor in any other schools?
 - b. Do you think the responsibilities or role of a counselor differs depending on the school? (Location of the school-urban vs. rural or the student population...)

13. a. How has your experience been as a counselor at this school?
 - b. Is this job what you hoped it would be?
 - c. How long have you been working as a counselor?

14. What do you think is the most important aspect to your job?

15. a. What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?
 - b. Can you give an example of a positive experience of your job?

16. a. What is the least rewarding aspect of your job?
 - b. Can you give an example of a negative experience of your job?