IMMIGRANT STUDENT SUCCESS: HOW DO SCHOOL COUNSELORS SUPPORT IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL SETTINGS?

by

NATALIE EDIRMANASINGHE

(Under the Direction of George McMahon)

ABSTRACT

One in four children under 18 in the U.S. have at least one foreign-born parent (Pew Research Center, 2015). These children attend schools in the U.S. While schools are becoming more diverse, education must adapt to the changing demographics. Children of immigrant parents and immigrant students will need social-emotional support, academic advisement, and post-secondary options adapted to their specific needs. Immigrant students may suffer from pre-migration trauma and acculturative stress (Kaslow, 2014; Saechao et al., 2012) Challenges like trauma and acculturative stress may also be affected by discrimination that can happen in the U.S. due to the negative connotations of immigration in the mainstream media. These social-emotional needs can lead to issues in academic achievement, including motivation (Perreira, Kiang, & Potochnick, 2017). One of the solutions to provide appropriate supports for immigrant students will be a comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors provide comprehensive programs delivered through classroom lessons, small group services, and individual student planning that support the academic success of all students (ASCA, 2009). However, school counselors have to consider how identifying as an immigrant can impact what a student may need to be academically successful.

This study uses participatory photo elicitation as data collection method for a qualitative research study to explore the experiences immigrant students had with their school counselors in K-12 public school settings (Kolb, 2008). The study explored what supports school counselors provided to immigrant students and the barriers that kept immigrant students from seeking support from their school counselors. Seven participants shared eight photographs reflecting their experiences with school counselors. Through discussions about the photographs, the participants co-collaborated to determine five themes, two related to support and three related to barriers. The study provided a deeper understanding of how immigrant students perceive the role of the school counselor and how it can help them navigate the U.S. school system. The study offers suggestions for school counselors to provide an inclusive program that addresses the needs of immigrant populations. The study concludes with personal reflections and reflexivity related to the process of conducting qualitative research as an insider to the research.

INDEX WORDS: School Counseling, Multicultural School Counseling, Immigrant Populations, Immigration, Participatory Photo Elicitation

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Nileema, for taking the journey and surviving the path to pave the way for me to be the ambitious and tenacious female I am today. I love you.

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I never could imagine what I would have already accomplished by the time I reached the end of this doctoral journey. As I reflect back on the journey that I have taken to complete this dissertation, I cannot help but think about the tears and pain to get this complete. However, I survived it. I would not be here today if it was not for my beloved community, who incessantly believed in me even when I began to give up on myself.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Immigrant" is a term that conjures an image from most people, based on assumptions framed by what the media portrays. While there are some truths to these stereotyped images of an immigrant, there are many things that people, and specifically educators that work with immigrant populations, may not understand the immigrant experience. One major component that many of the people influenced by media portrayals of immigrants do not consider is that immigrants come from different countries, backgrounds, and experiences. However, immigrants may have similar needs to acclimate with their new surroundings. In 2016, the immigration population consisted of 26.9% East and South Asian, 26.5% Mexican, 24.5% other Latin Americans, 13.2% Canadian and European, and 8.9% from different regions of the world (Radford & Budiman, 2018).

My interest in the experiences of immigrant students with their school counselors began even before I was a school counselor. I noticed that when we spoke about factors of immigration for students in schools and professors would share considerations around immigration status and language barriers. These factors were typically only discussed within Hispanic/Latinx identities. While Hispanic/Latinx populations comprise a large number of immigrants arriving in the U.S., I fear that being trained to explore immigrant experiences around one identity may perpetuate one's assumptions of what an "immigrant" looks like, specifically for individuals who do not have a personal connection to the immigrant experience.

School counselors are specifically to support and advocate for students from diverse backgrounds (ASCA, 2012). Accredited school counseling preparation programs must incorporate multicultural counseling training, specifically around social and cultural diversity (CACREP, 2016b). School counseling scholars have predicted that educators will increasingly look to school counselors as the cultural mediators in their school buildings. School counselors, therefore, will need thorough training to prepare them for this role, particularly given they may be the only educator in the building explicitly focusing on the cultural needs of students and families in the school (Nelson, Bustamante, & Watts, 2013; Portman, 2009). While there has been cultural consideration embedded in school counseling preparation, there are no requirements for examination of immigrant experiences within a social or cultural context.

Research investigating best practices for school counselors to support immigrant students has only recently begun to surface. There are discussions in school counseling around counseling interventions that could work with immigrant populations (Rowland & Davis, 2014) and ways that school counselors can engage immigrant families in collaboration with the school (Dotson-Blake, Foster, & Gressard, 2009; Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson, 2013). There are even discussions about the role of school counselors in developing a cross-cultural bridge between schools and immigrant families (Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett, & Yoon, 2007). While there are few publications on school counseling interventions to support immigrant populations, there are even fewer publications exploring the experiences immigrant populations have working with their school counselors. One study found that more Asian and White ninth grade students in a national longitudinal study shared that they sought out counseling services for support in taking courses in high school (Shi, 2018). However, besides this one study, there are no research studies on the experiences of immigrant populations with their school counselors. While there is

awareness of the needs of immigrant students in K-12 public school settings, it may be helpful to the school counseling profession to explore immigrant students' experiences with their school counselors. Understanding what is already occurring in the profession to address immigrants' needs adequately, can help inform professional development by identifying gaps in multicultural and social justice competence amongst school counselors in the field.

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of this dissertation. I will provide contextual information about immigration, how the immigrant experience may affect how students experience U.S. K-12 schools, and I will give details on how the role of the school counselor can ease the transition of immigrant families into their success in U.S. public education. I will then provide information about school counseling concerning immigrant identity. I will also define terms used in this dissertation. Liberation psychology, specifically problem-posing education was used to frame the study. Participatory photo elicitation was the method of data collection used in the study.

Immigration in the United States

Since 1965, the number of immigrants in the U.S. has risen from 5% of the population to 13.4% in 2015. Seventy-five percent of immigration to the U.S. is through documented paths, while 25 percent of immigrants are undocumented (Lopez & Bialik, 2017). As the population of foreign-born residents in the U.S. grows, the number of children born in the U.S. to foreign-born parents also increases. In 2015, 26% of the population under 18 were born to at least one immigrant parent. Eighty-eight percent of these children were born in the U.S. (Zong & Batalova, 2017).

Views of Immigration in the United States: The Past and Present

At the birth of the U.S., Americans were welcoming toward immigration, with most

immigrants coming from Europe (Williamson, 2016). The support for immigration in the U.S. has fluctuated during different periods since the founding of the country. When the country has had perceived issues in the labor market, the media portrayed immigration as a problem (Adkins, Sandy, & Derpic, 2017; Sevillano & Fiske, 2013; Spencer, 1994). Historically, race has been considered a determining factor in the acceptance of immigrants into American society (Bukowczyk, 2016). When one thinks of immigrant, they may imagine an individual of color, which can cause issues within an individual's presentation to society, such as a person of color being deemed an outsider even if they are native-born individuals. At present, the use of dehumanizing language to describe immigrants, such as words like "aliens," "illegals," and "bad hombres," perpetuates a perception that immigrants are outsiders to American society (Sevillano & Fiske, 2013; Earl, 2016).

This perception of immigrants as outsiders also can encourage the concept of one American cultural identity, where only those that can assimilate to follow American cultural expectations will truly be accepted as "American" (Massey, 1995). However, while some immigrant populations, such as Jewish, Italian, and Irish immigrants could assimilate, racially and economically with American cultural identity, other racially or ethnically diverse immigrant populations have had challenges establishing themselves as part of the American cultural identity. Many researchers agree that race is a substantial factor in how an American society incorporates an immigrant group into their cultural identity (Lee & Bean, 2004). Inherent in the historical narrative that portrays immigrants in a negative light is the concept of a single American cultural identity. Douglas Massey (1995) argued that the concern with immigration in the U.S. stemmed from many of the founding members of the U.S. belief that the country should have one united culture (Fischer & Mattson, 2009; Spencer, 1994; Williamson, 2016).

When immigrant populations are coping with fluctuating views, it can confuse their beliefs of how individuals in their neighborhoods and communities perceive them. This confusion can cause fear of interacting with individuals outside of their environment and isolation into their own community, rather than integrating into their new country (Rumbaut, 1994). In school settings, students can suffer from experiences of blatant racism and discrimination based on their identity, which can cause poor physical and mental health (Adelman & Taylor, 2015; Paradies et al., 2015).

The Immigrant Student and their Needs

Cultural sensitivity will be a crucial aspect of supporting the needs of immigrant populations. All students who have foreign-born parents are coping with some level of discrimination based on the narratives around immigration. Depending on racial and ethnic backgrounds, this may cause mental health and physical health concerns (Fox, Thayer, & Wadhwa, 2017; Paradies et al., 2015). Schools can either be part of the issue of discrimination, through their policies and interactions with students or can help students mitigate feelings of discrimination by providing a safe and welcoming atmosphere.

Beyond discrimination, immigrant students also balance two separate cultures, their culture of origin and their new American culture. Within a family system, where individuals may acculturate at different rates, it can provide challenges that can cause conflict (Galler & Sher, 2010). How easily the family can assimilate to the American culture can also affect the acculturative stress families experience. Assimilation refers to the social and economic mobility of a group within a larger society by adopting the culture of the new country where individuals are living (Greenman & Xie, 2008; Harker, 2001a). While assimilation can support the upward mobility economically and socially for some immigrant individuals, race, family background,

socioeconomic status, and ethnicity can still affect the opportunities immigrants have to assimilate. Some policies within education can create barriers to assimilation due to their inherent bias toward particular demographics over others. This bias can affect immigrant students' beliefs in their academic abilities (Bondy, Peguero, & Johnson, 2017). Schools that explore their policies and how they conflict with ways individuals can adopt American culture can support students in building self-efficacy toward academic success.

Additionally, the particular situation that all immigrant students face that native families do not have to cope with is navigatinge the U.S. school system without parents who have navigated it before them. This change in familial understanding of support educationally can force immigrant students to be their own advocate in school (Perreira & Ornelas, 2011).

The School Counselor Role as a Support for Immigrant Students

School counselors can serve as mental health supports for immigrant populations as well as their educational advocates (Lockhart & Keys, 1998; Nelson et al., 2013). School counselors work in the school building to help individuals understand the needs of their student populations and their families (Portman, 2009). They also provide interventions within the school to provide resources and strategies for students to be successful in K-12 settings and beyond, focusing on supports related to social/emotional development, academic development, and career readiness (American School Counselor Association, 2009). School counselors can help critique policies that make it difficult for immigrant students to be successful in schools. They can also provide resources for immigrant students to navigate the school system. The school counselor has a specific role in the school that could provide information, emotional support, and advocacy for the immigrant student. However, there have not been studies that explore the experiences immigrant students have with the school counselors.

Definition of Terms

In this dissertation, I will use the term immigrant student and child or student of immigrants frequently. When I am using the term immigrant, I am referring to an individual who was born outside of the U.S. and is currently living in the U.S. as their permanent residence. When I use the term child or student of immigrants, I am referring to an individual who was born in the U.S. with at least one parent who was born outside of the U.S. It is important to note that I am not distinguishing documentation in either of these references. While documentation status can create separate considerations, I chose to include any individual that fit in the criteria of immigrant or child of immigrants in my dissertation.

There are also times in the dissertation where I use immigrant students about both immigrant students and students of immigrant parents. I made a specific choice to include both immigrant students and students of immigrant parents together. In counselor education, it is unclear how educators prepare school counselors to work with immigrant populations. While immigrant communities may have identifiers that are recorded in school data management systems, such as place of birth and English language proficiency, children of immigrant parents may not be easily identified within the parameters of data management in schools. However, both immigrant students and children of immigrant parents have particular needs in the school. Children of immigrant parents may still hold an immigrant identity that may play an active role in their daily lives in school, even if they do not identify as immigrant themselves. I wanted to include their experiences with school counselors as well to highlight how they also can be impacted by the immigrant identity.

The Current Study

The purpose of the study in this dissertation is to explore the experiences of immigrant

students with their school counselors in K-12 public school settings. The research questions that guided the study were: *What supports did immigrant students need from their school counselor?* and *What barriers kept immigrant students from seeking support from the school counselor?* The participants and I created the questions together after a discussion in an initial meeting about the study. The method of data collection used was participatory photo elicitation using problem-posing education to inform the creation of the research questions and the analysis.

Problem-posing education emphasizes the importance of co-creation of knowledge through dialogue between the teacher and the student, where the student and the teacher are both experts and share their expertise and learn together (Freire, 1972). I chose the participatory photo method to collect data because of the involvement of the participants in the process of creating the truth found in the project. In participatory photo elicitation, the researcher discusses the purpose of the study and the participants work with the researcher to determine the research questions (Kolb, 2008). Then, participants take photographs related to the research questions. The participants and researcher later reconvene to share their stories related to the pictures that were taken and to determine the common themes based on the shared stories of the participants (Lorenz & Kolb, 2009). Chapter 3 will further discuss the photo elicitation project and the research study.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation follows a manuscript style-format to prepare to highlight the critical need for research and publication in the field of school counselor preparation to work with immigrant populations. This chapter, Chapter 1, highlights the background context of immigration as a country and within the context of the U.S. public education. In chapter 2, I write a critical review of the literature that highlights a call to the school counseling field to explore immigrant as a social identity on its own to discuss the intersections of the immigrant

with other identities, such as race, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. In Chapter 3, I describe a participatory photo elicitation study on the experiences of immigrant students with the school counselors in a K-12 public school setting. Chapter 3 also includes results and implications for practicing school counselors and school counselor educators. In Chapter 4, I conclude my dissertation with a description of my researcher reflexivity. I discuss my reflection through the lens of a child of immigrants, as a school counselor, and as a school counselor educator. I also reflect on the use of participatory photo elicitation as a data collection method.

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CHAPTER 2

CALL TO ACTION: THE NEED FOR IMMIGRANT AS A SOCIAL IDENTITY IN MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING

Edirmanasinghe, Natalie A. To be submitted to *Professional School Counseling.*

Abstract

The school counseling profession emphasizes the importance of working with students from diverse populations (ASCA, 2016). In their school counseling preparation, counselors explore multiple identities and how they may impact students and their growth in school and beyond (CACREP, 2016a). While some identities are addressed through discussion of race and ethnicity, the identity of immigrant may typically be discussed in conjunction with particular races or ethnicities, rather than as its own social identity. Immigrant populations have similarities related to their needs in social-emotional support, academic development, and college and career readiness (Adelman & Taylor, 2015; Kaslow, 2014; Perreira & Ornelas, 2011). In discussing immigrant as its own social identity, school counselors can explore their own knowledge and attitudes about immigration, while also discussing intersecting identities, such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The following article critically reviews the current literature about immigration and school counselors as a call for the counseling profession to identify immigrant as its own social identity in multicultural counseling.

INDEX WORDS: School Counseling, Multicultural School Counseling, Immigrant Populations, Immigration

Introduction

Since 1975, 59 million immigrants have entered the United States (U.S.). Foreign-born individuals and their children currently comprise 26% of the U.S. population, and that number is projected to increase to 36% by 2065 (Pew Research Center, 2015). Almost 70,000 refugees entered the U.S. in 2015 alone (Zong & Batalova, 2015). One in four children under the age of 18 in the U.S. has at least one immigrant parent (Pew Research Center, 2015). Many immigrant families arrive in the U.S. to provide a better life for their children, whether that means financial stability or a safer living environment than their country of origin (Adelman & Taylor, 2015; Kaslow, 2014). Students who identify as immigrants or as children of immigrants have specific educational and social needs related to their identity, and schools' ability to provide appropriate support can affect these students' success in school. For instance, these supports might include their social-emotional care, academic assistance, and college and career development.

Fear of deportation of entire families or key individuals in a family can create lasting impacts on immigrant children and their families. Living in a new country or a country that does not practice the same culture as one's family can cause internal conflicts regarding identity (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). External factors, such as discrimination tied to race or immigration status, may also create social-emotional effects in children (Fox, Thayer, & Wadhwa, 2017; Paradies et al., 2015). These factors regarding mental wellness, can, in turn, manifest into issues with academic motivation and performance (Perreira, Kiang, & Potochnick, 2017).

While immigrant populations may need support through ongoing, intensive, therapeutic services, school counselors may be the first mental health professionals to observe the impact of arriving in a new country, in addition to leaving an origin culture. School counselors are trained

to work with multicultural populations in their counselor education programs. However, if they are not aware of the specific challenges immigrants face, counselors may not be able to effectively assist these populations through their comprehensive programs.

Since school counselors are specially trained to support the social-emotional, academic, and career growth of all students, they can help advance the success of immigrant students if they are familiar with the needs of specific immigrant populations and develop interventions that are culturally sensitive to these needs. It is imperative that school counselors provide comprehensive programs within schools to address and support the needs of all students related to their success as students and as future members of society. School counselors provide accurate and realistic information about college and career opportunities that are personalized to the assessed needs of their student population and also promote students' skill development to promote academic success from year-to-year (American School Counselor Association, 2017). Also, school counselors have specific expertise to identify and address the mental health needs of all students (Dekruyf, Auger, & Trice-Black, 2013). However, if school counselors are unaware of the specialized needs of immigrant students and their families related to social-emotional, academic, and career skill development, those professionals may not be able to provide adequate support to immigrant populations.

School counselors learn their roles and responsibilities while they are in their counselor education programs. School counselor educators should support the development of culturally sensitive school counselors to create interventions who can effectively address the needs of immigrant populations. School counselor preparation programs can provide a multicultural curriculum that includes the immigrant identity as a separate entity within school counselor training. While individuals may be ethnically or racially different, their status as "immigrant"

may similarly affect multiple aspects of their lives in the U.S. Therefore, while many school counselor education programs integrate multicultural considerations for racial and ethnic groups, incorporating immigrant needs as a separate topic into those considerations would help ensure that school counselors develop plans that are sensitive to immigrant populations.

For this study, "immigrant" is an individual born outside of the U.S. who has established long-term residence in the U.S. (Villalba, 2009). Refugees are individuals born in another country, identified by the U.S. government as being unable or unwilling to return to their home country due to persecution or fear of persecution (Zong & Batalova, 2015). Both immigrants and refugees most likely come to the U.S. with intentions of creating a life better than their experiences in their country of origin; however, the government differentiates between refugee and immigrant based on the documented potential of persecution by an individual's country of origin. Additionally, in this article, "students of immigrant families" references students who identify as immigrants, themselves, or have one or more parents who were born outside of the U.S.

Social-Emotional Development and Immigrant Identity

Immigrant students have unique social-emotional needs resulting from their previous experiences and their emerging identity within their new home country. These issues may include post-traumatic stress from their pre-migration experience, historical trauma from their family's pre-migration experiences, trauma related to direct impact of the events related to immigrating to a new country, acculturative stress, and discrimination. Access to mental health services can also be a challenge for immigrant populations due to confusion of what mental health services entail in the U.S. and the lack of access to health insurance. The difficulty in

accessing mental health resources can lead to the symptoms of these mental health issues going unaddressed.

Trauma

Trauma "results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014, p. 7). The effects of trauma can damage the emotional and cognitive processes of an individual (Van der Kolk, 1987). Trauma in an individual's host country can lead to symptoms of depression, suicidal ideations, and PTSD (Galler & Sher, 2010; Harker, 2001; Perreira & Ornelas, 2011).

Even before coping with immigration laws and potential deportation, families may experience trauma and loss when leaving their homeland to live in another country, which potentially leads to a number of mental health symptoms (Kaslow, 2014; Villalba, 2009). Often, immigrants and refugees may have seen their loved ones being harmed or suffering such insults as being starved, deprived, or tortured. Immigrants have likely been physically injured or emotionally wounded, themselves (Kaslow, 2014). This suffering they may experience or witness their loved ones suffering can lead to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kaslow, 2014; Muhtz et al., 2016; Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). For the students of immigrant families, seeing family members dealing with the symptoms of PTSD can also induce trauma (Estrada, 2009; Nagata, Kim, & Nguyen, 2015; Phipps & Degges-White, 2014). While other individuals may experience trauma and symptoms of PTSD, students of immigrant

families may be re-traumatized on different occasions because of the events surrounding their transition into a new culture.

When immigrants arrive in their host country, they often continue to experience trauma. In May 2018, the Trump administration announced a zero-tolerance immigration policy, in which all individuals crossing the border without documentation were sent to federal prisons. If they arrive with children, then their children are separated from them, either being held in facilities for refugee resettlement or housed with other families (Shoichet, 2018). This change in enforcement of border security has resulted in additional families being deported for greater lengths of time, even after they have arrived in the U.S. The abrupt loss of connection with their family, traumatizes students. Moreover, if students expect to be separated from a family member in their support system, they may experience symptoms similar to those who have suffered the death of a loved one (Adelman & Taylor, 2015).

Trauma can negatively impact the achievement and behavior of immigrant students. In a study surrounding the connection between individuals' adverse childhood experiences and their academic performance, the more adverse childhood experiences or stress-inducing situations children experience, the more likely they are to be diagnosed with a mental health disorder. Because of their disorder, they are more likely to be retained or receive special education services (Porche, Costello, & Rosen-Reynoso, 2016). Trauma can also affect the emotional functioning of individuals, and this can present as disruptive behavioral issues or depressive states in the classroom (Frydman & Mayor, 2017).

Historical Trauma. In addition to the trauma related to individuals directly witnessing or experiencing a traumatic incident, immigrant populations can suffer from historical trauma (Estrada, 2009; Phipps & Degges-White, 2014). Researchers have first studied historical trauma

with children of Holocaust survivors, finding that children of Holocaust survivors also experience symptoms of the psychological effect of trauma, even without directly experiencing or witnessing the trauma (Kestenberg, 1990). Researchers have also found that other marginalized populations, such as Japanese Americans and Native Americans, have experienced historical trauma due to the traumatic events that affect the trajectory of the history of their cultures (Brave Heart, 1999; Nagata et al., 2015). While students born in the U.S. to immigrant parents may not experience direct trauma from their parents' host countries, their parents may have unresolved trauma from the events that they project onto their children, which in turn causes the children to suffer from historical trauma (Phipps & Degges-White, 2014; Sotero, 2009). Resulting responses may be similar to firsthand trauma and confounded with their accounts of witnessing or experiencing discrimination.

Acculturative Stress

Immigrant populations can also suffer from acculturative stress, the stress associated with immigrant populations socializing to the new behaviors, customs, and norms of the culture in their new country (Wong, Correa, Robinson, & Lu, 2017). Acculturative stress stems from the pressures that individuals face assimilating into their new country's culture while also maintaining pride in their culture of origin (Galler & Sher, 2010; Paterson, 2017). Individuals must cope with understanding a new language and different cultural norms. Immigrant children particularly deal with balancing their family's culture and the mainstream culture (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). Depending on their family's journey to the U.S., some students may also have to deal with changes in their role within their family, as well as adapting to a new environment (Perreira & Ornelas, 2011).

When students from immigrant families arrive to U.S. K-12 schools, they regularly interact with the mainstream culture. If they are not native English speakers, they typically have to learn a new language quickly, including expressions and idiomatic language. However, their adult family members may not have the same immersion in the new culture and language. This lack of exposure to their new community can exacerbate the stress on immigrant students because they may acculturate at a different pace than their other family members (Galler & Sher, 2010). Immigrant populations also experience the effects of acculturative stress depending on how different the heritage culture is from U.S. culture the diversity of the environment where families relocate (Fox et al., 2017).

Assimilation. One solution that some researchers have argued can help increase the psychological well-being of immigrants is the concept of assimilation. Assimilation has been viewed as necessary for upward mobility in the U.S. middle class (Leonardo, 2016). However, some critics have argued that since 1965 and the change of demographics of those individuals immigrating to the U.S., assimilation may not help immigrants' well-being the way it has in the past (Harker, 2001a; Xie & Greenman, 2011). One theory is that assimilation can be segmented, forming three paths for immigrants (Portes & Zhou, 1993). The first path is the classical path, in which immigrants gain upward mobility by acquiring a greater amount of the native culture in their new country. The second is downward assimilation, in which immigrants assume an underclass position in their new country. The third is selective acculturation, meaning that the economic integration of the mainstream culture occurs, but immigrant populations maintain protection of some traditional aspects of their home culture (Portes & Rivas, 2011). Critics of assimilation argue that the outcomes of assimilation are too complicated to measure and

dependent on the issues being measured, race, ethnicity, family background, and gender (Bondy et al., 2017; Greenman & Xie, 2008; Harker, 2001b; Xie & Greenman, 2011).

An important note concerning assimilation and the need for consideration of immigration as its own multicultural identity in school counseling is the impact of race and ethnicity of the immigrants on their overall identity. Some families may experience the mental health effects of immigration more strongly because of the negative association and discrimination that already exists due to their race and ethnicity in the U.S. Other families may not experience the mental health effects as intensely, such as white Europeans immigrating to the U.S., as their appearance aligns more closely with mainstream white race of the U.S.

Discrimination

The discrimination that some immigrant families face when they come into the U.S. can also affect the physical and psychological wellness of their students coming into public schools. Discrimination is the act of treating others differently based on their race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, or other identities by which an individual may identify (Perreira & Ornelas, 2011). Compounded with xenophobic legislation, political rhetoric, and judgments surrounding the issues of immigration, students of immigrant families can face discrimination in their daily lives. Perceived discrimination toward immigrant populations can challenge immigrant students' ability to develop their unique identities, resulting in difficulty acculturating (Rumbaut, 1994). Discrimination can lead to students suffering from mental health challenges, as well. Some of these challenges include symptoms of depression, low self-esteem, psychological stress, and anxiety (Fox et al., 2017; Huynh & Fuligni, 2010; Paradies et al., 2015; Rumbaut, 1994). Discrimination can also contribute to physical health symptoms, including headaches, stomach aches, and loss of appetite (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010; Paradies et al., 2015).

Children in a study on immigration and mental health display a stronger correlation between discrimination and well-being than adults (Schmitt, Postmes, Branscombe, & Garcia, 2014). The effects of discrimination on children can create issues surrounding academic achievement, such as lack of motivation, completion of educational goals, and academic performance (Perreira & Ornelas, 2011).

Immigrant populations also may perceive that they are experiencing discrimination because of political discourse and media reports. Current mainstream political rhetoric in the media asserts that individuals from other countries, such as Mexico, are typically criminals in their native societies, arriving in the U.S. and continuing to commit crimes against U.S. citizens (Rojas & Gomez, 2017). Usage of dehumanizing language such as "aliens," "bad hombres," and "illegals" biases people's perceptions of immigrants by making them seem like a burden on America, rather than a benefit to U.S. society (Sevillano & Fiske, 2013). Having to deal with continuous adverse judgment can cause trauma to immigrants (Villalba, 2009). Students of immigrant families must negotiate this adverse judgment in schools from on different levels, including policies and adverse reactions from faculty and peers. Having to cope with learning a new culture, possible trauma before and while migrating to the U.S., and navigating laws and regulations that criminalize individuals who immigrate can cause severe mental health concerns.

Challenges to Access to Mental Health Supports

In a number of studies on mental health access in immigrant communities, immigrant populations are less likely than U.S. born individuals to seek and access mental health services (Abe-Kim et al., 2007; Nadeem et al., 2007; Nadeem, Lange, & Miranda, 2009). Immigrant students and students of immigrant parents may have limited access to mental health services due to multiple factors. Two prevalent issues in accessing services can cause individuals to go

without mental health supports. The first is a misunderstanding of what mental health and who is eligible to receive services. Some individuals, if coming from countries without counselors or other mental health professionals, may not see these types of supports as necessary when considering other needs. Second, some individuals may not have access to affordable healthcare that covers behavioral health services.

The first issue above stems from misunderstanding what mental health services entail. Some immigrants report a belief that mental health services are for individuals with clinically diagnosable disorders (Abe-Kim et al., 2007). If individuals do not already carry a diagnosis, the stigma of being diagnosed with a mental health disorder can steer them away from seeking out services. In cases where individuals are applying for legal permanent residency, those who have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder and may be engaged in harmful behavior, such as drinking and driving, are deemed inadmissible by the U.S. government. While this is not necessarily a concern for all individuals attempting to reside in the U.S., the lack of comprehension regarding what is considered harmful behavior, in conjunction with a lack of exposure to mental health services, may affect whether or not an individual feels comfortable seeking counseling for themselves or a family member (U.S. Citizenship and Immigrant Services, 2017). The rules regarding admission as a legal permanent resident, along with the idea that one should seek out help from their own family or churches in some cultures, as well the possible lack of access to mental health services in immigrants' home countries, may cause immigrant populations to live with unaddressed mental health challenges in the U.S. (Abe-Kim et al., 2007; Amri & Bemak, 2013; Rogers-Sirin et al., 2015; Saechao et al., 2012; U.S. Citizenship and Immigrant Services, 2017).

There are countries where mental health services either do not exist or are significantly different than services in the U.S. (Amri & Bemak, 2013; Rogers-Sirin et al., 2015; Saechao et al., 2012). Some cultures expect individuals to obtain support within their families, as opposed to in the greater community (Saechao et al., 2012). In other cultures, the stigmatization of mental illness causes individuals' perception of seeking mental health supports to be shameful or weak (Amri & Bemak, 2013; Nadeem et al., 2007). The culture of origin, lack of presence of mental health services or information about accessing mental health services in the country of origin can affect whether an individual has previously received mental health support (Saechao et al., 2012).

In other cases, immigrants may not have access to quality resources or may live in locations where quality care is not available (Derose, Escarce, & Lurie, 2007; McGuire & Miranda, 2008). In many instances, individuals and their families may also have a higher financial burden because of the lack of suitable employment that offers insurance covering quality mental health care (Saechao et al., 2012). Another contributing factor to the quality of care could be eligibility for special programs. Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for insurance coverage via the health insurance marketplace in the U.S., nor can they receive Medicaid for anything beyond emergency care. If an individual obtains legal permanent residency, the waiting period is five years to receive any support from federal programs, except in the case of refugees, individuals who have sought asylum, Cuban/Haitian entrants, trafficking victims, or U.S. military veteran families (Derose et al., 2007; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2017).

Academic Success and Post-Secondary Options for Immigrant Populations

The struggles that immigrant students face socially and emotionally can also impact their academic performance. First, a change in family and familial support, due to some family

members staying in their home country or being deported, can necessitate that students advocate for their own academic success (Perreira & Ornelas, 2011). Second, even if their role within their families has not changed due to changes in circumstance, their families are not familiar with the structure of U.S. schools; therefore, guardians may face challenges advocating for their children's academic success.

Overall, the U.S. public school system does not support or require U.S. schools to provide language acquisition support to English language learners. However, there is other information that immigrant students may need in order to experience academic success. An example of this is gaining an understanding of the structure of the U.S. school system, including post-secondary options. Academic success in secondary school can be a substantial factor in the upward socioeconomic movement of immigrant youth (Engelmann et al., 2011). The success of a student in U.S. schools is potentially contingent on receiving accurate and quality advisement from school staff, especially school counselors, on their post-secondary options. This can also include addressing the mental health needs of students as they cope with their experiences as individuals who identify as immigrants.

While the U.S. Education Department requires that U.S. schools teach students regardless of their immigration status, schools only receive funding to support language acquisition of students whose families have newly arrived in the U.S (Nguyen & Kebede, 2017). While this support is crucial for students to be successful in U.S. schools, it does not address the other needs of immigrant students. This funding cannot be used to support parent understanding of the U.S. school system, nor is it used to help address mental health supports for students arriving from another country.

Without funding, schools do not have explicit delineation on how to address the other needs immigrant families experience. Schools should consider the specific concerns that immigrant populations possess that may require differentiation from the supports for students whose parents are were born in the U.S., regardless of the lack of guidance from the U.S. Education Department. For example, parent engagement opportunities may have to include childcare and flexible scheduling because families may have small children that they cannot keep at home without supervision. Other adults in the house may be working and unavailable to care for small children at home (Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson, 2013).

Additionally, schools will need to understand how living with the threat of deportation can disrupt some students' lives, regardless of whether the deportation happens. Specifically, deportation policies and practices alone, regardless of other factors, can negatively impact the academic, emotional, and financial stability of Latinx immigrant children (Brabeck & Xu, 2010). The concern of repercussions of deportation policies on mental health and academic progress can especially affect mixed-status families. Mixed-status refers to individuals who may be citizens or legal permanent residents who have loved ones who are undocumented. Undocumented parents may fear run-ins with ICE agents, leaving the house only when necessary. Concerns of deportation can cause a drop in attendance in school, especially in early childhood programs where bus transportation may not be as available because family members may be afraid they could be deported as they drive their children to and from school (Cervantes, Ullrich, & Matthews, 2018).

If a family member is deported, students assume new roles within families, depending on the position of the person who was deported (Gonzalez & Consoli, 2012). Schools need to be sensitive to the changes due to deportation while supporting students' college and career

planning. Also, students may have growing anxiety or fear that they will be deported as well. Deportation can affect college and career planning, social-emotional regulation, and academic focus. School counselors should consider the effects of potential deportation when providing support to their students.

Deportation and documentation status can not only affect the academic achievement of children of immigrant parents, but it can also change how they envision themselves contributing to the workforce in the future. Depending on the documentation status of students and their families, the opportunities to attend or fund college may be different from the possibilities of individuals with parents who are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents. While there are no federal or state laws that prohibit undocumented immigrants from being admitted to any U.S. universities or colleges, they are not eligible for federal student financial aid (Gonzales, 2009). Students are eligible to receive need- or merit-based scholarships funded by state governments; however, undocumented individuals may not qualify for this aid.

One particular approach to addressing the concerns of undocumented immigrant students has been the passage of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in an executive order in June 2012. DACA offers a two-year work and residence permit for undocumented individuals who arrive in the U.S. before they were 16, are between 16 and 30 years old, live in the U.S. illegally for five years or longer, and either serve in the armed forces or have a high school diploma (Martin, 2017; Nguyen & Kebede, 2017). This executive order offers time for undocumented students currently working on their post-secondary degrees to complete their degree.

DACA alleviates the fear of deportation of individuals who arrive in the U.S. with their parents before they are old enough to live on their own in their country of origin. They are able

to continue their education or their career without concern of deportation. However, on September 5, 2017, the Trump administration released a statement that has signaled the end of DACA, beginning in September 2017, with its official end in March 2018 (Office of the Press Secretary, 2017). After March 2018, individuals who are not already DACA recipients are not able to apply, but the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services have continued to take renewals and has continued to do so until the government determines next steps for individuals who benefit from the DACA program (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2018).

The end of this legislation has implications for educators. School counselors play a role in providing accurate information for students to pursue a career in their chosen field (ASCA, 2017). School counselors need to be familiar with routes undocumented students can take to pursue their chosen fields, including schools that accept undocumented students and available financial aid that undocumented students are eligible to receive (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Not only are school counselors in the position to inform immigrant families of postsecondary options, but they are also in a position to advocate for immigrant populations. School counselors can consult with their staff and faculty to teach them the needs and the struggles immigrant students may face (Perez, 2010).

School Counselors in Schools Creating a Safe Space for Growth for Immigrant Populations

School counselors may also play a role in easing immigrant students and families into the idea of accessing mental health services. If families have never interacted with a mental health provider, they may already be hesitant to work with one due to the process of becoming a legal permanent resident in the U.S. School counselors may not be present or have different responsibilities in schools around the world, but the education system is a familiar concept in most cultures. School counselors have consistent access to students because schools are a

sensitive location where immigration enforcement cannot occur (Department of Homeland Security, 2018).

Ethically, school counselors also must maintain confidentiality unless a student is in danger or endangering someone (American School Counselor Association, 2016). This obligation can also provide a haven for students with immigrant parents, particularly undocumented individuals. Also, school counselors work as first responders to mental health issues that immigrant students may encounter. School counselors tend to be the first and sometimes only mental health resource with whom a student interacts that can help support their social-emotional needs (Dekruyf et al., 2013; Froeschle & Moyer, 2004; Lockhart & Keys, 1998).

School counselors also have specific expertise to work with individuals from diverse populations through prevention, intervention, consultation, and collaboration to aid the academic progress of all students (Portman, 2009). The American School Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2016) states that school counselors must provide access to their comprehensive school counseling program to all students, specifically including immigrant status as a factor in multicultural considerations. While this is part of the standards for school counselors, there is no standard curriculum for future school counselors to learn how to assess and provide services that appropriately fit the needs of immigrant populations.

School counselors work to support students within schools by collaborating with key stakeholders, including parents, community members, and other teachers and staff, to provide access to success for all students (Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett, & Yoon, 2007). The counselor is the liaison between staff and faculty and the family to ensure equal access to education fit for the student. School counselors are an integral piece in developing a school

climate conducive to providing a comfortable environment for immigrant families and their children. School counselors consult with faculty, parents, and staff in various situations to address the needs of students. They may also provide professional development opportunities for staff and other counselors to serve different student populations (ASCA, 2009). Additionally, counselors offer a comprehensive school counseling program which includes classroom lessons, small group counseling, and individual meetings for students (Rowland & Davis, 2014; Goh et al., 2007).

However, if school counselors do not understand the needs of their students and their families and do not know how to assess or address the particular needs of immigrant populations in a culturally appropriate manner, they may be unable to serve immigrant students or their families adequately. While school counselors may be learning how to address cultural and racial differences within their school community, they require support in addressing needs related to identifying as an immigrant. An individual's identity as an immigrant is a factor in all other aspects of their schooling. These students must receive appropriate services to cope with their experiences, accurate information concerning their post-secondary options, and skill development that relates to the family's transition to the U.S. educational system.

School Counselor Preparation and Development as a Way to Train Future Advocates for Immigrant Populations

School counselors gain the majority of their knowledge, attitudes, and skills to implement a comprehensive school counseling program in their master's programs (American School Counselor Association, 2014). Part of their preparation typically includes interventions that support the success of multicultural populations (CACREP, 2016). However, few studies have explored the implementation of a curriculum with pre-service school counselors to prepare to

work with immigrant communities. School counselor education programs could be a space to emphasize the necessity for future school counselors to explore the immigrant experience and how it affects the academic, post-secondary, and social-emotional needs of students.

Counselor education programs can work with pre-service school counselors to help them to develop skills and knowledge to assess issues and provide interventions for students of immigrant families. When studying professional development needs of practicing school counselors, Schwallie-Giddis et al. (2004) have found that school counselors recognize the importance of a space to share their experiences of working with linguistically and culturally diverse students while learning from other professional counselors. While most programs provide multicultural counseling training, few denote particular attention to the training necessary to work with immigrant populations. In 2009, Villalba wrote that few research studies have found prevalent and consistent content in discussions in counselor preparation or multicultural competence around topics involving the needs and support of immigrant and refugee populations. The number of articles for best practices to work with immigrant people for school counselors has increased (Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett, & Yoon, 2007; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Rowland & Davis, 2014); however, the number of conceptual contributions for best practices in counselor education has not (Cisneros & Lopez, 2016). While conducting a literature search to find programs addressing the need of immigrant populations, there is only one program evaluation that includes a four-hour vicarious contact intervention and documentary at Arizona State University (Cadenas, Cisneros, Todd, & Spanierman, 2016; Cisneros & Lopez, 2016).

Even generally within education, including teaching and school administration, there are few studies dedicated to addressing immigrant students' needs in preparation. In many studies, programs have focused on preparing educators to work with linguistically diverse populations

(Lindquist Wong et al., 2007; Garcia-Joslin et al., 2016; Goodwin, 2002). Immigrant students have mental health needs, such as acculturative stress and trauma, as described in previous sections. These mental health concerns can also impede the academic performance of immigrant populations. Language acquisition may be one aspect of needs that individuals may possess; however, understanding the other ways that the immigrant experience can affect students is crucial to supporting their success. Although addressing language acquisition is one portion of a professional development need, only 22 of 177 articles about diversity and education contain the words "immigrant" or "immigration," implying a lack of emphasis on the impact of immigration on education (Goodwin, 2016).

Immigrant populations may be different ethnically or culturally, but their needs regarding their identity as immigrants may have commonalities. Their experiences interacting with the school and greater community may be similarly affected by the characteristics they share as immigrants. Counselor education programs should pay close attention to needs and considerations for immigrant populations to encourage ethnic tolerance and reduce racist perceptions of the mental health needs of immigrant students as most counselors will encounter immigrant students in their schools (Constantine & Gushue, 2003).

Call to Action: “Immigrant” as Its Own Identity

Children of immigrant families and immigrant students are prevalent in schools across the U.S. They may come from various countries and backgrounds; however, they share similar experiences when they arrive in the U.S. This may cause them to have similar needs, educationally and emotionally. Their characteristics of being an immigrant may intersect with other aspects of their lives, including their religious affiliation, sexual orientation, or race. While “immigrant” may not be the only label they hold, it ultimately affects the way they perceive their

membership in their new community. Specifically, immigrants cope with the political climate around immigration enforcement and discrimination toward individuals who identify as immigrants (Adelman & Taylor, 2015; Harker, 2001; Rumbaut, 1994). This systemic discrimination serves to relegate immigrants to the role of "other" in society.

Systemic discrimination, along with other factors, affects the mental health and physical well-being of immigrant adolescents (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). Unlike the whose parents are born in the U.S., immigrant families, specifically those who may not ethnically or racially assimilate to White American society, deal with laws that portray their journeys to seek safety for their families as criminal. Some are coping with fear that they or their family members may leave their homes in the U.S., only to be sent back to dangerous and often unfamiliar situations in their countries of origin. Additionally, academic achievement, motivation, and performance can all be affected by discrimination, whether it is blatant or perceived (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010; Perreira et al., 2017; Schmitt et al., 2014). Immigrant students may face challenges determining their place in their communities—the one of origin and their new culture (Rumbaut, 1994). Unlike families with generations in the U.S., children of immigrant parents have to balance acculturating into their new culture, while still maintaining pride in their culture of origin, a task that can seem sometimes impossible for an individual facing ridicule and discrimination (Adelman & Taylor, 2015).

Parents choose to emigrate to the U.S. to provide their children with better lives and better educational opportunities. They may not have a background in U.S. educational systems to understand their children's prospects, post-secondary options, and the process of advocating for their children's success. Not only do immigrant students have to navigate the U.S. K-12 and

higher education systems without a parent who is savvy enough to negotiate it with them, but they also may have to cope with regulations based on their immigration status.

However, schools can be unwelcoming places for immigrant students, even after they have successfully navigated the education system. Policies and procedures in the schools may be blind to the needs of immigrant populations, including a lack of materials to best explain said policies and procedures in terms that someone who has not attended a U.S. school can understand (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Additionally, while language acquisition may be part of the supports that U.S. schools provide for immigrant populations, schools fail to provide services to honestly address the emotional struggles stated above and in previous sections (Nguyen & Kebede, 2017). Immigrant communities are expected to understand the underlying expectations of being a student in the U.S. with little or no empathy towards the emotional challenges that can affect their academic performance. This blindness can further "other" immigrant students within a school if not adequately addressed.

School counselors are the only trained professionals in the school building who can address the needs of mental health related to education. ASCA states that school counselors work with all students in three development areas: academic, social/emotional, and career development (Dekruyf et al., 2013). School counselors maintain the position to advocate for programming and policies that address the needs of students who identify as immigrants or children of immigrants. They can provide interventions with students, parents, and community stakeholders to bridge the information gap to make the school system more accessible to navigate. However, if school counselors do not view immigrant as an identity with particular needs, these professionals may fall short of supporting immigrant students.

Despite that, for a number of years, researchers have stated best practices to working with immigrant populations (Goh et al., 2007; Rowland & Davis, 2014; Villalba, 2009), school counseling research has still not addressed immigrant identity as a way that individuals experience the world around them. The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MCSJCC) focuses on the need for the counselor to develop knowledge about their clients' worldview through exploration of the social context, discrimination, and power that shapes it (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & Rafferty McCullough, 2015). However, there is little discussion in the counseling field about how immigration alone can affect the worldview of a client. In many cases, some school counselors and educators may assume that only specific ethnicities identify as immigrants (Gonzalez et al., 2013; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Indelicato, 2006). It is clear that identifying as an immigrant affects individuals differently based on their race, ethnicity, family background, and a multitude of other factors (Greenman & Xie, 2008; Harker, 2001b; Xie & Greenman, 2011). However, to exclude explicitly incorporating "immigrant" as an identity that has social implications on a student fails to emphasize the need for counselors to develop their knowledge base of how immigrant identity can intersect with other identities.

School counselors require professional development to understand and address the specific factors that affect the success of immigrant populations in K-12 education. However, since there has been little documentation of professional development or education programs that incorporate immigrant as its own identity, this information must come from the firsthand observations from immigrants who have participated in K-12 education. Immigrant students are experts on their individual needs and experiences. Past K-12 students are aware of what has helped or hindered their experiences after high school. It is imperative that educators listen to the

experiences of those they serve in order to truly understand how school counselors can support immigrant populations in schools.

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CHAPTER 3

A PHOTO ELICITATION STUDY EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS WITH THEIR SCHOOL COUNSELOR

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Abstract

The American School Counseling Association provides school counselors with professional and ethical standards to work with all students in their schools, regardless of race, ethnicity, immigration status, and other diverse identities (ASCA, 2016). However, how prepared school counselors are to reach immigrant students is still in question. The researcher used qualitative inquiry through participatory photo elicitation to explore how school counselors supported immigrant populations and what barriers kept immigrant students from seeking support from their school counselors. Participatory photo elicitation involves participants taking photographs that relate to the experiences being explored (Kolb, 2008). After the photos are taken, the participants reconvene together with the researcher to share in more detail their experiences through the photographs. The participants then work with the researcher to determine common themes. The article provides an overview of literature related to immigrant students' needs and the role of counselor in addressing their needs, as well as details of the qualitative study.

INDEX WORDS: School Counseling, Multicultural School Counseling, Immigrant Populations, Immigration, Participatory Photo Elicitation

Introduction and Rationale

In 2015, one in four children under the age of 18 born in the United States had at least one immigrant parent (Migration Policy Institute, 2016). Twelve percent of those children with one immigrant parent were born outside of the United States (U.S.) (Zong, Batalova, & Hallock, 2018). These students will attend Kindergarten through 12th-grade education at schools across the country. As immigration and the number of children with at least one immigrant parent rises, the number of individuals that will identify as immigrants or children of immigrant parents will also continue to grow (Zong, Batalova, & Hallock, 2018). Immigrants and their families need support that is fundamentally different from families who identify as native to the United States. Therefore, schools will need to provide a different approach to interventions of academic success for immigrant populations. These may include flexible scheduling and location for parent information sessions, additional tutoring services for immigrant children, and information about navigating the U.S. school system that may be different from their country of origin (Adelman & Taylor, 2015).

Educational and Social-Emotional Needs of Immigrant Populations in Schools

As families enter into the U.S., they may face challenges in understanding the U.S. school system and coping with discrimination and acculturation in their new home country. Immigrant populations have specific needs related to the experiences they face as newly arrived individuals into the U.S. First, pre-migration trauma may cause individuals to experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Adelman & Taylor, 2015; Galler & Sher, 2010). Even if students were born in the U.S., they might encounter trauma as their families deal with experiences before migrating to the U.S. (Estrada, 2009; Sotero, 2009). Immigrant families also have to negotiate the process of maintaining their pride for their culture of origin while

simultaneously transitioning into a new culture, often leading to acculturative stress (Amer & Hovey, 2005; Wong, Correa, Robinson, & Lu, 2017). They also have to cope with the struggles of negative political rhetoric and the discrimination from individuals who perceive immigrants to be criminals (Perreira, Kiang, & Potochnick, 2017). As they deal with discrimination, acculturative stress, and symptoms of PTSD, immigrant students can lose academic motivation and underperform academically (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010; Wong et al., 2017).

In addition to the challenges immigrant families can face due to the stressors related to immigrating to a new country, immigrant families may also face challenges simply understanding and navigating the academic system in their new country. Immigrant parents may have perceived their role in their child's educational attainment differently to the expectation in the U.S. U.S. public schools also have different legislation and safety nets in place than schools around the world, making it difficult for immigrant parents to know how to help their child navigate the school system in the U.S.

Another factor in immigrant population's academic success is educators' awareness of the differences between immigrant families' education system of origin and the U.S. education system. Educators may assume that everyone in their classes has certain information that will help them navigate the school system, while immigrant families may need much more information and support than they are receiving in their schools. The most significant barrier in academic achievement that immigrants perceive is the lack of understanding by educators of the culture and needs of their children (Becerra, 2012). When educators cannot understand what families need, they will not serve their immigrant students adequately.

Immigrant as an Identity

To best understand immigrant families, educators would need to consider that being an immigrant affects several aspects of one's experiences within their environment. Immigrant students face the challenge of being treated as an "other" in their environments, including in their K-12 schools. This can happen through systemic discrimination, including the lack of funding to address mental health concerns due to acculturative stress and PTSD, lack of resources to support family outreach addressing academic advocacy for students, lack of language supports for parents, and policies that keep families from feeling safe entering the school building (Adelman & Taylor, 2015; Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson, 2013; Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). Understanding the implications of having an immigrant identity can help school counselors better focus interventions designed to meet the educational and social emotional needs of their students.

School Counselors as Advocates for Immigrant Populations

School counselors may be the only educators in the building who are specially trained to advocate for services that promote the academic success of diverse populations (Nelson, Bustamante, & Watts, 2013), and must play a vital role in schools as the liaison between the student, parents, and school staff to advocate in addressing the student's needs (ASCA, 2012). School counselors are required to support the academic, social/emotional, and career development of all of their students, yet there is little research on the amount of training school counselors receive regarding appropriate interventions to support immigrant populations. Of course, immigrant students will have multiple dimensions to their identities beyond their immigrant identity. However, the characteristics related to identifying as an immigrant is crucial to the way they experience their lives in the U.S. and the needs they have in the U.S. school

system. When school counselors understand that being an immigrant affects other aspects of a student, they may be more prepared to support their needs.

School counselors in training learn strategies that help them consider and understand the needs of diverse populations, yet, no school counselor preparation standards explicitly addresses skills, attitudes, or knowledge to work with immigrant populations (CACREP, 2016). Even within exploration of the position statements from the American School Counseling Association, there are no position statements advocating for the need to support immigrant students, except for one addressing work with undocumented students (ASCA, 2012). If school counselors are not learning in their preparation programs the impact of immigrant identity and do not see their professional organization highlighting the importance of exploring the needs of immigrant student populations, one may question whether school counselors are truly reaching their immigrant students in their comprehensive school counseling programs. There is no evidence demonstrating that school counselors are prepared to work with immigrant populations, and no studies that specifically explore training strategies that prepare school counselors to work with immigrant communities.

Because there is a lack of identified programs that prepare counselors to work with immigrant populations, the immigrant students may be the best experts on how school counselors should work with immigrant communities. Students typically are not asked to provide their voice in their educational needs (Smith, Beck, Bernstein, & Dashtguard, 2014). However, they are supposed to be trained to advocate for themselves (American School Counselor Association, 2014). The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of immigrant students and children of immigrant parents with their school counselor in K-12 school in the U.S. The following research questions were created to address the experiences more specifically:

- What supports did immigrant students need from their school counselor?
- What were some of the barriers that kept immigrant students from seeking support from the school counselor?

The voices of those who have experience as immigrants will eventually inform school counselors, counselor educators, and future school counselors on their impact on the lives of immigrant students. Because of this need to allow the immigrant students state their own experiences and support, I did not prepare research questions beforehand. The participants and I determined the research questions after the participants were chosen, and the study was explained to them.

Theoretical Orientation

The research method and underpinnings of the study were grounded in liberation psychology (Martin-Baro, 1994) and the writing of Paolo Freire (1972). Freire coined the term problem-posing education as an approach to liberating systems of education to incorporate the expertise of populations that are being studied. In problem-posing education, there is open communication between facilitators and learners, where every participant is part of identifying the problem and actions toward solutions (Freire, 1972). The process begins with identifying questions, and working collectively to answer those questions, which, in turn, develops more questions. This process provides solidarity amongst the participants and researchers and can support working toward a unified goal or purpose.

Liberation psychology shares the underpinnings of problem-posing education. There are three elements to liberation psychology. First, both theories believe that the practice of the approaches is more important than the ideas themselves. Therefore, individuals who are marginalized must practice exploring the world around them through a critical lens and advocating for themselves to truly understand their own needs and how the environment around

them affects their experiences (Freire, 1972). Second, the relationship between the facilitator and participant is a crucial factor in the work toward change. The goal is to make leader and learner more equal. The act of learning happens by both parties in the relationship. Freire (1972) found that traditional learning involved a teacher pouring into a student and the student as a passive participant in their education. However, Freire believed that working with marginalized populations was most effective when both the teacher and the learner worked together to determine what needed to be taught and addressed. Finally, both work within an epistemology, where those working to seek knowledge do not just look to experts, but also to those oppressed by the structures that the new knowledge is being sought to change (Martin-Baro, 1994). Therefore, the learner is providing expertise to the teacher, while the teacher is providing expertise to the learner. Both theories believed that one could not understand the needs of a group of people without asking the group of people (Martin-Baro, 1994).

Methodology

I used a critical paradigm of qualitative research to frame my methodology for the study. The critical theory tradition focuses on the value of dialogue and engagement with research subjects in the creation of knowledge (Prasad, 2005). Ontologically, the truth is contextual within critical tradition. Reality in a critical theoretical tradition is considered subjective and changes within the greater society and context (Hays & Singh, 2012), and is formed based on the societal norms, history, culture, and political issues of the time (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

In a critical research paradigm, knowledge is co-created and constructed through engagement between the participants and the researchers. Specifically, research subjects and the facilitator develop knowledge in dialogue together (Denzin et al., 1994; Lincoln et al., 2011). The axiology, or the impact of the researcher's values and assumptions on the research design, of

critical theory, is value-laden. Critical theorists believe in the impact of culture and experiences on knowledge. Therefore, the values of the participants and researchers impact the outcomes of the research (Lincoln et al., 2011; Prasad, 2005). To attain this knowledge, critical researchers actively engage participants in a dialogue in discussing their experiences at length.

Researcher's Subjectivity

There are several identities that I hold strongly to my heart that inform my decision to focus on immigrant students and their supports from school counselors. First and foremost, I am a child of two immigrant parents. My parents came from Sri Lanka, a country suffering at the time, and even now, from civil disagreements and mistreatment of the "other." My parents came from two different backgrounds, one is Sinhalese and the other Tamil. Their decision to move to the U.S. was grounded in a fear of death by terrorism and concern for a baby on the way, rather than the narrative promoted by media today, with criminals trying to take their crimes to a new country, or people trying to cheat the system. Their urgency came from the day when my father called in sick for work as a flight attendant only to find out that a suicide bomber had bombed the plane on which he was supposed to work.

Additionally, my memories of being the child of immigrant parents contributed to my decision to pursue this research. Growing up in California felt easy and natural. I spent most of my days on the playground with several different ethnicities. I had Jewish friends, Latinx friends, and even some other Sri Lankan friends. I spent my weekends with my mom at her friends' homes, eating rice and curry and playing with my siblings and other Sri Lankan kids that were around. However, when I was in fourth grade, my family moved to Amelia Island, Florida.

Amelia Island was a different space. I had no friends that looked like me and my teachers were all White women. I had the privilege of understanding the language, but the culture was

different to my familiar surroundings. I was scolded for not saying “ma’am” to female adults, teased for having dark hair on my face, picked at because my house smelled like curry and we ate with our hands. I distinctly remember that when my mom would feed me and my siblings with her hands, she would check the blinds and make sure nobody on the street would see us. I hated the way I looked, the things that my family did, and the way we all lived. Yet, I never spoke with a school counselor because, in my experiences with the one school counselor that I remember ever seeing in elementary school, she had already looked at me with judging eyes and I never felt like she would understand what I had gone through.

My family moved back to California right before I was going to go to high school. This was great news for me because I would be able to reconnect with my elementary friends. But the other part of support from a counselor—college and career readiness—was becoming necessary in my life. I heard that the counselor was supposed to help with setting up schedules and preparing students for college. My counselor put me in classes that he told me were required for all students, but my friends never had to take. My memory of college planning was that I received an application encouraging me to apply to Tulane University. It was free, and I really had no idea what I was doing when it came to college applications and choosing where I wanted to apply. I ended up applying to about 15 schools. I was required to get a counselor recommendation. When I went to my counselor, he acted shocked that I would choose to apply to such a prestigious and competitive school.

As I sit back as a current middle school counselor and reflect on my high school experience as the first generation in my family to attend a U.S. high school, I think about all the things that I should have been told. I should have been supported in applying to whichever school I wanted to attend, whether my counselor believed that I should be applying or not,

especially for a college that was sending me a free application. I also should not have had to ask my friends how to apply to college, how to apply for FAFSA, or how to find scholarships. To me, it seemed like there was an underlying assumption that I should know this already. However, as a child with parents that did not attend U.S. schools, this whole process was confusing.

In my current experience as a middle school counselor, I see the same pattern of experiences play of with my students. I see the assumptions in education that students should know certain information to navigate their school experience, that all parents should teach their children the same things, and that we all should understand how to navigate the process of determining what college is right for us. However, when I work with my students, it is clear that this is entirely not true. When I teach, I make no assumptions about what my students know or do not know. I have explicit discussions about undocumented students. I have no clue how many students in my classrooms are actually undocumented students, but I will not assume that I have none. But what about the other counselors? I hear other counselors saying that they do not think that immigration is an issue they need to concern themselves with in the state of Georgia. At the summer meeting to plan for our annual state-wide conference, one of the conference team members tried to remove a proposal about resources for undocumented students because she did not believe that was an issue in Georgia, only on the national news.

How are we going to get counselors to listen to the needs of immigrant populations? My goal is to be more intentional in getting those student voices at the table. I am concerned that school counselors simply do not know what they do not know. The purpose of this dissertation focus is to inform school counselors that just because they do not hear about it—maybe the student speaks perfect English or never told the counselor that they were undocumented—does not mean that they do not need support. It does not mean that a counselor should not be

intentional about their information being as basic as it possibly can so that those who do not know, will.

Participants

I used convenience sampling to recruit participants. I sent a flyer to individuals who were community leaders and organizations that support immigrant individuals. I also shared information about the study with individuals who participate in activities, such as churches, fraternities and sororities, and non-profit organizations, that shared to other members that would qualify to participate. All participants were between 18 and 23 years of age, identified as immigrants or children of immigrants, and went to a U.S. K-12 public school for at least one year. To accommodate the schedules of the participants, I met with two separate participation groups. Group 1 met at a university closer to a metropolitan city, while Group 2 met in a university a few hours north of the metropolitan city.

The following table, Table 1, shows the ethnic identity and immigrant status of each participant.

Table 1. *Participant demographics*

Pseudonym	Ethnic Identity	Immigrant Identity	Sex	Participation Group
Cathy	Indian	Child of Immigrants	Female	Group 1
Rose	Indian	Child of Immigrants	Female	Group 1
Leah	Syrian	Immigrant Child	Female	Group 1
Yusra	Pakistani	Child of Immigrants	Female	Group 1
Juan Diego	Mexican	Immigrant Child	Male	Group 2
Luis Pedraza	Mexican	Child of Immigrants	Male	Group 2
Gabby	Mexican	Child of Immigrants	Female	Group 2

Photo elicitation

This study utilized photo elicitation as a primary source of data collection and analysis. Photo elicitation is defined as the addition of photographs into the research process (Harper, 2002), and allows participants to actively engage in the research process and contribute their ideas and social constructs to the research process in a deeper way than possible with other methods (Kolb, 2008). In a world focused on images, incorporating photographs into the dialogue of the research process can evoke a deeper consciousness of participants and provide a holistic and consistent record of a critical phenomenon (Dempsey & Tucker, 1994; Prosser, 2007).

Photo elicitation as a data collection method began to surface in anthropology and sociology, where researchers believed that photos sharpened participants' memory and reduced areas of misunderstanding while conducting interviews (Harper, 2002). The use of photographs in research can prompt reflection, where participants can reflect on their perceptions of phenomena and examine meanings and significance of media (Dempsey & Tucker, 1994; Prosser, 2007). In many of the earlier projects in photo elicitation, researchers or professional photographers took photographs then shared them with participants to seek their perspective on the subjects in the photographs. Typically, they would be in relation to the culture or community of the participants (Harper, 2002; Smith & Woodward, 1999). However, participatory photo elicitation is another form of photo elicitation that has surfaced that provides more freedom to the participants to inform the research process.

I determined that photo elicitation would be the best approach for this study for a few reasons. The first reason is use of participants as co-collaborators in the knowledge creation process. Photo elicitation also supports the decrease of a power differential between the

researcher and participants because images are created without the researcher's influence (Llamas Coronel & Rodriguez Pascual, 2013). Photo elicitation mixes the voices between the researcher and the participants (Denzin, Lincoln, & Guba, 1994). The second reason is the expertise immigrants in the U.S have regarding their experience and educational needs. Photo elicitation highlights the voice of the participants as they work with the researcher to determine what should be included in the photographs and then create their story (Kolb, 2008; Llamas Coronel & Rodriguez Pascual, 2013). I also chose photo elicitation because of its potential for inclusion of non-native English speakers because the use of images as a replacement for the use of writing or reading (Hergenrather et al., 2009; Wang, 2006).

Participatory photo elicitation involves the researcher describing and considering the general purpose of the study with the participants and then eliciting the participants to take photographs on their own that relate to the research questions (Kolb, 2008; Lorenz & Kolb, 2009). At a later date, participants reconvene with the researcher and reflect on their photos by verbalizing their reasoning for taking the photographs in collaboration with other participants (Kolb, 2008). This method utilizes participants as actively engaged in co-constructing the research with the researcher and stimulates self-reflection related to the issue being explored The goal of this photo elicitation study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of students, who particularly identify as immigrants, either as immigrants themselves or through their parents, while working with their school counselor in K-12 public schools.

Procedures

Meetings were conducted over a month's span. The purpose of the meetings was to acquaint the participants with the study and the study's procedures, to help the participants understand the expectations of participating in the study, and to discuss the photographs they had

taken between meetings. Participants met twice during this time. Due to their disparate geographical locations, the seven participants were divided into two groups. One participant group had four participants, and the other had three participants. Each group met with me on two separate occasions. Group 1 met with me in the student center of a university in a metropolitan city in the southeastern region of the U.S. Group 2 met with me in the education building of a university in a rural area in the southeastern region of the U.S. Each meeting last for about two hours.

For each group, I began the first meetings by describing the purpose of the study and obtaining informed consent. The groups then discussed the roles and responsibilities of school counselors and how that was reflected in their school experience, because the participants in both groups expressed confusion about the role of the school counselor. After discussing what the role of the school counselor is supposed to be in schools, I allowed the groups to explore what they found to be perceived gaps between what school counselors were supposed to do and what they actually experienced in schools, using the participants as the experts (Freire, 1972). The purpose of this conversation was not only to help them think about for the photos they would take, but also to determine the research questions. Some of the problems they noticed varied between lack of knowledge of how to utilize the school counselor and the lack of consideration for individual needs that participants may have had.

After the first meeting with the first group, the participants developed research questions with me. As they shared their experiences with the school counselors, I provided suggestions on questions that would help get a better understanding of how school counselors can provide support to immigrant students. We determined that because some of the participants shared their positive experiences, but others shared the absence or avoidance of the school counselors at their

school, it would be helpful to explore participants' perceptions of barriers and support they received from their school counselor.

With the second group, I shared the research questions and asked for their input on their development. They agreed to maintain the research questions from the first group. The main purpose of this conversation was also to help participants discuss how to take their photos that would reflect the questions (Kolb, 2008). Participants were also given procedures of considerations when taking photographs. Participants were told that if they were in a photograph, this would affect their anonymity in the study and that if they were taking photographs of other subjects they would need to receive consent to take the photo and share it.

During each second meeting, individual participants shared their photographs and discussed their reflections of the photographs. The meetings were recorded, and the recordings were transcribed. At the conclusion of the second meetings, each group was asked if they thought another round of photographs were necessary in order to better express their experiences. In both groups, they agreed they did not need another round of photographs because they believed, in conjunction with the discussion, the photographs accurately depicted how they perceived their experiences with school counselors. All participants that participated in the initial meeting about the purpose of the study, participated in the photograph-taking and analysis meetings. They also all agreed to have their photographs in potential publications in future articles regarding this study.

Data collection. The data collected for this study was be two-fold. First, I collected photographs that participants took. The photographs were depictions of the participants' experiences in K-12 schools, specifically focused on their experiences with school counselors. The purpose of collecting photographs that depict their experiences was to better understand

what helped or hindered them from success in school. The participants selected one or two photographs out of the ones they took over the two weeks between meetings that were particularly salient to their experiences in K-12 schools. Then, at the second meeting, I audio recorded the group discussions about the photos. I used the audio recording to inform the common themes they determined based on the stories they heard and the photographs they shared with each other.

Data analysis. When the groups reconvened for the second meetings, each participant shared one or two photographs they had taken. Then, they developed a story using Wang's (2001; 2006) SHOWeD framework. The SHOWeD framework is a method for structured and facilitated discussion about the photographs (Wang, 2006). The questions are as follows: What do you See?, What is really Happening?, How does it relate to Our lives?, Why does this situation, concern or strength Exist?, and What can we Do about it?. The stories revealed the context of the photographs to me and the other participants in the group. The stories were recorded on audio and through note-taking so participants can review them if necessary.

During the meetings, I asked my participants to pay attention to commonalities between their experiences and photos. I also took notes about the photographs and their stories about the photos to help find the common themes. After the meeting, I took the transcriptions of the meetings and used the quotes to inform the common themes described during the meetings. Since there were two separate groups that met, I collected themes from the first group, then I shared those themes with the second group after each group member had shared their stories. I then asked the participants from the second group to share what they noticed as commonalities within their photographs and to compare them to the themes the previous group had shared. I then used the second groups themes to create the overall findings described in the next section.

Trustworthiness

I used various methods to support trustworthiness and rigor of the research study. First, the researcher used triangulation in the process of research. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple forms of evidence to support the findings (Hays & Singh, 2012). In this study, the researcher used the photos and the stories about the photos, discussion with the participant groups, and member checking.

I conducted member checking in the study through collaboration to develop the research questions, collect data, and analyze the data. Member checking happened as part of the photo elicitation because participants were able to voice their expertise on each of the themes. Additionally, after I finished writing up the results, I shared the chapter with participants to ensure I interpreted our discussions accurately as I wrote.

Finally, I kept a reflexive journal. The purpose of the reflexive journal was to maintain consciousness about my role as the researcher and the power dynamics within the research team. The use of liberation psychology as the theoretical orientation in this study meant that I had to give most of the power in the outcomes of the research study to my participants. The reflexive journal provided an opportunity for me to reflect on the process and how it impacted me as a researcher (Hays & Singh, 2012). The reflexive journal also provided me with a space to critically reflect on my intentions of research and my research process (Lennie, 2006). I wanted to ensure that I was continuously looking to my researchers as the experts and that I am did not hold my own biases as superior to their expertise.

Findings

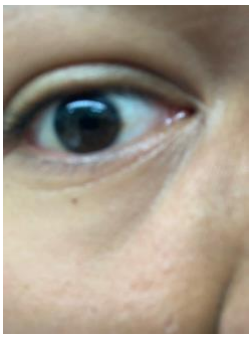
In the following section, I will describe the emergent themes in relation to the research questions. The greatest factor immigrant students described that impacted the supports from

school counselors or the barriers to seeking help from school counselors was the relationship they developed, or did not develop, with their school counselor. Their relationship guided how the participants experienced their interactions with the school counselor. In the first section, I will share the findings associated with the relationship, or lack thereof, which impacted the participants' support from their school counselor. In the second section, I will share the interactions and experiences that impacted their experiences with school counselors.

Relationships with the School Counselor

The participants shared stories of relationships, or a lack of relationship, with the school counselors that impacted the support they received to be successful in school and the barriers that kept them from seeking support from their counselor. When counselors were able to get to know their students, they were able to tailor information to the needs of the student. Luis Pedraza took the photograph in Figure 1. He shared that the counselor saw his vision and values. Seeing his vision helped her understand what he needed from her to become comfortable. He described his experience in this way:

Figure 1.



Luis Pedraza: *You kind of find that way we can relate sometimes and I felt like my counselor found out and like I was saying, earlier, like my type of humor and I mean also I was like very academic focused. But I mean I was really focused on just keeping my grades up because that's what my parents cared about. So whenever we would talk about*

anything, she would focus on those things and kind of make it easier for me, more comfortable to get to know me, or just get me to talk because also I'm pretty quiet so I didn't even speak up or like when she would tell me something I had to be like, okay and not really have a conversation.

Another participant, Juan Diego, shared how his relationship with his counselor helped him navigate being one of the only Hispanic students at his school. He stated that his counselor helped him understand what path would help him be successful. Juan Diego found that the counselor listened to his experience, rather than assuming that he was like other students. He shared his experience in this way:

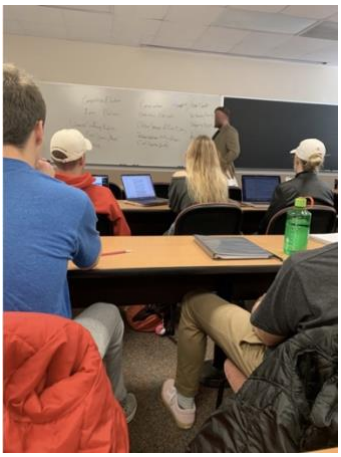
Juan Diego: *...yes, it was freaky just to like be all alone in all these classes. But she kind of just came in and, you know, reassured that it was, everything was going to be fine. And she was there throughout….*

Juan Diego: *...'cause she was friendly, not only with me but with everyone else, the staff and the kids and everybody knew her and she just, she was the cool counselor I guess because she understood the kids…and what I saw in a lot of other counselors was that they either had kids really young, which they were kind of like, you know, not fed up but like tired because…they do bad stuff just like kid stuff or they* [the counselors] *were grown and at that point they're like, oh yeah, I've been through here, he's just misbehaving this and that. But they don't actually take the time to sit down and listen to what the kid is saying.*

On the other hand, participants also shared there was a disconnect between the counselor and the participant, where the counselor was there, but did not seem to develop a relationship with them, in particular. Gabby shared that the lack of relationship stemmed from the lack of

cultural representation of counselors that shared her identities. She described her photo, pictured in Figure 2, of a college classroom where the professor and students are predominantly white. She suggested that having counselors who ethnically identified with their students may help the participants reach out to school counselors. She describes her experiences in this way:

Figure 2.



Gabby: *From where I came from, it's just a systemic thing that we're underrepresented and we're always sitting in the back because it feels like we're not being welcomed. And um his* (Juan Diego) *story about like how he actually had a relationship with a counselor is very different from mine even though we're from the same area. I mean, I only went to the counselor to turn in those letters so I can take higher classes, like my honor classes or when they asked me for my social security number and that was it. So, I mean it's true. Those are the only few times I really got to see my counselor.*

Gabby: *Obviously the first step is having more representation because without representation, how are you going to teach others to be mindful of certain things? I mean obviously they're teaching you all how a counselor is supposed to be, but there's a disconnect.*

Rose shared a different perspective to relationships with the counselor. Similar to Gabby's experience, Rose did not have a relationship with the counselor, however she described her experience as one where she did not put in effort to build the relationship. She knew the counselor was there, but she found access to the counselor took more effort than she would need put forth to seek support from other stakeholders in her success. Since she perceived that it would be difficult to develop a relationship with her counselor, she sought support from other stakeholders. She shared a photograph in Figure 3 of a tree, representing her growth. She described the meaning of the photo in the following way:

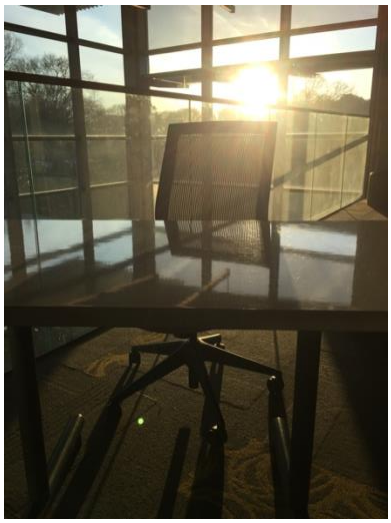
Figure 3.

Rose: *…for a tree to grow that big it takes a lot of effort. There's all these forces of nature that make it get so big. So if that tree was me, I would say that the bark and the roots are like my parents and my family and then my experience with counselors would be like one of the smaller branches. So like I could definitely get there but I would just have to climb up the tree as weird as that sounds…um so this concern exists because I guess in different schools in different environments, like people just have like different access. So in the environment that I was in, like um, I did have access to it, but you just*

had to put in a little bit more effort and climb up, talk to a few different people to be able to like meet with a counselor.

Cathy shared the absence of the counselor altogether. She never received the opportunity to develop a relationship with the school counselor because she never interacted with her school counselor. The absence of the counselor led to a lack of understanding of what the counselor's role was in supporting students. Cathy took a photograph, Figure 4, that reflected her relationship with the school counselor in this way:

Figure 4.



Cathy: *Um, so yeah, that's pretty much an empty chair because all throughout high school I don't think I ever thought about going to the counselor ever. I don't think I actually went ever. Counseling really didn't exist to me and I think that was similar to what other people thought too, like my friends. Um when we had academic problems or anything like our first go-to option wouldn't be counselors…that would either be like talking to our friends or going to our family or talk to teachers. Teachers would be people that we'd be more willing to go to just because we know them and see them around too. So I guess why this situation, or concern exists, um I guess kind of like*

everyone kind of touched on how we don't really know the rules, like the rules of counselors aren't really defined and they're not really readily available to really know about them.

Rose also detailed confusion about the role of the counselor and how it affected her development of a relationship with school counselors, particularly as a child of immigrant parents:

Rose: *...for my parents, there was no such thing as counselors back in Kenya, right? So you know, they were kind of like, what exactly are they doing? Because of course like the normal person doesn't know that like to us, they should be guiding us, not laying the options out. So you have this expectation that like this is what they are supposed to do. Um, and also like you don't really know whether or not like, you're supposed to trust them um if like they're just supposed to be, you know, if they give the same information to all the kids or um because I was taking x level classes, they would tell me a different subset of information.*

The relationship that the participants perceived with their school counselors aligned with the supports they received or the reasons they never sought support from the school counselor. When the participants felt they had time with the counselor and the counselor listened to their experiences, they were more likely to seek support from the counselors. However, if the counselors were difficult to find or, as the participants perceived, not available at all, the participants were less likely to seek support from their school counselor.

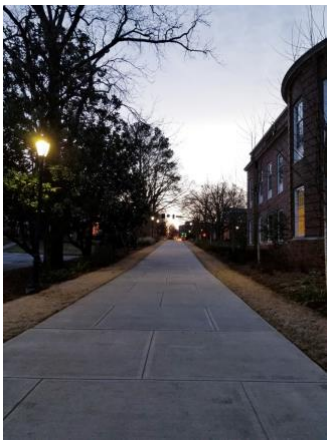
Interactions and Experiences with the School Counselor

The relationship that the participant had with their school counselor also impacted the interactions and experiences the participant had with their school counselor. In experiences

where the participant felt they had a positive relationship with the school counselor, the participants shared helpful interactions with the school counselor. However, in stories where there was no relationship, there was either an absence of experiences or interactions were unproductive, some even negative. The participants in some instances perceived the school counselor helping them overcome barriers to their success. However, in other instances, they perceived the counselor being a part of the barrier to success.

Connection to Resources. Juan Diego shared a photograph, Figure 5, of a bus route in his area that connects students who are homeless to their school of origin, to maintain consistency in the school they attend. Juan Diego found that the school counselor connected him to resources that helped him persist through school. He shares his experience here:

Figure 5.



Juan Diego: *Yeah, because the counselors were actually, they were the ones who will talk to the bus people and made all of the transportation and things possible. So yeah, they were the coordinators for all that…'cause it wasn't just me, it was other kids too. 'Cause like those special ed busses there, those aren't just used for special needs kids. There are kids that, you know, they need transportation if their parents can't make it in time. And I*

mean, I don't know if that falls within the job description of a counselor, but those counselors did that and my counselor did that.

While Juan Diego found that his school counselor was connecting him to resources to help him persist through school, Leah believed that her school counselor did not provide adequate resources for her needs. As an immigrant child, Leah believed there were aspects of college readiness that she was not prepared to understand, including understanding how courses she took in high school would impact her course load in college. She also discussed the need to understand scholarships in a way that individuals who did not identify as immigrant or children of immigrants may not have to consider. She shared her experiences in the following statement:

Leah: *Like I know she had some students that she would be busy with, but I think there are needs to be like this. Like they should know that people who are immigrants or their parents are immigrants, they don't know as much as the average person knows. Just in terms of like not just like, I feel like when you're new they focus a lot on your friends and like just making sure you're taking the right classes to graduate on time. They don't go above and beyond, but also like about the opportunities I could have. Like for example, my friend, she had a different counselor and I don't know, maybe she was freer than mine. But she told her how like there's scholarships. She* [my counselor] *told us about the basic stuff, how to apply, but I think especially when it comes to scholarships like each students', I think that's something my friends can't really help me with, like maybe scholarships are competitive, like you have to figure them out by our own and each scholarship is different.*

Showing Potential for the Future. Some participants shared how their school counselor helped them perceive their future and potential for a future. In Figure 6, Luis Pedraza took a

picture of a construction fence. The space between the fences represented his interaction with his school counselor. Since he did not have family members who attended a U.S. college, it was behind the fence, where he could not see what was there or how to get there. He found that the counselor helped him understand some of the processes to attend college. He shares in more detail in this way:

Figure 6.

Luis Pedraza*: I'm a mix of the two cultures of the two languages, like being first generation here and in a sense like the construction was college to me because I really didn't have like that vision into that field. I mean, none of my parents really went to college, at least not here and uh, they have no idea. I mean, none of my relatives had been to college here. None of them, like, even with the high school sometimes, and I really had no guidance into what field I wanted to go into or how to apply anything like that. So I was just kind of on this side of the barrier, like hoping if I do well here and then that's a gain, I guess like that, that's success if you were the one to measure it by that I mean, and like you can see right there with the two fence meet, there's like a little gap where you can see in. And I was like, you know, that kind of represents my, my guidance counselor. Like she knows maybe she wasn't too involved or like maybe she wasn't, um, I guess like had that great relationship with me, but I knew like she was a person I could*

talk to when it came to those kinds of topics. And even when I didn't have to go to her, she would willing, willingly come out to me and were like, asked me, have you done this? Have you done that? Just trying to keep me on the same, on the right path I can get to college. All counselors I think should have for their kids when it comes to college obviously providing all the information because I feel like I got a lot of information that I would have never found myself. I mean I think it does take sometimes some one-on-ones, one of like I know I have to have one when I filled out the FAFSA and whenever I haven't looked through scholarships and all that, um, I guess she was like my main motivator for actually doing any of them because I know my parents just kind of counted on me to be like, oh yeah, I mean , you know what you're doing. And I'm like, how am I going to know? Like okay I guess I do. Um yeah, I mean I guess she was the main reason I got here.

Juan Diego also shared the perspective that his school counselor helped him on his path to attending college because of her belief in his potential. He described his experience in this way:

Juan Diego: *Um, and really in elementary school she helped me like, not cope, but kind of steer me on the right path to see because there's this thing that kids get labeled right if they're more prone to be successful versus not. So I feel like she kind of took me out of that low tier, the career path, if you could say that. Um and then once in high school, she had an active role in me actually applying to all these schools and not just going to work for like Mcdonald's or in other low tier places. She wanted me to succeed. And so that's how she helped me get here because she really went out of her way. Um and it's like me and my family, uh, honestly and the experience would have been very different if I*

wouldn't have had her because I wouldn't have applied to college at all. I wouldn't have been here and reaching out to a counselor.

Then there were instances where the interactions between the participants and the counselors reflected a perception that the counselor had lower expectations than the participants had for themselves. Leah shared that she was advised to not take the advice from the counselor because they would encourage students to take a less rigorous course load:

Leah: *So my friend literally like I was telling her, oh my counselor said maybe I shouldn't take like AP Bio[logy] or AP Chem[istry]. She was like oh like counselors always tell you to take a little lower, which I understand sometimes I know that and that's actually why I think she didn't tell, make me take another, like the higher level when I was a Freshman just because she didn't want to stress me out. But um I mean every individual has a potential and, in a way, she was kind of making a decision almost like not making a decision for me, but not really showing me what the other alternatives, not showing me the positive of the other alternatives. Um like yeah I might be more stressed out but it might pay off.*

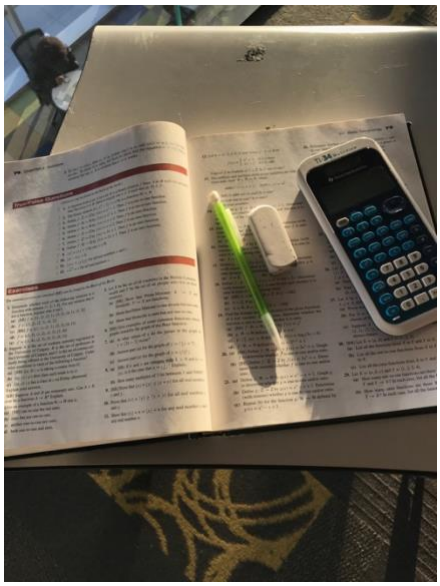
Gabby also shared an experience where her counselor seemed to have lower expectations for what she was capable of doing after high school:

Gabby: *And when they found out I got into* [University name] *and they were all like shocked. Like how does she get in? Even though they had access to like my GPA all my honor classes, I took all those letters that they asked for from my teachers that say, like she can do it, but they still don't believe it.*

Clerical Hurdle. There were two separate participants, one in Group 1 and one in Group 2, that shared the only interactions with their counselors they recall were to change their classes.

Particularly, they believed their school counselor was a step to get into rigorous courses. In Figure 7, Yusra photographed a picture of a textbook. She stated she took this picture because she found that she had to complete research about her courses by herself. She also shared that her counselor did not provide her with any additional information about her options for courses. Gabby had a similar experience. Her counselor would ask for letters from teachers confirming that she could handle the rigor of the courses but would not meet with her to discuss her options. Yusra shares the following story about her experience:

Figure 7.



Yusra: *I never once went to them for like a personal issue. Like I would go to them maybe I would say in all of my high school year, I probably went like less than five times. But it was every time I went it was like for a purpose, like I want to change my schedule to this one specific class. Like I knew like what I wanted and that's why I went, you know, and so in this picture like I chose to use a test because it's like self-studying a lot. Like it's like you teaching yourself, you're doing it yourself rather than someone explaining it to you, like in class. And so that's kind of how it was for me. Like I would do all the, like I*

would have to come up with what I wanted myself, like do the research myself, whether that'd be for like classes or college or something like that.

Gabby shared her experience in this way:

Gabby: *So they made it seem like everyone was having to turn in these letters but in reality it wasn't everyone turning in these letters. It was really just me. And like those few other minority students within those Honors classes or STEM classes…um so um these letters would be saying this student, and I'd say my name, has shown the foundations to be able to take this class and has prior knowledge to pass this class and won't fail, basically in essence. And so you would have to get signatures from your previous teachers or the head of the department. And most of the time, those honor teachers who I've had previously were the head of the department. And most of the time, they would always laugh, like why? But they wouldn't do anything. They would just sign it and be like, okay, here you go. Yeah so it was just like something they knew was coming up every time I was having to register for classes. And I guess the paper stopped us from talking because I'd just literally turn it in. They'd be like put it in our mailbox. Like she wouldn't see my face. That was it. Next day I know it's on my schedule. I got the class.*

Feelings of Being Targeted. Gabby shared a significant incident that she recalled from her high school experience. While this was the experience of only one participant, it was important to include because it did make a noteworthy difference in the way Gabby perceived school counselors. Gabby shared that students at her school, particularly Hispanic students, were being called to the counseling office and being questioned about their social security number. She shares the story of her own experience of being called in below:

Gabby: *So the next thing you know, I am in my history class and um, he was like, hey Gabby you need to go to, um the counselor's asking for you. So I was like okay, I'll go thinking not much about it. And I just already knew what to say. Like I wasn't going to say anything and just walk out. But obviously I started to show up because if not, I would get written up because they were really weird about stuff like that. So I'm walking across campus, I am messaging my mom and my sister about what's going on. And at the same time my mom was like, alright I'm on my way, don't say anything. And I was like, cool. I finally get to the counselor's office. And they were like sit down in the waiting room and whatnot, which I was like okay cool. By the time I get called in because there's other Hispanic kids, um waiting around, there's also one in the office, well all offices, there's four counselors and there's one in each office already talking or whatnot. And um, they just ask like you can see like the kids like either getting really really red or like all the blood would drown out from their face. And so they would walk out, we all like acknowledge each other and then they would leave. And then we all like the next four get called in and I was one of them. And so I get called into, I don't even know her name, like I don't have I really don't know if she was even a counselor. Um 'cause I never seen her. And um she was like, hey have you filled out your FAFSA? And I was like, I don't know, why? She's like oh well we just need to make sure that your social security numbers in there.*

Before Gabby was called to the counselor's office and was asked to share her social security number, there was an incident with a Hispanic student at the school, who was deported in front of the school with her mother after her mother was pulled over for a traffic violation. This incident is one of two incidences that Gabby can recall in her time in K-12 schools with the

school counselor. While Gabby cannot confirm that the individual who questioned her was a counselor, she does recall that this incident happened in her school's counseling office.

Discussion

There is little research on the experiences of immigrant populations with their school counselor in K-12 settings, although researchers have published best practices for school counselors to serve immigrant populations (Goh et al., 2007; Rowland & Davis, 2014). There are parts of this study that aligned with the current literature. However, what was found in this study was that much of what immigrant students need in K-12 schools aligns with the professional practice and ethical standards set forth for any school counselor working with diverse populations.

First, the study validated some of the best practices and findings from previous literature. As the research shared about mental health, most of the participants in this study did not seek out mental health supports from the school counselor (Abe-Kim et al., 2007; Nadeem et al., 2007; Nadeem, Lange, & Miranda, 2009). Some of the participants shared that the reason for avoiding social-emotional supports involved their lack of trust between themselves and the counselor. Researchers shared that the barriers to seeking mental health support may be related to the lack of understanding in the role of counseling in their lives (Abe-Kim et al., 2007). The participants shared the same sentiment. In their experience, they were not aware of the rules of confidentiality, which discouraged them from seeking help from the counselor.

Also consistent with the research, the participants in Group 2 discussed the impact of the cultural competence of the school counselor on the academic supports they perceived receiving (Becerra, 2012). Gabby shared that her school counselors never seemed to interact or build a connection to her and seemingly lost her trust when they called Hispanic students into the

counseling office to request their social security numbers. In Group 1, cultural competence did not emerge as a consideration in the participants' experiences. However, members of Group 1 did share that their needs in academic advisement would differ because of their immigrant identity. As immigrant students, they did not have parents who had navigated the U.S. school system before them. Therefore, they needed information about high school courses, college applications, and college scholarships that assumed they had no foundational background about these topics at all.

Second, the relationship between the participants and their counselor was a fundamental part of how they utilized the counseling role in their success in K-12 settings. The interactions and experiences participants had were guided by the relationship, or lack thereof, with their school counselors. When participants had a relationship with their school counselor, they shared helpful experiences they had with their school counselor. They shared they received useful information and resources that helped them persist through K-12 settings. They also saw that college was a realistic part of their journey.

However, when participants had no relationship with their school counselor, the participants experienced their interactions with the school counselors in three different ways. Some participants shared they had no experiences with the school counselor. Cathy, for example, shared that she had never met with a counselor before. Other participants who had no relationship expressed confusion about the role of their school counselor and how they could utilize their services. This mostly came from the second group, who said they were unaware of the "rules" of talking to the school counselor, how to get in touch with them, or what information they would receive from the counselor. This led to participants seeking information from other stakeholders in their education, such as teachers and family members.

Additionally, some interactions were harmful when the participants perceived they did not have a relationship with the counselor. Leah shared experiences where not having a relationship with her counselor impacted the support she received to help her make choices in courses she would take in high school. Although it was not detrimental, if Leah was advised about the impact of taking courses that would count toward college credit, she could have taken less courses in college, saving her money in tuition costs. Additionally, Gabby's interaction in the counseling department, when she was asked about her social security number, was perceived as a harmful interaction because she had no relationship with her school counselors. While there are details that are not clearly defined, such as whether or not the conversation was with the school counselors, Gabby held distrust with her school counselors because she did not have a relationship with her school counselor, seemingly having no idea who her counselor was.

Some of these instances, such as the relationship between school counselor and participant, were not specifically related to the immigrant experience. However, because immigrant families may not have had school counselors or understand the role of the school counselor (Amri & Bemak, 2013; Saechao et al., 2012), the counselor's effort to forge positive relationships with their immigrant students will impact whether or not they seek support from their school counselors. Even the relationships that were perceived as positive, such as Juan Diego's relationship with his counselor, were largely a coincidence. Juan Diego's counselor had a son who was in the same grade as Juan Diego and his mother worked at the school. So, on nights where the counselor stayed late and Juan Diego's mother had to work, the counselor and Juan Diego built a relationship. If these relationships were developed intentionally and mirrored this relationship, school counselors could provide support and encouragement that would help other individuals, like Juan Diego, persist through school and attend college.

In some of the experiences, participants shared interactions that were specific to the needs of immigrant students. Many of the experiences in Group 1 related to academic advising in high school settings. Students who were entering the school system in high school, like Leah, may have had challenges catching up on information that would help them navigate decisions in high school that would impact their college path. While some individuals have older siblings, like Cathy and Yusra, there are other students who have to figure out how to navigate the process of high school and college without a familial guide. As Luis and Yusra described, their parents encouraged them to attend college, but also depended on them to figure out how to get to college alone.

Lastly, most of what the participants shared in their experiences could be addressed through ethical, multiculturally competent school counseling. The multicultural and social justice counseling competencies (MCSJCC) emphasize the importance of the counselor exploring their own biases and values and how they may limit their work with marginalized or privileged clients (Ratts et al., 2015). In terms of immigrant populations, school counselors would need to explore their own values and assumptions and how they may factor into the information they provide, how they provide it, and the connection they can develop with an immigrant student.

Implications

In this study, there are implications for school counselors that can address their approach with working with immigrant populations. However, some of implications are beyond the role of the school counselor. School counselor educators can learn from this study on how to incorporate immigrant populations into their preparation programs to better serve the needs of immigrant students. Additionally, advocacy is still needed to educate stakeholders, including principals and policymakers, to ensure that school counselors can provide support to immigrant populations.

School Counselors

School counselors need to be more intentional about their approach to working with immigrant populations. As some immigrant students and their families may not understand what a school counselor does to support academic success, school counselors will have to explore the cultural worldview of their students and how it may impact their perception of their role. Some of the lack of understanding of the role can be remedied by counselors being more visible in the building. However, one of the most impactful parts of the experiences of immigrant students will be the relationship they build with their school counselor. School counselors will need to be cognizant of the access their immigrant populations believe they have to them.

Another aspect of the impact school counselors can have on their immigrant students will be their self-awareness and how they provide culturally sensitive counseling approaches in the comprehensive school counseling program. The students' experiences will likely be similar to other underrepresented populations. Therefore, if school counselors provide a culturally sensitive, data-driven comprehensive school counseling program, they will be able to help their immigrant students succeed. Even if school counselors do not believe they received training to work with immigrant populations, following the ethical guidelines and standards of practice set forth by the American School Counseling Association, will support immigrant populations. Exploring the MCSJCC also will provide a framework for school counselors to explore their self-awareness and examine their approach to working with immigrant populations.

School Counselor Educators

The CACREP standards for accreditation (2016) require that school counselors-in-training learn about social and cultural diversity. School counselors-in-training should reflect on their biases toward immigrant populations and their knowledge of immigration in the U.S. Part

of this exploration of social and cultural diversity will need to expand on knowledge regarding immigrant identity. If school counselor educators discuss "immigrant" as its own identity with their students, critical discussions related to the intersections of immigrant identity with other identities, such as ethnicity, could take place in pre-service settings. In this study, participants mostly identified as South Asian and Mexican. Many of the needs from school counselors were similar in both groups, such as accurate information to access college. However, their experiences were even further impacted by their ethnicity within their identity as immigrants.

When counselor educators discuss immigrant identity while discussing a particular ethnic identity, they may perpetuate counselors-in-training's assumptions that there are only one or two ethnicities that emigrate to the United States. When educators explore immigrant identity as its own identity, however, the conversation can explore biases and knowledge about immigration within the intersections of other social and cultural identities, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation.

Other Educational Stakeholders

In this study, members in both groups, the participants expressed their doubt that school counselors could get to know them and their educational needs because of the number of students they were expected to serve. Currently, the national average ratio of student-to-school counselor is 482:1 (National Association for College Admission Counseling & ASCA, 2015). The recommendation from ASCA is 250:1 (ASCA, 2012). While school counselors are expected to provide culturally responsive, comprehensive school counseling programs, not providing them with the supports to meet the needs of all students, such as a small number of students can make reaching immigrant students almost impossible. One recommendation for policymakers would

be to provide funding through legislation that requires schools to hire enough school counselors to provide a 250:1 ratio.

Additionally, school counselors must provide services that are related to their school counseling role. School counselors are trained to provide a comprehensive school counseling program, where they disaggregate data to identify the needs of their student populations, address those needs through classroom, small group, and individual interventions, and continuously evaluation of their interventions. When principals avoid requiring counselors to conduct duties unrelated to their responsibilities, counselors can provide interventions that address the needs of their students.

Limitations

While this study provided preliminary findings that can help inform school counselors of how immigrant students perceive their support in K-12 settings, there were some limitations to the study. First, the participants were all college-going students. There are many postsecondary options for students, including immigrant students. However, this study was limited because all participants were somehow able to navigate the college application process in order to attend college after high school. In future studies, findings may be different for students who may not have attended college and explored other postsecondary options.

In addition, the study had to be completed in two separate groups. While unintended, the groups were divided by ethnicity. Participants were found from organizations that serve particular ethnicities, one serving Muslim students and the other service Latinx populations. The responses in the study may have been different if I had a heterogeneous group of participants who identified as immigrant students. In the future, research may be heterogeneous if the

researcher partners with a non-profit organization that serves immigrant populations, rather than organizations that serve one particular ethnicity.

Conclusion

Immigrant populations in U.S. schools are projected to grow, however, educators may not understand how they can best support the success of immigrant students. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of immigrant students with school counselors. Through photo elicitation, individuals who either identify as immigrants or the children of immigrant parents took photographs that articulate their experiences with school counselors while they were in K-12 U.S. schools. The participants found that their school counselors help them find information and resources to support their academic success and provided empowerment or encouragement to persist through school. They also found that the confusion of the role of school counselors, the access they had to reach school counselors, and the self-awareness school counselors had on their approach posed barriers to seeking support from their counselors. School counselors can utilize this information to reflect on how their approaches to working with the students support immigrant populations.

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CHAPTER 4

MULTIPLE IDENTITIES COLLIDE: REFLEXIVITY IN RESEARCHING THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE AS A CHILD OF IMMIGRANTS WHO BECAME A COUNSELOR

As I reflect back on the four years of the doctoral program and my work on this dissertation, I think through the journey I thought I would have and the one I actually had. I have always been the person who needs to know the plan on how to get where I would like to be. However, as I worked through this doctoral program, I realized the impact that the process can have on the content of the program. The choice to conduct a study about immigrant populations in education seemed like the natural choice when I started, but weighed on me when the political climate shifted in the U.S. This process has been an emotional and tiring journey, to say the least, to explore the voices of some of the populations most negatively affected by the current government administration.

During my experience as a researcher, I also had to consider my identity as a child of an immigrant as well as my identity as a school counselor. I wanted to ensure that I did not impose my own experiences as a child on my participants, while also not wanting them to feel hesitant to share their own experiences with school counselors because I identified as a school counselor. As some research has expressed, there are times being an insider to the populations is advantageous (Berger, 2015). Challenges, however, as a result of being an insider may also arise, such as determining when to self-disclose about one's experience. A problem I regularly encountered was attempting to maintain empathy for my participants' experiences without

getting overly emotional. Researcher reflexivity is the concept of critically reflecting on the researcher's identity, position, and interests in every part of the research process (Pillow, 2003). For me, this included journaling, recording my own rants after meetings, and having discussions with my doctoral colleague, Sarah Brant-Rajahn about the research process. This chapter outlines my process of reflection. I will first reflect on myself and the multiple parts of my identity influenced by and influencing this dissertation. I will then reflect on the process of data collection, my methodology, and my transitioning role as a school counselor educator.

Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

I am the child of immigrant parents. Let's get this out of the way. My historical trauma runs deep. So deep we never discussed my parents' journey to the U.S. as a family. The first time I learned about my parents' path to the U.S. I was 19. I was taking a Sociology class about immigration and had to complete an interview with an individual who identified as an immigrant. I was excited at how easy this would be for me because my mom was a phone call away and I could quickly and easily complete this project. But, the assignment was not easy. My parents were flight attendants in the 1980s in Sri Lanka. A civil war between a Tamil separatist group, The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the Sinhalese government had just begun and would last until around 2009, officially (although some argue the war continues as this is being written) (Bajoria, 2009). My parents, one Sinhalese and the other Tamil, had recently gotten married and were pregnant with their first child: me.

On a seemingly average day, when my mother was roughly six months pregnant with me, my father decided to call in sick to work. I have no idea if my dad truly was not feeling well or if he decided to play hooky from work, but the flight he would have been on that day was destroyed by a LTTE suicide bomber. Hearing this story for the first time, during a project I

thought was going to be a breeze, wrecked me. In this moment my devotion to advocacy for immigrant populations began.

Because of this suicide bomber, my parents left their entire world—friends, family, and livelihood—to move to the United States. Much like the narratives of immigrants today, my parents gave up everything they had ever known for me to have a chance at a better life (Kaslow, 2014). My parents' idea of a better life was entrenched in trauma and internalized racism. When I was 24, my family and I met one of the band members of Steel Pulse on a trip to Hawaii. He asked me if I knew my family's language and I answered the same way my parents had always answered when I asked them why they never taught me or my siblings our language: they wanted to be able to talk about us without my siblings and me being able to understand what they were saying. I do not remember what sparked the conversation, but my mom and I started unpacking that statement shortly thereafter. What she shared with me was that she thought the more "American" I was, the better my life would be. Not knowing the language of my home culture was, in her eyes, a way of accelerating my assimilation as an American. As I write this sentence my heart breaks to think my mother believed a better life for me involved losing a foundational piece of the cultural identity I gained from her.

Although my mother's admission saddens me, I am not surprised by any of it. I remember being at a point in my ethnic identity that Phinney (1989) would have described as foreclosure. I lived in California for my first nine years of life. At that stage of my life, I had little awareness of being different and would do the things my parents told me I had to do, sometimes visiting other Sri Lankan homes, for example. Then I moved to northern Florida and I grew to hate my brown skin. I wanted to fit in with White folks so severely. I remember avoiding inviting people over because of the smells of curry leaves and spices that radiated my house

morning, noon, and night. My mom used to feed us with her hands. My routine in the evenings before I ate would be to close all the window shutters to ensure nobody from my school would walk by and see us eating with our hands and that my mother was still feeding me in fifth grade. I remember feeling paranoid that people were staring at my family wherever we went. I remember when we were moving out of the home we were renting, that my elementary school principal came to a showing of the house and looked at my mother in shock as she asked, "You live here?!"

Fast-forward to high school, back in California and what I felt like was my reprieve from the discomfort and pain that was living in Florida. I remember feeling at home again, being able to reconnect with friends and family. High school brought the pressure to do well academically and go to a prestigious college with all of my friends. My high school was diverse, but my friends had wealth and generations of family members who had attended college before them, whereas I had parents who had high expectations, but no idea how to support me to reach those lofty goals. Everything related to the college application process was a trial by fire. My friends would say they were participating in a club so I would join a club. They said they were applying for a scholarship so I would apply for a scholarship. They applied to a school and I would apply to a school. This reactive progression was exhausting because I had nobody but my peers helping me. But, if you have read this far into my dissertation, you may already know I am a resilient person. I do not give up quickly, and college was the same way.

Negativity tended to nurture my motivation to prove people wrong. My experience with my high school counselor was the non-example I might give a masters student to help them understand the transition of the profession from guidance to school counselor. My first interaction with my high school counselor was when he placed me in classes during my

Freshman year. There was a class he told me was a graduation requirement called Career Choices. I followed his word blindly. When I got to class I discovered predominantly students of color who were not planning on attending college. We learned about skills needed in different types of careers and my school's alma mater song, which am still proud to remember to this day. However, what I could not help but notice was that none of my friends, who I knew would be applying to college, were present in this class. I always came back to this "graduation requirement" in my head because I realized nobody else I knew had to take this course, even though we all graduated. I wondered if my counselor's recommendation had more to do with the assumption that I was not going to end up going to college than it did with what classes I needed to take to graduate.

In my senior year I started applying to colleges. One day, my mom shared with me a letter from Tulane University. Tulane had sent me a free application and encouraged me to apply based on my high school performance. The application required a recommendation from my school counselor, so I set up an appointment with him to request a recommendation for me. The amount of shock he expressed upon learning I was planning to apply to Tulane confused me. First of all, I had never even heard of Tulane. Secondly, he had access to my records and transcripts. He knew I had already received opportunities for scholarships. Why was he so surprised that I received a free application and was planning on applying?

Foreclosure to Moratorium

My road through college was just as tortuous. I started at one school, transferred to a community college, and landed at one of the best places for me, the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB). I was still sure of the path I wanted to take but was not sure where the road would end. I was coping with family trauma, identity confusion, and heartbreak. UCSB was

where I started to explore who I was as Natalie. I examined how I wanted to present myself to the world outside of the coattails of my White friends. This is where I met my first real South Asian friends. I had friends through my mom and her friends who were also South Asian, but this felt different. Sasha, Pritesh, and Kitty probably have absolutely no idea how much they impacted my life because our friendship was short and happened by chance. Sasha was dating a friend of mine and was a student at UCSB. They participated in a South Asian dance group, and I remember being attracted to their energy of exploration of their cultural identity and association with other South Asians in the community. My interaction with them and my sociology class assignment helped me shift into moratorium (Phinney, 1989), where I desired to explore my ethnicity as I peeled away at the encouragement I had received to be as White as possible.

As I started exploring my cultural identity, I simultaneously found myself becoming more curious about the external systems that had encouraged me to sacrifice bits of my cultural self to be successful. To me, the most impactful of these systems was the educational system. I determined I wanted to work with children so kids of color could see someone in a position of influence that looked like them and I could encourage them to be themselves, even when the system was telling them otherwise. I did not believe in the current education system as I observed it through shadowing in my education courses. As I explored my options, I found myself back in Florida at the University of North Florida's (UNF) School Counseling Program. I saw school counseling as a way I could facilitate exploration of students' identity and a position where I could see myself leading the charge in breaking down barriers for students in their access to success in school and beyond.

Transitioning into my position as a school counselor and a child of immigrants

In my first year as a school counselor in Florida I was designated the English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) contact. I noticed something significant about the perceptions educators had of children of immigrant parents in my first year as a school counselor. I heard how they spoke about the language acquisition of parents, the way they treated parents, and the lack of sensitivity to cultural differences. Their attitudes seemed to encourage the same sentiments my mother had. I realized the expectations of immigrant students were unrealistic to the circumstances immigrant families face—a lack of understanding of the U.S. educational system and historical trauma (Roche, Ghazarian, & Fernandez-Esquer, 2012; Sotero, 2009).

After my first year in school counseling, I realized concerted effort and consideration was needed to support immigrant families and help their children be successful in school. I started to shift my efforts as a school counselor to advocating for translated documents, asking about multiple forms of invitations to events and conferences (Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett, & Yoon, 2007), and breaking explanations down into instructions that a parent who had never experienced a U.S. school may be able to understand. When I worked with students I provided a safe and welcoming environment, covered in posters and items that represented the demographics of my students.

When I went to professional conferences and organization meetings, I became aware I was one of few in the room who identified as an immigrant or child of immigrants. In Florida there were a handful of Latinx school counselors, but when I moved to Georgia I felt like the only person in the room that shared experiences with my immigrant students. In Georgia, ESOL contact was not a role for the school counselors, but for either a teacher or administrator in each building. I could not help but question whether my colleagues were noticing the opportunity gaps

in education for immigrant students. I also wondered how school counselors who did not directly experience what it was like to have immigrant parents, would even know they needed to change their approach to reach immigrant families.

This last issue brings me to my research. Hays and Singh (2012) encourage qualitative researchers to challenge themselves to think about their identity as an insider to their research and explore how the topic relates to one's own interests and the interests of others. As I scoured through research about immigrant populations and their interactions with school counselors, I noticed this topic was not researched from the perspective of the immigrant. There were some articles about approaches to working with immigrant populations, but none focused on the perspective immigrant students had of their school counselor. Not being able to find research about the experiences of immigrant students with school counselors made me think of two things: (1) immigrant populations were underrepresented in the school counseling profession, possibly leading to a lack of immigrant voice at the table concerning school counseling supports, and (2) maybe I was doing this research for my own interests.

Then came November 2016, and Donald J. Trump won the presidency with a strong narrative about building a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border to combat illegal immigration (Tumulty, Rucker, & Gaeran, 2016). This event provided the sign of how important my research indeed was. The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) ethical standards explicitly state that school counselors will provide a comprehensive counseling program that advocates for and affirms all students from diverse populations, including students with different immigration statuses (2016). The Trump administration, with their rhetoric against immigrant communities, now appeared to stack public sentiment even higher against immigrant populations than when I was in a K-12 school. I felt the time had now arrived to bring voice to students who identified as

immigrants or as part of the immigrant identity, to address their concerns involving the education system, especially knowing school counselors were supposed to be non-judgmental and a safe haven for all students.

Exploring the Process of Research

Although I knew I wanted to examine immigrant students and school counselors, I was unsure how I was going to approach researching these populations. At first I wanted to explore the self-efficacy of school counselors to work with immigrant populations. Then, I took a course in my first fall of the doctoral program with an assignment to conduct a social justice intervention at work. At work my principal wanted me to address absenteeism with our Latino community. I decided to start an outreach focused on collaborating with monolingual Spanish-speaking families. As I was planning this activity, I found a similar intervention completed in Canada, where parents met to facilitate discussions around topics they found significant to their children (Ippolito, 2010). Upon implementing this social justice project, I discovered how important co-collaboration was to my researcher identity that those who I am researching co-collaborate in the process of seeking truth.

Theory

While I do think exploring how prepared school counselors believe they are to work with immigrant populations may be an interesting research topic in the future, I decided getting the perspective of immigrant students first would be essential. In addition to exploring a parent co-led outreach effort, I also started studying liberation psychology and Paulo Freire. Paulo Freire's writing spoke to my lack of trust in the way formal education was set up in the U.S. Like Freire, I also believed school was set up in a system where students were supposed to act passively and

believe in one truth, which came from their teacher (1972). I wanted my participants to believe they had as much of a voice and input in the results of the research as I did.

While continuing to study Freire, the professor in my social justice class asked me to read *Writings for a Liberation Psychology* (Martin-Baro, 1994). As I read through and compared the beliefs stated in this book and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), I felt my ideas about how I could approach research started to solidify. Freire and Martin-Baro both believed in the importance of listening to the marginalized as the expert on their own needs and conditions. I asked myself why I was questioning who my participants should be. What I knew was that the immigrant voice seemed to be silent in education. What I wanted my research to do was to highlight the perspective of immigrant students. This is the point I committed to conducting research from the perspective of the immigrant student.

Method

After this determination I decided I wanted to conduct a Participatory Action Research (PAR) study. PAR is a critical methodology, where the researcher and the participants act as co-collaborators to the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). They investigate the problem as a unit and work together to determine an action plan toward solving the problem in some way (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). I wanted to use Photovoice because I felt this method would help me see things from my participants' perspective. Photovoice would give my participants the opportunity to bring an image to their experiences and feelings.

But the process of research was one I had never experienced before. Little did I know the writing process would take me over a year to complete. When I had an assignment in a course during my doctoral program, I was able to finish the first draft at least a week in advance. I could stick to a schedule and complete anything before the deadline. The dissertation process,

unfortunately, took much longer than I expected. Reading through the painful history of immigration in the U.S. was mentally exhausting and caused me to stop multiple times. I had to come to terms with the fact that much of what I was writing, while intriguing to me, was not necessary for my journey to illuminate the immigrant voice. As I got to my proposal defense, my professional and doctoral goals were confronted by reality. My committee members expressed concerns about calling a research study a PAR study without having time to complete an action plan with my participants. This was a pivotal point where I had to be true to my reality and think through what I wanted personally and what I wanted for a research study that was important to the field. I made a choice to move away from a PAR study, yet still work in a qualitative, critical research paradigm, but without the action plan.

My methodologist shared with me that some researchers still use photo elicitation as a data collection method, where researchers use photographs to inform their interviews of their participants (Harper, 2002). I continued to research photo-elicitation interviews and most of the articles discussed the use of researcher or professionally taken photographs being used to elicit responses from the participants. After investigating further, I found an article about the transition of the use of pictures where the researcher requested participants take photos and then return to the researcher to describe their story. This was called participatory photo elicitation (Kolb, 2008; Lorenz & Kolb, 2009). I chose this data collection method because participants are still involved in co-collaborating on research questions and data analysis (Kolb, 2008). I also found that letting my participants to take photographs and reconvene with me later gave me much needed space from their experiences. I knew my identity as a child of immigrants was intertwined with my participants. Allowing them to take photographs, rather than interviewing them in our first

interaction, gave them time to think about their experiences with school counselors without me guiding them through the process.

Data Collection

When I began the process of exploring immigrant student experiences, I expected the accounts to reflect my experience in some way. I assumed they would all have had few interactions with their school counselors and possibly negative ones. The first meeting had to occur in two separate sessions. Finding individuals who were able to drive to a central location proved difficult. Not only were the groups separated by distance, they were also divided by ethnicity. In one group, all of the individuals in the group identified as Muslim or Asian. In the other group, all of the individuals identified as Latinx. While this was not intentional, part of the divide seemed to be a result of the recruitment of participants. I got the first group of participants from a personal request to an individual who knew me as her child's former school counselor. She is a South Asian woman, who is actively involved in her mosque. She reached out to young people in her mosque, who attend a university with a large Asian population. The other group was recruited by a masters student, who is involved in Latinx sororities and fraternities at a predominantly White institution.

I share this because the meetings were starkly different, and the distinctions seemed to me to be related to the differences in culture between each group. During the first meeting with the first group, the focus was entirely on the academic supports, or lack of, from school counselors. In the second group, there was a mix between social-emotional supports and academic. As I reflected back on the first two interactions, I found I believed this had to do with the perception’s educators had of Latinx and Asian communities. In my experiences with educators, there is a model minority perception of Asian cultures. This seemed to reflect in the

discussion of what each of my groups believed they needed as supports to get to college. In the second group, there were situations where school counselors were almost blatantly racist. Whereas, in comparison, the first group described times where they basically told their counselors what they wanted and received it.

I was surprised to find individuals had positive experiences with their counselors. I know how that may sound, but to a degree I have become jaded from meeting so many school counselors who seem to believe in a one-size-fits-all approach to counseling, which tends to miss the mark with many underrepresented populations. However, after hearing positive interactions, a good experience still seemed to fit an exception. In one experience, the reason the participant had a positive relationship with his counselor was that he was friends with her son and his mother worked at the school he was attending, giving the counselor and the student extra time to build a therapeutic relationship. There was another student who had a positive experience with his counselor who emphasized his experience may have been different because he was one of the only Hispanic students in the advanced classes. I would like to believe all students were receiving the information they would need to make choices about college, but the fact this participant had to explain he was the exception to the "rule" as far as Hispanic students in advanced classes, makes me question the resources given to all students.

In hindsight, I wish I could have had both groups meet together so I had culturally diverse immigrant students sharing their experiences with each other. If I were to complete this study again, I would be more intentional about finding a way to get all of my participants together in one space at the same time and find a diverse group of individuals who identify as immigrants. I still believe there are similarities in the needs and experiences of students who identify as children of immigrants and immigrant students, regardless of their ethnic or racial

identity. I also believe that there are differences in skills and needs based on ethnic or racial background. However, I think the research will have to continue to explore immigrant as an identity, rather than one that fits with specific identities because immigrants may look different ethnically and racially. Counselor education cannot assume future school counselors can pick and choose what an immigrant looks like.

Data Analysis

The challenges I anticipated as a researcher after the initial meeting were far more built up in my head than they were in reality. Individuals each took photographs that they shared with the participants in their group. While they were sharing, I leaned into my counseling skills, focusing on reflecting the meaning and summarizing what they were saying about the photographs. The participants led the storytelling of each and I took notes on the main themes I heard. At the end of the meetings with each group, I shared what I wrote for each photograph. I asked them to share which photos they felt had common themes in their group of pictures. I found the analysis stage to be much easier to allow the participants to lead than I expected. They had opinions about which photographs should go together and what the pictures represented, and I let them take charge. Having two groups posed somewhat of an obstacle in determining whether I needed to share one group's photographs with the other group. After discussing this with the second group, we decided sharing the pictures across groups was not necessary, but I shared the common themes that came from the first group.

Findings

The findings from this dissertation did not surprise me. For the most part, the results paralleled with what the research stated school counselors should consider. The one aspect that did upset me was the lack of cultural sensitivity. Most of what both groups described, as far as

experiences with a school counselor, related to their high school experience. I have never found my role as a school counselor to be one of a gatekeeper. I have always found value in sharing any information about decisions families will make concerning their child's education to be something every family should have access to in a way they can understand. However, I was upset that in my participants' experiences, they saw their school counselors act as gatekeepers when trying to access rigorous courses or programs that could support their access to college.

I find the educational system creates this gate because the processes can be long and arduous to undo decisions to place children in rigorous courses. At times school counselors are expected by their administrators to keep students from making decisions their teachers may not have had a say in. I also believe school counselors can lead the charge in culturally responsive approaches to assessing the abilities of students to be successful in rigorous courses. But school counselors themselves will then have to be culturally aware and sensitive to the diverse communities in their schools. This is not only in the benefit of immigrant populations, but all people.

I also noticed how sensitive the individuals who participated in the study became on the subject of how school counselors factored into how they were experiencing college today. Some articulated they wanted to go back to their younger siblings and make sure they were asking the right questions. Some encouraged me to advertise the role of the school counselor and what they could do to help students. While the participants may not have understood that participating in the research study may have changed the way they looked at how they got to college today, the way they described their own encounters seemed to reflect their growth in overcoming obstacles or utilizing key support systems in their lives.

Reflecting on my Growth Through the Research

As I worked with my participants on this research study, I ebbed and flowed in my feelings of pure genius and total imposter. There were times where I felt they could tell I had no idea what I was doing and other times where I thought they were cheering me on in getting this study complete and letting their experiences be heard. This range of emotion mirrored how I felt through the whole doctoral program. There have been times throughout this program where I have told myself I will be one of the great school counselor educators—the ones I geek out over meeting at professional conferences. There are other days I question how I even got here.

As far as my ethnic identity, I cannot even say where I am at the moment. My mom recently joked with me that I am her child who wants to be Brown so badly. I took time in this program to explore my ethnic identity. I visited Sri Lanka and recorded my great uncle sharing the story of my mom as a child, stories about my grandmother, and stories about my childhood. There are times I wish I could have spent more time learning about elements of my culture, like wearing saris and cooking Sri Lankan food. Then there are times I realize I am the epitome of what it is to be a Sri Lankan American. My feet are always rocking between the line of not genuinely being Sri Lankan enough for Sri Lanka or American enough for America. As I move into a space of thinking about raising my own children, I think about what I want them to learn about my ancestors, how I want them to grow as multicultural, and how I see them navigating the terrain of the U.S. education system.

The Next Chapter: School Counselor Educator

The transition I will take to school counselor educator has been on my mind, along with all those children I have right now that I feel like I am leaving behind. I think about the little Natalie's that will want to tear off their beautiful brown skin every day and how I will not be

there to help them love that brown skin. And then I remember there is only one me, but so many Natalie's in the U.S. education system. This realization makes the transition into the role of a school counselor educator less stressful.

There is a necessity to train school counselors to work with immigrant populations. There are roughly 36 million individuals in the U.S. with one or more foreign-born parent (Pew Research Center, 2013). Many people fear to accept them as American. I want my impact on school counseling to be advocacy for the immigrant to be considered its own social identity. I want to continue to grow as a researcher in exploring what the profession is missing, as far as multicultural counseling competence is concerned, when we consider that we still have individuals who believe they are being kept from accessing resources that will help them to be successful adults.

I want to be able to develop content and curriculum that can be integrated into a multicultural counseling course relating to identity as an immigrant, so, when school counselors-in-training have discussions about immigration, they are not assuming immigrants have one way of looking. I want counselors to be able to have conversations about immigration that discuss how White, European immigrants have a much easier time assimilating into the U.S. because of their race, but may have trouble understanding processes we have for getting into college because they, too, have parents that did not come from U.S. schools. If we separated immigrant identity from specific racial and ethnic identities, counselor educators could facilitate much more fruitful discussions to evoke future school counselors to contemplate their approaches to culturally responsive comprehensive school counseling programs.

Conclusion

As I reflect back on my dissertation study, I have to reflect on the journey I took to get to this point. This doctoral program was not just the four years I sat in the classroom and took courses. This doctoral program has been 32 years and beyond in the making. Some of my plans changed, but what was always for sure was my destiny as an advocate for the immigrant voice in counseling. Through all of the challenges the past four years have brought me I am reminded at how much I have grown.

A concept that comes to mind when I think about what I have conquered the past four years is potential. My mentors, professors, family, and friends have always believed in what I can become more than I typically believe in me. The process of completing this study has shown me the potential was still there. My surroundings, whether chosen or forced, helped me grow into a counselor educator. As this journey ends, I find myself in awe of what I have accomplished. I am grateful this program pushed me more than I thought I could handle. I am thankful for the knowledge and skills I now take to continue to grow through my experiences with my future colleagues and students. I also hope to continue to advocate for children through research and the training of future school counselors, who will work in the trenches and continue to dismantle systems of oppression.

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APPENDIX A

PHOTO ELICITATION FACILITATION SHEET

Instructions for Photo Taking

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences that individuals who either identify as immigrants or children of immigrants had with their school counselors. The specific prompts for this will be decided with the participants and the researchers.

As a participant, you will take photographs that reflect the prompt related to your experiences with your school counselors in schools.

Then, you will decide on 1 or 2 that stood out that best reflect your experiences.

You will then, share the story of your photograph(s) by using the following questions:

What do you see?

What is really happening?

How does it relate to our lives?

Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist?

What can we do about it?

Please Note: If you are taking photographs of other people, you will need to receive consent that they agree that you can take the photograph of them.

If you are taking photographs of yourself, please be aware that these may be published in an academic journal with the research study. Do not take any photographs that you would not like to be published in an academic journal.

Questions to consider when taking photographs:

- What supports did you have or wish you would have had from a counselor?
- Who helped you get to where you are today?
- If you had the support that you needed how would your current experience be different?
- What were some of the barriers that kept you from reaching out to a counselor?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
Examining the Experiences of Immigrant Populations with School Counselors in K-12 Schools

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Henry George McMahon
Co-investigator: Natalie Edirmanasinghe
Counseling and Student Personnel Services
(760) 218-9862

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to use photographs to understand the experiences immigrant populations have with their school counselors while in K-12 schools. You are being asked to participate because you identify as either an immigrant or a child of an immigrant, are between 18 and 23 years of age, and would be willing to meet at least two times over a month to analyze photographs.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …

- *Take photographs to reflect your experiences with your school counselor while you were in K-12 schools.*
- *Meet at least two times over a month's timespan*
    - *Meetings will be held for about 2 hours each meeting*
- *Provide reflections on your experiences in K-12 schools*

Risks and discomforts

- *I do not anticipate any risks or discomforts from participating in this study*

Benefits

- *There are no direct benefits for participants*
- *The study will help school counselors become more aware of their impact on immigrant populations and will support future immigrant students to receive better support from their school counselors.*

Incentives for participation
Participants will receive a $25 dollar Amazon gift card after their participant in the whole research study. If a participant does not participate in all three meetings, the participant will receive a prorated amount divided by the number of meetings they have met. Participants who receive the incentive will sign a payment log to confirm that they received their payment. The records will NOT be shared with any other businesses.

Audio/Video Recording
You will be taking photographs during this project. It is not required for you to be in any photographs, however, all photographs will potentially be used in publications of the research study. The photographs will be saved until after the research study is complete. However, if any of your photographs are published in the study, I will save them indefinitely.
Meetings will also be audio recorded. The audio recordings will be saved during the research study. Audio recordings will be stored on a hard drive that is password-protected and only accessible by the doctoral candidate, Natalie Edirmanasinghe. However, the audio recordings will be destroyed after the analysis is complete.
Privacy/Confidentiality
I will collect your name and contact information. I will also ask you to choose a name that will be associated with the data that you collect. Your real name and contact information will only be used to schedule and coordinate our meetings. Your chosen name for the project will be used during publication. I will save your name and contact information in a document that will be held on a hard drive that only I can access. The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight.

Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law. While the researchers will keep your comments during the meetings confidential, we can't promise that other participants will do the same; however, we will ask all participants to respect confidentiality by not discussing what was said in the group

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate before the study begins and discontinue at any time, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is *Natalie Edirmanasinghe*, a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Natalie Edirmanasinghe at nae25208@uga.edu or at *760-218-9862*. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.