AN EXAMINATION OF FACTORS RELATED TO ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING OF PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELORS

by

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ABSTRACT

JENNIFER RENEE PERRY. An examination of factors related to the ethical decision-making of professional school counselors. (Under the direction of DR. SEJAL PARIKH FOXX)

Professional school counselors are faced with the task of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program that supports the academic, social-emotional, and college and career development of all students they serve. While implementing such with additional demands, school counselors may encounter ethical dilemmas. A non-experimental survey research design using multiple regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between ethical decision-making (EDM) of professional school counselors (*N*=102), global belief in a just world (GBJW), social justice advocacy, and training. A total of 102 professional school counselors responded to the survey. Results suggest a statistically significant negative relationship between EDM and GBJW and a statistically significant positive relationship between coursework and EDM. Implications and suggestions for future research are discussed.

DEDICATION

For my Daddy. I hope I have made you proud. You are forever in my heart. I miss you and love you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and hope." Jeremiah 29:11

Without God, absolutely none of this would have been possible. I owe it all to thee. He has instilled in me a passion to serve, a determination to strive for better, and a calling for this profession. It is all for His glory and I dedicate it back to Him. I am forever grateful.

To my Mother, Sandra, I thank you. The Lord surely blessed me when He gave me you. Thank you for the prayers, the phone calls, the trips across the state to check on me, the support, the encouragement, the push, and most of all – your belief in me. This is yours too, Momma.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the 2019-2020 school year, approximately 56.6 million students attended the United States of America's public (50.8 million) and private (5.8 million) schools (NCES, 2019a). Of the 50.8 million public school students, it was projected that approximately forty-seven percent (47%) would be White, 15.1% Black, 27.4% Hispanic, 5.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 4.2% bi- or multi-racial (NCES, 2019b). During the 2017-2018 school year, 7.0 million public school students received services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (NCES, 2019c). English language learners made up 4.9 million students enrolled in public schools at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year (NCES, 2019d).

Society depends upon and trusts school counselors to care for its children within our schools (Wilczenski & Cook, 2011). It was reported that 141, 390 educational, guidance, school, and vocational counselors were employed in elementary and secondary schools in 2018 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Having a higher proportion of counselors than students theoretically supports the American School Counseling Association's (ASCA) recommendation of a 250:1 student to counselor ratio (ASCA, n.d., 2019a). However, on average, schools have a 464:1 ratio (Education Trust, 2019). Furthermore, 1 in 5 students do not have access to a school counselor at all (Education Trust, 2019).

School counselors have a charge to develop a comprehensive school counseling program consisting of advocacy, leadership, and collaboration, ensuring equal access to education and success for all students (ASCA, n.d., 2017). With the dynamic diversity of students populating our schools, it is vital that school counselors be prepared to properly

attend to the academic, social/emotional, and career and college readiness development of all students within pre-kindergarten through high school (ASCA, 2014a; Feldwisch & Whiston, 2018). With advocacy being the central tenet of the profession (Toporek & Daniels, 2018), school counselors are placed in a rather peculiar position of advocating for what is best for the students they serve, the profession, and navigating improper duties, lack of support, and opposition (ASCA, 2014a; González, 2016; Goodrich et al., 2013). When faced with challenges to deliver the best service to students, school counselors must possess an arsenal of resources and characteristics that stem from training, ethical codes (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016), and a conscious multicultural awareness of one's moral and extended worldview (Wilczenski & Cook, 2011).

ASCA has established an outline for the mindsets and behaviors school counselors should maintain in order to deliver a comprehensive program (ASCA, 2014b, 2019b). Particularly, Section B-PF 3 of the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies (ASCA, 2019b) states school counselors should "practice within the ethical principles of the school counseling profession in accordance with the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors" (p. 3). Relying on ethical codes alone, however, can lend school counselors to a lack of equitable service (Wilczenski & Cook, 2011). It is suggested that ethical and moral acts extend beyond mainstream legal and ethical guidelines and cater to the perspective of the student (Wilczenski & Cook, 2011).

Ethics in School Counseling

Initially approved by the American Counseling Association (ACA) Governing Council in 2005, the *ACA Code of Ethics* (ACA 2005, 2014) were commissioned to ensure counselors make sound decisions that protect the clients served, as well as the

profession (Brown et al., 2017). The counseling profession values enhancement of human development; the honor and embrace of diversity and multiculturalism; promotion of social justice; the integrity of the counselor-client relationship; and competent and ethical practice (ACA, 2014). The *Codes* establish ethical obligation and guidance for common ethical practice (ACA, 2014). School counselors should adhere to both the *ACA Code of Ethics* and the *Ethical Standards for School Counselors*, published by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) in 2016. The professional ethical codes and standards are based on guiding principles for ethical behavior: autonomy (fostering one's right to make choices), nonmaleficence (duty to do no harm), beneficence (duty to do good for the individual and society), justice (fair and equitable treatment of others), fidelity (honor commitments and maintaining trust in the professional relationship),and veracity (remaining truthful within practice) (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016). As "school counselors assume a moral agency in their responsibility to future generations of students and school counselors" (Dahir, 2009, p. 3), it is imperative that they lead by example and adhere to the ethical guidelines established by the profession.

Moral principles, duty, and values are at the core of *ethics* (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) and ethical practice entails making decisions of a moral nature (Garrigan et al., 2018). *Morality* (Cambridge, n.d.) is defined as principles guiding good or bad character and behavior on both personal and social levels. Character, made from virtues, is a vital component of morality, and it is vital that counselors act morally (Wilczenski & Cook, 2011.) Essentially, our morals guide us in the way we conduct ourselves and the decisions we make.

According to German philosopher Immanuel Kant, people base moral action on what is good or bad regardless of the consequence such action may yield (Forsyth, 1980). This approach to action is coined deontology. As an alternate stance, teleology, one's moral action depends on the consequence of said action (Forsyth, 1980; Wilczenski & Cook, 2011). Virtue ethics place emphasis on the person who acts, rather than the action itself (Remley & Herlihy, 2020; Wilczenski & Cook, 2011). When faced with ethical dilemmas, counselors should consider an ethical decision-making process carefully (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016; Brown et al., 2017). Ethical reasoning incorporates professional values, principles, and ethical standards. Based on morality, values, and professional ethics, ethical decision-making includes both personal values and acceptable professional behavior (Brown et al., 2017).

One's ethical stance is identified when idealism and relativism are dichotomized and crossed (Forsyth, 1980). Ethical dilemmas vary, are often individualistic (Wilczenski & Cook, 2011), and can become conflicting for school counselors. While tasked with making decisions that affect the client, self, and profession, school counselors may find these decisions come from a place of one's beliefs and values, rather than guiding principles alone. It is within these instances that school counselors should be aware of the motives behind their decisions (Wilczenski & Cook, 2011). Approaching decision-making from a moral perspective, one's decisions may be influenced by situational factors, personality, and biases (Brown et al., 2017; Cottone, 2001; Garrigan et al., 2018). While ethical principles act as guides to ethical behavior during dilemmas, virtue ethics (with emphasis on moral character) suggest counselors' thoughts and behaviors should

always be moral and ethical, regardless of the presence of a dilemma (Wilczenski & Cook, 2011).

Stone and Zirkel (2010), cited a case of a school counselor who is faced with an ethical dilemma of being caught between honoring the ASCA ethical standards, honoring procedure for her district, and ultimately acting in the best interest of the students she served. In this particular occurrence, after not receiving response from her immediate supervisor and principal regarding improper delivery of support services for a child under IDEA (US Department of Education, 2004, 2015), the school counselor contacted the "pupil services administrator" (p. 245) of the district for support. In keeping with the ethical standards, the school counselor felt this was the right thing to do in order to properly serve her students. The principal, however, reprimanded her with a warning for not following procedure. Ultimately, the school counselor resigned from the district and, later, filed a civil rights suit for forced resignation. The courts ruled in favor of the district. This case serves as just one example of the many court cases (Stone & Zirkel, 2010) and dilemmas school counselors face. Following ethical standards, school counselors should utilize interpersonal skills and respectfully act to ensure advocacy is effective (Stone & Zirkel, 2010).

While ethical decision-making models outline steps, they do not necessarily detail how the ethical decision occurs (Cottone, 2011). Awareness of the existence of an ethical situation is not enough (Kitchener, 1986). When deciding how to address the situation, the moral justification of such should be considered. The works of Kohlberg (1984) suggest one should have an understanding of what is considered just or fair, as such

filters moral issues. Literature on the decision-making processes of counselors, as well as the effectiveness of training in ethics is scarce (Linstrum, 2009; Levitt et al., 2015).

Only one study (Brown, 2017) is known to have examined factors that affect ethical decision-making of school counselors, specifically, by way of development of the School Counseling Ethical Decision-Making Inventory (SCEDMI). An exploratory factor analysis yielded six factors: graduate training, religion and culture, decision-making models, ranking of importance, consult and brainstorm, and mandatory/universal. While the study sought to understand the impacts of school counselor ethical decision-making model awareness and use on school counselor ethical decision-making, Cronbach's alpha scores were not strong (Brown, 2017). As the current study also seeks to discover factors that affect school counselor ethical decision-making, this empirical research will add to the dearth of literature surrounding this subject.

Predictor Variables

Global Belief in a Just World

Belief in a just world suggests a belief that people "get what they deserve and deserve what they get" (Lipkus, 1991, p. 1171). In other words, good people experience good and bad people experience bad in life (Ashkansy et al., 2006). Though not a universal belief (Lipkus, 1991; Reich & Wang, 2015), belief in a just world stems from social learning experience over the course of one's life (Ashkansy et al., 2006; Shah & Ali, 2012). Those who believe in a just world tend to be more trusting; their internal locus of control tends to be higher; and they believe social justice can be found on personal, interpersonal, and socio-political levels (Lipkus, 1991).

People with strong personal beliefs in a just world tend to view events in their lives as just, while those with general beliefs in a just world believe the world is just (Otto et al., 2009). One's belief in a just world and the helping behavior that stems from such may be dependent upon the situation (Shah & Ali, 2012). On one hand, if a person with a high belief in a just world learns that the person they are helping is responsible for his sufferings, helping is unlikely. On the other, one may help another individual without having the need to judge said person.

Belief in a just world has been found to be positively statistical significantly related to school counselor's likelihood to refer students, due to discipline, to alternative learning programs (Dameron et al., 2019). Research has also found negative correlations between belief in a just world and social justice advocacy, political and religious ideologies (Parikh et al., 2011; Inman et al., 2015), and multicultural counseling awareness (Jones, 2013) in school counselors. Furthermore, belief in a just world has been found to be negatively correlated to attitudes toward social class (Smith et al., 2011) and obese persons (DeBarr & Pettit, 2016). These studies suggest one's just world beliefs impact one's behaviors, attitudes, and decisions. They lack, however, specific evaluation of ethical decision-making.

The current research lacks an analysis of the relationship of school counselors' ethical decision-making and just world beliefs. School counselors have a duty to advocate for and work in the best interest of all students. The present study sought to add to the dearth of literature on the relationship between belief in a just world and the ethical decision-making of school counselors. Because one's conceptualization of moral issues is filtered by one's assumptions of moral justification (Kitchener, 1986), exploration of this

relationship helps to better understand the impact one's belief of whether or not students get what they deserve and deserve what they get has upon school counselors' process of making ethical decisions that impact students served.

Social Justice Advocacy

Within the school setting, social justice advocacy entails a challenge of systemic barriers that impede upon the academic, socio-emotional, and career development of students (Lee, 1998; Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015). School counselors are in an ideal position to serve as social justice advocates to facilitate the success of every student (especially those underserved and underrepresented), working to eliminate the achievement and opportunity gap and improve policy using data (Dahir & Stone, 2009, ASCA, 2019b). The ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) preamble states counselors should promote social justice. The ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2016) state, "School counselors are advocates, leaders, collaborators and consultants who create systemic change by providing equitable educational access and success by connecting their school counseling programs to the district's mission and improvement plans" (p. 1).

Grimes et al. (2013) conducted a phenomenological study of rural school counselors and social justice advocacy. Deep ties and investment in the communities in which participants served, as well as personal and professional integration strengthened participants' social justice advocacy experiences. School counselors are in a position to lead and challenge social injustices, while engaging stakeholders in such pursuit (ASCA, 2019, n.d.; Ratts et al., 2007; Trusty & Brown, 2005; Young & Dollarhide, 2018). The combination of leadership, social justice, and advocacy produce social justice advocacy

acts which can inspire and motivate others to participate (Young & Dollarhide, 2018). Empirical research of social justice advocacy in school counselors is limited (Crook et al., 2015; Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015; Kennedy & Arthur, 2014; Parikh et al., 2011; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). As school counselors practice social justice advocacy and work in the best interest of the student, establishing an ethical stance becomes important. It is believed that one's position on social justice directly impacts one's decision-making. The current study sought to examine this relationship and add a focus of ethical social justice practice to the literature.

Mediating Variable: Training

Training is defined as "the instruction and practice of skills related to the counseling profession… [contributing] to the ongoing proficiency of students and professional counselors" (ACA, 2014, p. 21). As ethical decision-making incorporates both use of an EDM model and counselors' self-awareness of values (Evans et al., 2012), ethical decision-making training can help counselors reconcile their professional and personal beliefs and values (Ametrano, 2014). In compliance with the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (ASCA, 2019b), school counselors have a professional foundation consisting of knowledge in and application of theories, educational systems and policies, legal and ethical principles, multicultural impact, leadership, and advocacy. Though there is a clear call for knowledge of ethical principles, research specifically looking at ethics training of school counselors is scarce compared to other discussions of ethics within school counseling (Cannon, 2010). Counselors-in-training should practice ethical decision-making proactively within training (Evans et al., 2012). One's level of training may impact one's ethical decision-making (Foster & Black,

2007) and school counselors should become well-informed (Hall et al., 2010). Frequent training, self-reflection, moral and cultural competence are needed to strengthen the ability of counselors to make sound ethical decisions and judgements (ASCA, 2017; Evans et al., 2012; Oramas, 2017; Remley & Herlihy, 2020).

As mentioned, empirical research on the effects of training of school counselors specifically is scarce, however, a couple of studies do point to the importance of measuring training and its impact on practice. In terms of Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), the more training school counselors received, the more knowledge and skills they possessed to properly carry out MTSS programs within their schools (Olsen et al., 2016). Within his dissertation study on training effects of school counselors on use of EDM models, Brown (2017) found thirty percent (30%) of school counselor respondents felt unprepared to make ethical decisions and approximately 59% of respondents were familiar with EDM models. Brown's findings suggest school counselors' EDM model awareness decreased after receiving training within their graduate programs. Given that training can increase awareness, one's professional development level can impact ethical decision-making ability (Foster & Black, 2007), and school counselors should be well-prepared to apply legal and ethical principles (ASCA, 2019b), one can argue assessment of school counselors' degree of training as a factor of ethical decision-making is worthy of examination. The current study is presumed to be the first to empirically examine the relationship of school counselors' level of ethics training and ethical decision-making.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training on ethical decision-making of professional school counselors.

Research Questions

The present study addressed the following research questions:

1. Does global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training relate to ethical decision-making of professional school counselors?
2. Does training mediate the relationship of global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and ethical decision-making?

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made in relation to this study:

- Responses to this study were given honestly and willingly.
- Participants clearly understood all survey items.
- Participants were not influenced by the researcher in their responses.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were made in relation to this study:

- The study utilized purposive sampling.
- The study only included participants who were licensed professional school counselors in the United States.
- Survey responses were self-reported by participants.

Limitations

The following limitations are true of this study:

- Social desirability may be a contributing factor of the results of this study. Favorable responses may have been given by the participants.
- The results of this study may not be generalizable to school counselors in other regions or countries.

Threats to Internal Validity

Internal validity speaks to the extent that a change in the independent variable(s) influence a change in the dependent variable (Belkin & Kleist, 2017) and the data measures what it is meant to measure (Huck, 2012). Measures in this study have been used previously to measure these constructs successfully.

Threats to External Validity

External validity is the extent to which the relationship exhibited between the independent variable(s) and the dependent variable can be seen in other samples of the same population (Belkin & Kleist, 2017). The researcher anticipated the results of this study would be generalizable to professional school counselors within active practice.

Operational Definitions

Ethical Decision-Making

Ethical decision-making is operationally defined as one's ethical orientation within the process of reasoning through an ethical dilemma. The integration of ethical code knowledge, one's principles, and moral values help form one's judgement in resolving the dilemma (Kitchener, 1984; as cited in Dufrene & Glosoff, 2004).

School Counselor

The American School Counseling Association (ASCA, n.d.) defines school counselors as certified/licensed educators who specialize in the academic, career, and

social-emotional development of students. Professional school counselors hold positions within schools, districts, and counselor education and hold, at minimum, a master's degree in school counseling. School counselors implement comprehensive school counseling programs to strengthen success of all students within the schools they serve.

Global Belief in a Just World

Global belief in a just world (GBJW) is operationally defined as the level of a person's belief in a just world, "that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get" (Lipkus, 1991, p. 1171).

Social Justice Advocacy

Social justice advocacy is operationally defined as "attitudes towards social justice and social justice related values, perceived self-efficacy around social justice efforts, social norms around social justice efforts, and intentions to engage in social justice related activities and behaviors" (Torres-Harding et al., 2012, p. 80).

Training

Training is operationally defined by school counselor's highest level of education (MA, MS or Doctorate); CACREP or non-CACREP school counselor preparation program completion; amount of ethical training received (i.e., number of ethics courses in counseling preparation program, number of non-counselor preparation program trainings and workshops completed within the past six (6) years); and comprehensiveness of training within their counselor preparation program's ethics course, related to ethical dilemmas faced by school counselors.

Significance of the Study

The more aware school counselors are of the factors that affect decision-making and how they are prepared to make ethical choices, the better school counselors can serve students and the profession. “School counselors assume a moral urgency in their responsibility to future generations of students and school counselors” (Dahir, 2009, p. 3) and are faced with ethical decisions on practically a daily basis. Often times the event which brings the counselor to face such decisions can be seen as a dilemma. Not only are school counselors adhering to and obligated to adhere to the guidelines provided by the counseling profession, the ACA Codes of Ethics (ACA, 2014) and the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2016), but also the directives of the school, district, and state in which they work. It can become a major dilemma when deciding on maintaining one’s professional codes, school and district standards, and ultimately serving the best interest of our students.

When our ethical principles falter or are in conflict with other forces (e.g., administrative order), our values may step in. Research is dearth in the area of school counseling ethical decision-making and moral development (Brown et al., 2017; Froeschle & Crews, 2010; Hicks et al., 2014; Lloyd-Hazlet & Foster, 2017; Stone & Zirkel, 2010; Wilczenski & Cook, 2011). The proposed study seeks to add to the literature and examine the factors that relate to the ethical decision-making of school counselors.

Chapter Summary

This chapter was an overview of the origins of ethics within our society and the counseling profession, in particular. School counselors are expected to attend to the

academic, social-emotional, and career and college readiness of all students under their service (ASCA, n.d.); and, to do so in an ethically sound manner (ASCA, 2014a). Ethical practice entails moral agency, character, and principles (Dahir, 2009; Garrigan et al., 2018; Wilczenski & Cook, 2011). In turn, ethical decision-making must encompass not only morality, but also awareness of one's personal values, beliefs, and situational factors that may affect decision-making and professional behavior (Brown et al., 2017; Cotton, 2001; Garrigan et al., 2018; Remley & Herlihy, 2020; Wilczenski & Cook, 2011). Global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training was examined in relationship to the ethical decision-making of professional school counselors. Chapter 2 of this paper will discuss the literature of ethical decision-making, global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology used within this study. Chapter 4 discusses the results of the study. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the study and its implications on counselor education, supervision, and counseling practice.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training with ethical decision-making of professional school counselors. This chapter provides a detailed review of the conceptual and empirical literature of the theoretical framework and variables of this study, and is divided into seven sections. The first section is an overview of the professional school counselor and its significance within education. The second section entails discussion of the theoretical framework, along with a review of various ethical decision-making models. The chapter then presents empirical research supporting the need to examine the outcome variable, ethical decision-making of professional school counselors; and predictor variables, global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training. The chapter then concludes with a summary.

The Professional School Counselor

"School counselors have unique qualifications and skills to address preK-12 student's academic, career and social/emotional development needs" (ASCA, 2016, Preamble). Through a comprehensive school counseling program, professional school counselors attend to student achievement and outcomes (ASCA, 2019b). The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019a, 2019c) helps in the development of school counseling programs that are data-driven and are systematically delivered to all students in a developmentally appropriate manner that intends to close achievement and opportunity gaps (ASCA, 2017, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). Through its four major tenants, the Model helps school counselors define, manage, deliver and assess their roles and programs

(ASCA, 2019a, 2019c); thereby creating a comprehensive program that meets the needs of all students and stakeholders.

In delivery of an effective school counseling program, efficient program management is key (ASCA, 2019a, 2019c). The ASCA National Model provides program focus and planning tools to assist school counselors in effective programming. The Model also guides school counselors in delivery of "developmentally appropriate activities and services directly to students or indirectly for students as a result of the school counselor's interaction with others" (ASCA, 2019a, p. 4). Lastly, school counselors are empowered to assess their programs on a regular basis for effectiveness, need improvements, and data-driven outcomes; as well as, assess their own performance and professional development.

Professional school counselors are guided by both professional and student standards (ASCA, 2019a). The ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies (ASCA, 2019b) and the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College- and Career Readiness for Every Student (ASCA, 2014b) serve as guidelines for school counselors to attend to the academic, socio-emotional development, and college and career readiness of all students. These standards outline specific mindsets and behaviors school counselors should possess, as well as those in which school counselors should be able to help students accomplish. To ensure school counselors carry out their role in an ethical manner, the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2016) are enforced. The Ethical Standards are closely aligned with the American Counseling Association Ethical Codes (ACA, 2014), which serve as an additional guide for school counselors, program supervisors, and school counselor educators to maintain

ethical behavior. Although school counselors have ethical codes as a guideline for professional practice, they may still face dilemmas that make application of the codes difficult.

Ethical Dilemmas Faced by School Counselors

Maintaining confidentiality is a vital component of the counseling profession and has been the most frequently addressed dilemma within the profession's literature (Bodenhorn, 2006; Brown et al., 2017). It is the reason many students feel comfortable to seek help from their school counselor and should benefit the student, regardless of the student's age (Williams & Wehrman, 2010). Again, reliance upon professional ethics can provide a framework for decision-making. In addition to maintaining the student's right to confidentiality, the counselor is faced with the parental legal rights of children and knowing when it is appropriate to divulge information. School counselors are also faced with dilemmas of their principal requesting information (i.e., names on caseloads, session topics, etc.). For instance, when school counselors withhold student risk-taking behavior information, administrators may view school counselors as insubordinate or not being a team player (Moyer et al., 2012).

As an employee, it is the school counselor's duty to follow policy set forth by the school and/or district of employment. Such duty should not, however, compromise the duty to act in the best interest of the student (Moyer et al., 2012). It is imperative that the school counselor and administration work together. Maintaining a mutual respect and understanding of each other's duties (legally, ethically, and professionally) helps school counselors and administrators establish a collaborative and cohesive working alliance

(Williams & Wehrman, 2010). Such cohesiveness can potentially strengthen the school counselor's ethical ground.

Moral principles are shared beliefs or ideals by helping professionals and lie at the foundation of principle ethics (Remley & Herlihy, 2020). As complex as dilemmas can be and being that not many absolutes exist in addressing ethical and legal issues, it is important that counselors have an ethical theory to work from. Having such will aid the counselor in solving or addressing ethical dilemmas and defend one's actions taken to resolve said dilemmas (Remley & Herlihy, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

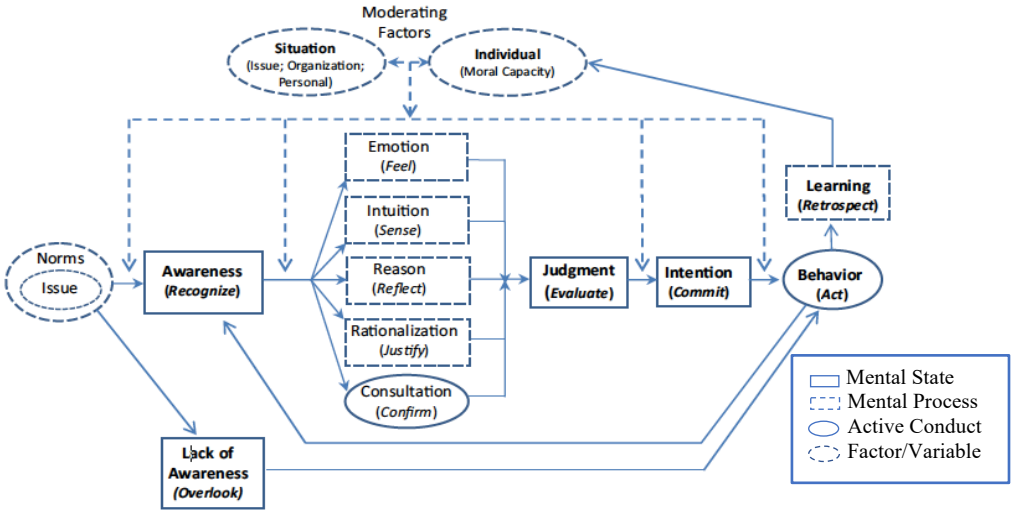
This study operates from an integrated theoretical framework, the Integrated Ethical Decision-Making Model (I-EDM, Schwartz, 2016). Derived from business ethics, I-EDM postulates one's ethical behavior depends upon a particular person and the situation in which they are facing (Schwartz, 2016). In essence, one's ethical behavior is both individual and situational (Schwartz, 2016), encompassing both principle ethics and virtue ethics (Remley & Herlihy, 2020). This entails acknowledging both the situation, what is happening within the dilemma, and the external factors at play; as well as, awareness of the individual and what is happening within the counselor and one's beliefs (Remley & Herlihy, 2020) as moderating factors (Schwartz, 2016) (see Figure 1).

I-EDM gives both a cognitive-developmental and social intuitionist lens into ethical decision-making. According to cognitive-developmental theorists, moral decisions are mainly driven by cognition and reasoning (Fiedler & Glöcker, 2015). Alternatively, social intuitionist theory postulates emotionally based intuitions drive moral decisions.

After a decision has been made, moral reasoning forms (Alba, 2018; Fiedler & Glöcker, 2015; Kitchener, 1986; Remley & Herlihy, 2020).

Figure 1

Integrated Ethical Decision-Making Model



Note. This figure displays the integrated ethical decision-making model designed by Schwartz (2016).

The moral domain (Garrigan et al., 2018; Turiel, 1983) and ethics are intertwined. Moreover, at the core of ethics is the act of making moral decisions about people and societal interactions (Kitchener, 1986). The process of moral judgement, the determination of an ethically appropriate course of action, potentially involves intuition, reason, emotion, and rationalization (Schwartz, 2016). There are several theories that explain how moral decisions and ethics work in understanding moral development and behavior (Alba, 2018; Brown et al., 2017; Cottone, 2001; Fiedler & Glöcker, 2015; Forsyth, 1980; Kitchener, 1986; Kulju et al., 2016; Remley & Herlihy, 2020; Rest, 1983; Wilczenski & Cook, 2011) and Schwart's (2016) I-EDM combines many of them. Specifically, I-EDM (Schwartz, 2016) incorporates several theoretical models: Rest's

(1984, 1986) four component model, Treviño's (1986) person-situation interactionist model, Jones' (1991) issue-contingency model, and Haidt's (2001) social intuitionist model; with the construct for the I-EDM being moral capacity (Hannah et al., 2011).

Moral capacity is "the ability of an individual to avoid moral temptations, engage in the proper resolution or ethical dilemmas, and ultimately engage in ethical behavior" (Schwartz, 2016, p. 761). One's level of morality and how they continue to adhere to such when faced with pressure to forgo said morality attests to one's moral capacity. Demographics, personality and psychological characteristics, and ethical experience all impact individual moral capacity, which is comprised of an integration of *moral character disposition* and *integrity capacity*. Moral character disposition, a concept lacking in ethical decision-making models (Schwartz, 2016), is "one's level of moral maturity based on their ethical value systems, stage of moral development, and sense of moral identity" (p. 762). Previous models failed to find the integral contribution of an individual's characteristics to identifying ethical dilemmas (Pimental et al., 2010). Integrity capacity is "the commitment or motivation one has to act consistently according to their moral character disposition through their ability to self-regulate" (Schwartz, 2016, p. 762). Such incorporates moral ownership, moral efficacy, and moral courage.

Professional ethics include both personal values and acceptable professional behavior in addition to the morality and values in which ethical decision-making is based upon (Brown et al., 2017). Ethical dilemmas often require the professional to reflect upon moral standards and claims of stakeholders to determine the decision or action that is morally sound (Remley & Herlihy, 2020; Schwartz, 2016). One's moral judgment, in turn, ascertains that which is ethically appropriate. An ethical decision-making process

incorporates sequential stages. Descriptive ethical decision-making, in particular, focuses on reason (cognitive processes) or emotion (affective processes) (Schwartz, 2016). The typical ethical decision-making process entails awareness of the situation, moral judgement, an intention to act, and a resulting behavior. It is hoped that such behavior will be ethical, conforming to legal and moral norms and moral standards (Schwartz, 2016). The author states:

> "EDM is simply too complex a neuro-cognitive-affective process involving too many inter-related or undiscoverable variables being processed by our brains preventing any possible generalizable conclusions… [or] …the predictive ability of any theoretical EDM model will be limited to activity that more clearly constitutes ethical or unethical behavior, rather than predicting behavior involving more complex ethical dilemmas where achieving normative consensus over what even constitutes 'ethical' behavior can often prove to be elusive" (p. 756).

Ethical Decision-Making Models for School Counselors

Ethical codes can be flawed, are sometimes ambiguous and contradictory, and do not create an end all be all for ethical dilemmas (Kitchener, 1986). Belonging to more than one professional association, such as ACA and ASCA, can further complicate things if the ethical codes of each do not align. Cottone (2001) states mental health professional can debate what is considered ethical practice. When faced with ethical issues, counselors should possess tools to critically evaluate and interpret ethical codes, as well as evaluate how their feelings lead or stray from ethical behavior. Both ASCA and ACA recommend its members follow an ethical decision-making model (ACA, 2016; ASCA, 2014) that is

credible and able to withstand public scrutiny (ACA, 2014). Though not required to use, both ACA and ASCA have made ethical decision-making models available to school counselors.

ACA Ethical Decision-Making Model

Forester-Miller and Davis (2016) developed a seven-step model for members of ACA. Step one is to identify the problem. Counselors should lay out the facts surrounding the ethical dilemma and identify the type of problem, rather ethical, legal, professional, or clinical (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016). Legal advice should also be sought at this time, if applicable. Next, the counselor should apply the 2014 ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) and any other applicable codes. Step three involves the core ethical principles: autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, and fidelity. The counselor should determine the nature and dimensions of the dilemma. How does each principle apply to this dilemma? What does relevant literature say regarding such? Consultation with colleagues who adhere to the ACA (2014) Code of Ethics, as well as state and national professional associations, are suggested. After determining the dimensions of the dilemma, counselors should generate potential course(s) of action and consider the consequences involved in the course(s) of action. Evaluation of the selected course of action encompasses consideration of justice - the fairness of the chosen course of action, publicity - whether this decision would be appropriate if reported in the press, and universality - whether the same course of action could be applied by another within the same situation. The final step is implementation and should be accompanied by follow-up assessment to gauge the intended versus actual impact of the selected course of action.

ASCA Ethical Decision-Making Model

The Solutions to Ethical Problems in Schools (STEPS, Stone, 2013) was developed and provided as an optional ethical decision-making model for school counselors, program directors, and supervisors (ASCA, 2016). The STEPS model outlines the 'steps' school counselors should take when facing an ethical dilemma. First, the counselor should define the problem, from an emotional and intellectual lens. Next is the application of the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2016) and legal guidelines. In this, the counselor should consider two things: the chronological and developmental level of the student; and the setting, parental rights, and minor's rights. The counselor should then apply the core ethical principles and determine solution options and consequences. Prior to implementation, evaluation of the selected course of action and consultation (e.g., colleagues, ethical standards, law) should take place. While ASCA does not require use of this model, it has been endorsed by the organization (ASCA, 2016).

Remley and Herlihy (2019) see the construction of counseling practice being built from the inside out. Moral principles and virtues; ethical, legal, and professional standards knowledge; and decision-making skills are amongst the internal, foundational elements of professional practice. Such are enhanced by self-reflection and awareness and reinforced by holding true to one's convictions. The authors contend it can take courage to defend doing what is right, especially when there may be a high cost attached, others agree or disagree with your actions, or within ethical dilemmas. Receiving guidance from consultation with colleagues, through supervision, and continuing education are some external factors that comprise professional practice (Remley &

Herlihy, 2020). Acknowledging the call for school counselors to practice professionally and ethically (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016), the two ethical decision-making models or processes discussed here are available to all counselors to utilize in practice.

Empirical Research on Ethical Decision-Making

Ethical decision-making research is prominent in the nursing and business fields and is increasing within the field of counseling, particularly school counseling. Gilbride et al. (2016), conducted a study of professional peer membership and resources used in decision-making of school counselors who were members of ASCA (*N*=897). Participants were given a list of resources that may be used to make professional decisions that included: consultation with school or district administration, supervisor, or trusted non-educational peers, and professional ethical codes; community resources; district policy and precedents; past legal rulings; and spiritual guidance and prayer. In regard to decision-making, results indicated five prominent resources potentially used by school counselors: administrative policies, professional ethical codes (ACA, 2014 and ASCA, 2016), consultation with a colleague or professor, consultation with ACA's Ethics Consultant, and previous legal decisions (Gilbride et al., 2016).

Springer (2016) conducted a case study of a school counselor's thought process within navigating an ethical dilemma of child abuse allegations of a student. In an effort to maintain rapport with a particular family, the school counselor wrestled with her duty to report and consulted with the school psychologist and then the principal. She was instructed not to report the allegations to Child Protective Services until after a meeting of the counselor, psychologist, classroom teacher, and principal. Several ethical issues were addressed within this case study: confidentiality, informed consent, limits of

confidentiality, and duty to report. The counselor never utilized an EDM model within her decision. Personal values may affect decision-making and clinical supervision and consultation can aide in such; however, counselor preparation should focus on developing counseling, advocacy, and EDM skills (Springer, 2016) in counselors-in-training. It would be of benefit to know if or how the application of an EDM model within this case study would influence the counselor's decisions and actions. This knowledge would further aid in the lack of research on ethical decision-making of school counselors and factors that influence such.

In a non-experimental, correlational study (Alba, 2018) that examined the factors impacting EDM ability of emergency nurses (N=182), perceived ethical decision-making ability was related to intuition, though the relationship was weak (R^2=.063, r=.252, p=.001). Intuition involves pattern recognition, which means our memory forms a pattern of aspects experienced and applies those patterns to future experiences (Alba, 2018). For instance, a counselor-in-training who received experiential training in EDM, perhaps via role playing during one's preparation program, is able to apply one's intuition within a future experience of decision-making in practice. Experience may increase intuition or instinct over conscious thought (Brown et al., 2017; Levitt et al., 2015). Alba's (2018) finding supports the theoretical framework that intuition is a component of moral judgment within an I-EDM (Schwartz, 2016), which leads to ethical intent and subsequent behavior. Ultimately, this finding is significant to the present study as school counselors' experience and potential pattern recognition or intuition, measured via the training variable, may affect their EDM.

The integration of personal and professional develops one's professional identity. Ethical decisions may vary by one's professional development level (Brown et al., 2017). Lloyd-Hazlett and Foster (2017) examined the relationship of moral development and intellectual development to professional ethical identity development of counselors-in-training (*N*=59). The authors found moral development and intellectual development to be individually significant predictors of professional ethical identity development. Of the participants, during ethical reasoning, the application of postconventional moral judgement schemas was used 43% of the time. Postconventional schemas indicate counselors' ability to acknowledge how limited social conventions are, and, this approach aligns with the ethical obligations of counseling professionals (Lloyd-Hazlett & Foster, 2017). The authors also found that the majority of the participants had high multiplicity, indicating consideration of multiple perspectives in terms of right or wrong. This finding is of particular importance in relation to the present study's theoretical framework in that moral reasoning is influenced by both individual and professional factors.

Lazovsky (2008) examined school counselor maintenance of confidentiality with minors. Israeli school counselors (*N*=195), within elementary, middle, and high school settings, were asked about their decisions and reasons to break confidentiality. Participants were given eighteen dilemmas within three domains. The study found counselors were more willing to break confidentiality when dangerous behaviors or situations, such as with drugs or alcohol, were exhibited. School counselors were less willing to break confidentiality for unlawful behaviors, such as theft or cheating; and, least willing in situations involving personal or family information that did not pose as a danger or threat to the student or others. The participants were also asked 1) if they would

breach confidentiality and 2) what reasons influenced their decision. The main two reasons reported were danger to student and best interest of student (Lazovsky, 2008).

Moyer et al. (2012) sought to understand school counselor (*N*=378) perceptions of divulging unsolicited confidential information. They found a general belief of confidentiality breach being ethically appropriate within direct observance of risk-taking behavior and occurrence on school premises during school hours. Elementary and middle school counselors believed a breach was significantly more ethical for sexual activity and tobacco use than did high school counselors. Such is interesting given many high school students are still minors. As ASCA (2016, Section D.1.b) outlines the responsibility of the school counselor to the school and community, school counselors were more willing to break confidentiality if school guidelines or policy existed to warrant such (Moyer et al., 2012). This suggests a conflict in the school counselor maintaining the aspect of protecting the student's privacy and upholding one's responsibility to the school and its policies. It is within such dilemmas as this that more information is needed to ascertain what drives ethical decision-making of the school counselor. Perhaps homing in on the factors that are related to decision-making will afford counselor educators the tools to better prepare school counselors to handle these decisions in an ethically sound manner.

Global Belief in a Just World

Some believe that one's fate is aligned with one's merit (Rubin & Peplau, 1975); that wickedness and suffering are linked. Global belief in a just world contends "people get what they deserve and deserve what that get" (Lipkus, 1991, p. 1171). Such a belief can influence one's decision-making and behavior towards others. Shah and Ali (2012) suggested just world belief and one's helping behavior is situational and may differ from

one person to the next. Belief in a just world has been found to effect ethical decision-making in combination with cognitive moral development (CMD) and expectancy in MBA students (Ashkanasy et al., 2006). Managers possessing low CMD, expectancy that unethical behavior was condoned by their organization, and high just world beliefs tended to make less ethical decisions than those with high just world beliefs and high cognitive moral development. However, counseling literature is currently missing an analysis of the relationship of school counselors' ethical decision-making and their just world beliefs. School counselors have a duty to advocate for and work in the best interest of all students. Kitchener (1986) postulated moral justification assumptions filter moral issue conceptualization. Exploration of this relationship helps to better understand the impact a school counselors' belief that students get what they deserve and deserve what they get, or not, has upon school counselors' ethical decision-making that impacts those students served.

Significant Studies

Dameron et al. (2019) examined the impact of race, gender, and socioeconomic status on school counselors' (*N*=334) decisions to place students in alternative learning programs (ALPs) for disciplinary reasons. Attitudes about exclusionary discipline and prevention programs were assessed (Dameron et al., 2019). The study also introduced belief in a just world as a covariate. Particularly, the study examined if there was a statistically significant difference between the predictor variables on the likelihood of school counselors to refer students to ALPs, controlling for school counselor belief in a just world. No statistically significant difference was found. The study's analyses did find global belief in a just world to be positively statistically significantly ($\eta_p^2 = .029$) related

to the likelihood of school counselors placing students in ALPs. Such suggested school counselors who had a higher just world belief were slightly more prone to place students in ALPs for discipline than school counselors who scored lower on the GBJW scale (Lipkus, 1991). Though these findings were statistically weak and GBJW was used as a covariate rather than predictor variable, Dameron et al.'s (2019) finding supports the current study's hypothesis that GBJW may impact the ethical decision-making of school counselors.

Inman et al. (2015) studied graduate counselor trainees' (*N*=274) commitment, self-efficacy, and interest to social justice. The study used belief in a just world as a predictor variable and found as participants' just world belief increased, their social justice advocacy interest and commitment decreased. Such findings correlate to those of Parikh et al., (2011) who found school counselors with lower belief in a just world were likely to have positive social justice advocacy attitudes. In a study of client's social class and counselors-in-training belief in a just world, Smith et al. (2011) found the higher counseling psychology graduate students' (*N*=200) just world belief, the more likely they were to view potential clients who were members of the poor and working-classes as more unpleasant and dysfunctional than members of the middle and upper-classes.

Summary

The research mentioned within this section suggest an impact of one's just world belief on attitudes and behaviors. There is a substantial lack of research in this area of counseling. Though belief in a just world has been found to correlate with social justice advocacy, advocacy attitudes, political ideology, religious ideology, multicultural counseling awareness, attitudes toward social class, and attitudes toward obese persons

(DeBarr & Pettit, 2016; Inman et al., 2015; Jones, 2013; Parikh et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2011), there has been no empirical research of its impact upon ethical decision-making. The present study will be the first to examine the relationship between belief in a just world and the ethical decision-making of school counselors.

Social Justice Advocacy

The ACA Advocacy Competencies were endorsed by ACA Governing Council in 2003 (Lewis et al.) and updated by Toporek and Daniels in 2018. The advocacy competencies serve as a guide for counselors to work as advocates to addressing systemic barriers for their clients. The Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ) Code of Ethics provides guiding principles for counselors practicing social justice (Ibrahim et al., 2011). The 21st century school counselor should participate in social justice advocacy and address inequities exhibited in schools (Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015; Ratts et al., 2007). Furthermore, Trusty and Brown (2005) contended everything done by school counselors is considered advocacy. It is important that ethical implications be considered, and potential ethical issues be identified while engaging in social advocacy (Bradley et al., 2012).

As schools are more diverse than ever, inequality remains an issue (Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015). School counselors can challenge systemic barriers and should be prepared to serve academically, physically, ethically, economically, social, and gender diverse student populations (Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015; Olsen et al., 2016). Advocacy can be defined as taking action on behalf of the client and is integral to the role of every counselor (Bradley & Lewis, 2000; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001), empowering the client and fostering sociopolitical change (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). Counselors may be

forced to advocate due to laws mandating them, such as the duty to warn and report, and ethical standards guiding them to act on behalf of the client (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). There may be times where laws and ethics collide and the school counselor must make difficult decisions (Stone & Zirkel, 2010). Such decisions become particularly important and prevalent within advocacy and one's actions should entail a moral imperative (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). The school counselor should also incorporate self-awareness, relationship building, and personal beliefs when implementing social justice advocacy (Parikh et al., 2011; Ratts et al., 2007).

Particularly within the country's current climate, many students and families are being affected in negative ways. It is vital for school counselors to be in place to not only be social justice advocates but to do so in an ethically sound way. When working with undocumented Latino students, for instance, ethical decision-making may be frequent (Storlie & Jach, 2012). While the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 1974) protects the status of these students and school counselors can maintain confidentiality of such status, dilemmas may still arise. It is, therefore, important for counselors to maintain competence in ethical frameworks (Storlie & Jach, 2012) while advocating for students and families.

Significant Studies

Social justice advocacy in rural areas align with the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Bradley et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2003; Toporek & Daniels, 2018). Rural communities can often have a higher need for social justice advocacy, prevalent mental health issues, and a lower amount of and limited access to support (Bradley et al., 2012). Via a qualitative study, Grimes et al. (2013) focused on the experiences of rural school

counselors as advocates; as increased poverty, decreased achievement, low high school graduation and college attendance rates, and inequity is prevalent in rural communities. Key themes found within this study were community partnerships and being able to meet the needs of students and parents in non-traditional ways. The authors implied school counselors-in-training should be prepared to work in rural settings by being trained in building relationships, maintaining personal and professional reputations, and collaborating with stakeholders (Grimes et al., 2013). With such advocacy practice, comes a particular importance to maintain ethical behavior.

Summary

While there are no known studies that examine the relationship between social justice advocacy and ethical decision-making of school counselors, the aforementioned social justice advocacy studies allude to the importance of ethically sound advocacy work. As school counselors are heavily encouraged to be change agents and practice social justice advocacy (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016), it becomes worth measuring if school counselors' social justice attitudes have an effect on ethical decision-making. Bradley et al. (2012) called for understanding the decision-making process in dilemmas associated with social justice advocacy efforts via empirical research. The present study seeks to do such.

Training

In compliance with the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (ASCA, 2019b), school counselors have a professional foundation consisting of knowledge in and application of theories, educational systems and policies, legal and ethical principles, multicultural impact, leadership, and advocacy. Ethical

reasoning is not inherent and can be sharpened with practice or training (Linstrum, 2009; Remley & Herlihy, 2020; & Rest, 1984). Frequent training, self-reflection, as well as moral and cultural competence are needed to strengthen the ability of counselors to make sound ethical decisions and judgments (Evans et al., 2012; Oramas, 2017). In addition to knowing the professional codes, moral development, strengthened by education, influences one's view of what is morally fair (Kitchener, 1986).

In a Delphi study, researchers identified the teaching of ethical decision-making as counselor preparation's most important issue; and, ensuring counselors maintain ethical codes was found to be the most important issue of the field overall (Herlihy & Dufrene, 2011). However, research determining the training provided in counselor preparation programs, in terms of ethical judgement and ethical decision-making models, is dearth and the field lacks research on the effects of ethics instruction on counselor ethical development (Herlihy & Dufrene, 2011). Cannon (2010) found that school counselor respondents' (N=54) ethical sensitivity scores were positively correlated to courses in professional ethics and multicultural issues. Lambie et al. (2010) examined the effect of counseling ethics courses on master's level students' social-cognitive development, ethical and legal knowledge, and ethical decision-making. Knowledge significantly increased with course completion and was predicted by pre-course social-cognitive maturity. Brown (2017) found, of the school counselors sampled, almost thirty percent felt unprepared to make ethical decisions, though 80.6% reported learning about ethical decision models within their graduate training programs. Furthermore, only 58.6% of respondents reported familiarity with EDM models, suggesting decreasing awareness after training. Brown (2017) recommended counselor educators train students in both the

ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) and ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2016), as well as how to use EDM models.

Significant Studies

In 2006, Bodenhorn conducted a study of Virginia school counselors (*N*=92) who served in either a rural, suburban, urban, or combination setting. Ethical dilemmas were identified within the preceding academic year and potential or commonness of future dilemmas were ranked. The most commonly reported dilemmas involved confidentiality with personal disclosures and student records; danger to self or others, parental rights, and dual relationships with faculty (Bodenhorn, 2006). Awareness of colleagues' ethical breach, in addition to danger to self or others, parental rights, and dual relationships with faculty, were reportedly the most challenging ethical dilemmas faced by participants.

The study also ascertained the extent of training and continued training in ethical decision-making received by the participants. Seventy-two percent (72%) of participants reported receiving guidance by reading articles or books. Fifty-five percent (55%) took a general course that included some ethics, while 58% reported courses specific in ethical and legal issues. Forty-two percent (42%) of respondents received continued training at conferences or from continuing education within the previous two years. With this knowledge of ethical issues and decision-making, only 41% of respondents reported feeling ethical codes were readily accessible and only 8% referred to the codes frequently (Bodenhorn, 2006). The outcome of Bodenhorn's (2006) study suggests that although some ethics training had been received by the school counselor respondents, utilization of their professional ethical codes and standards was underutilized. Such leaves one to

wonder how the counselors were making their ethical decisions. The present study hopes to gain insight on decision-making by including training as a mediating variable.

Linstrum (2009) conducted an experimental study to examine the effects of EDM model use training and moral development on EDM of master's-level counseling students (*N*=67). The author had two hypotheses: 1) students with high Defining Issues Test-Two (DIT-2, Rest et al., 1999) scores, which measures cognitive development, would also score high on the ethical dilemma (dependent variable), regardless of training; and 2) those with low scores on the DIT-2 and had received training would score higher on the ethical dilemma than those who scored low on the DIT-2 with no training. The majority of participants were in the school counseling track for their program (*N*=32), majority female (*N*=52), majority held only a bachelor's degree (*N*=58), and the majority were Caucasian (*N*=44). Participants responded to four dilemmas (Bernard & Jara, 1986; Betan, 1996) concerning a classmate or friend who had a drinking problem and compromised their work performance (Linstrum, 2009). Respondents were asked what they should do, according to their training, and what they would probably do. Respondents also rated their confidence in actually taking action on what they identified they should do.

All participants received training in basic ethics theory and counseling ethical standards and codes (Linstrum, 2009) together. Participants were then split into randomly assigned experimental (*n*=32) and control (*n*=35) groups. The control group continued training with a discussion of the ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2005), but no training on using an EDM model, while the experimental group received training on utilization of Cohen and Cohen's (1999) integrative EDM model. During a later training session,

participants were given the ethical dilemmas (Linstrum, 2009). Results of the study indicated students with high DIT-2 scores also had high scores on the ethical dilemmas, supporting hypothesis #1, and DIT-2 scores were significantly correlated with what participants reported they would do and confidence of such action. Interestingly, there was a stronger significant correlation of should and would for respondents; however, no significant correlation was found between DIT-2 scores and what participants reported they should do within the dilemma. Furthermore, no significant correlations were revealed for hypothesis #2, which proposed low DIT-2 scores with training would yield higher ethical dilemma scores than those of the control group (Linstrum, 2009). The findings also revealed an interesting phenomenon - though 67% of respondents reported knowing they should inform their clinical director of the drinking problem, only 29.9% reported they actually would tell. Linstrum's (2009) findings aligned with other studies utilizing the ethical dilemmas in that respondents indicated what they would do was below what they should do (Bernard & Jara, 1986; Betan, 1996). These findings support the notion that counselors knowing the ethical codes and appropriate ethical behavior does not equate to them actually acting in ethical manners (Brown et al., 2017; Kitchener, 1986).

In a study of whether or not graduate program or work- related ethics training predicts ethical awareness, judgement, and intent amongst business professionals and college students (*N*=448), Noel and Hathorn (2014) found that completing training in ethics significantly predicted ethicality. Those who reported taking an ethics course in college were significantly more likely to have higher ethical awareness and ethical judgment scores, and lower intent to behave unethically scores. A similar pattern was

found for those who had taken an ethics training at work. The study also examined whether ethics courses could be a predictor of ethical judgement while controlling for variables that could not be modified immediately, such as cognitive moral development, social desirability bias, gender, age, conscientiousness, and number of ethics courses taken. While individual traits cannot guarantee one's ethical behavior in any given situation, teaching ethics can improve one's ethical awareness, judgment, and intent (Noel & Hathorn, 2014).

Though research in ethical decision-making of school counselors is increasing, it remains important that we further ascertain how training of school counselors-in-training in the area of ethics and EDM models relates to school counselors' decision-making. Level of training can impact ethical decision-making (Foster & Black, 2007). The studies mentioned in this section suggest a disconnect between students receiving training and putting that training into practice. It was the hope of the present study to shed more light on the standing question of whether or not training in ethics is indeed a factor in ethical decision-making.

Summary

School counselors' training needs differ from the needs of clinical mental health counselors in that school counselors must learn how to manage not only individual and group counseling, but also the demands of students' needs, teacher influence, and comprehensive counseling program implementation (Kozlowski & Huss, 2013). School counselor preparation programs should ensure students possess knowledge, skills, and attitudes to place into the development of their comprehensive school counseling programs (ASCA, 2014a, 2019b, 2019c). Of these is the application ability of school

counseling professional, legal, and ethical principles (ASCA, 2019b) and addressing the ethical, legal, and professional issues faced within PK-12 schools (ASCA, 2014a). Training from counselor educators should incorporate not only traditional concepts, such as individual counseling skills, but also the aforementioned untraditional concepts (Kozlowski & Huss, 2013). For instance, management of large caseloads in the school setting require unique training in legal and ethical referral practice (Kozlowski & Huss, 2013). This section outlined empirical research to support the importance of ethics and EDM training and its shortfalls in regard to practice. The current study sought to add to this line of research and strengthen our knowledge of the effectiveness of training for school counselors while making ethical decisions.

Chapter Summary

While strengthening self-awareness (ACA, 2014), school counselors consider morals when making ethical decisions and developing the best course of action - being able to weigh all implications of one's decision, good and bad, and choose the best course of action (Oramas, 2017). This chapter has served as an overview of the theoretical framework for this study and empirical research to support use of the predictor variables and outcome variable within the study. As counseling research's ultimate goal is to improve the practice of the profession (Remley & Herlihy, 2020), this study sought to contribute to the ethical practice of school counselors.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodology for the present study. The chapter begins with a description of participants, followed by procedures for data collection. The section on instrumentation outlines the measurements that were used within the study. The research design, research questions, data screening procedures, and data analysis are also discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Description of Participants

Participants in this study included a purposive sample of professional school counselors in public, private, and charter schools. Participants were asked to consent to participation in the study, on a voluntary basis. Prior to data collection, a power analysis was conducted using G*Power (Version 3.1.9.3; Faul et al., 2009). To achieve a power of .95 ($\alpha = .05$, $f^2 = .15$), a total sample size of 119 was necessary; however, at least 200 respondents were desired for this study. A total of 102 professional school counselors completed the survey in its entirety. Only participants who met the following criteria were asked to participate in the study: a) licensed professional school counselors, b) practicing in a (pre)K-12 public, private, or charter school.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to data collection, the researcher sought approval from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's Institutional Review Board to conduct the study. Upon approval, participants were identified through the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) directory of RAMP schools, ASCA Scene community board, the American Counseling Association (ACA) Connect listserv, counselgrads listserv, North Carolina Counseling Association listserv, and CESNET listserv. Via email recruitment,

data was collected via electronic survey method using SurveyShare, a secure online survey platform used by UNC Charlotte. Due to an initial low response rate, IRB amendment was sought to include recruitment via social media (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, GroupMe, and Instagram). A flyer detailing the call for participants was produced by the researcher and posted to the aforementioned social media platforms. These posts were public and those who viewed such were permitted share the posts with others. The IRB amendment also permitted paper and pencil administration of the survey. The researcher attended a regional meeting of school counselors and administered the study via paper and pencil method. Due to a printing error and incomplete surveys, only two hardcopy surveys were included in the data analysis.

Prior to accessing the survey, participants were provided a written statement of the purpose of the study, inclusion criteria, confidentiality, and notification of procedures should they have decided not to participate at any point during the study. Upon review, participants were asked to consent to study participation by checking “Yes, I consent to partake in this study” (for electronic administration) or by signing the consent form (for paper and pencil administration). Consenting allowed the participant to proceed to the survey questions, while declination excused participants from the survey. No identifying data was collected. The data remained anonymous and confidential. All data will be deleted upon completion of analyses. Participants were informed that data may be used for research projects that have not yet been developed.

Recruitment and data collection extended over an eight-week period, via email, open-forums, and social media invitation. During week one, an initial invitation to participate was distributed via email. At the beginning of week two, a reminder invitation

was emailed. Response rates were evaluated during week 3, and an IRB amendment approval was granted to extend data collection. Recruitment follow-up emails, open-forum, and social media posts were sent weekly until the survey was closed at the point of saturation (*N*=102). No follow-up correspondence was sent to participants.

Instrumentation

Three validated instruments were used in this study: the Ethical Decision-Making Scale – Revised (EDMS-R; Dufrene & Glosoff, 2004, Appendix H), the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS; Lipkus, 1991, Appendix I), and the Social Justice Scale (SJS; Torres-Harding et al., 2012, Appendix J). The researcher obtained permission to use each instrument from each respective developer. Participants were also asked to respond to a demographic questionnaire, developed by the researcher (Appendix K). This questionnaire included five items that assessed participants' training. The instruments and questionnaire were combined into one survey. The survey took participants an average of 20-25 minutes to complete. By participant self-report, the survey collected data on the variables in question: ethical decision-making, global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training.

Ethical Decision-Making Scale - Revised

The Ethical Decision-Making Scale - Revised (EDMS-R; Dufrene & Glosoff, 2004) was developed to examine the ethical orientation of counselors. Utilizing Kitchener's (1984; as cited in Dufrene & Glosoff, 2004) definition, ethical decision-making is viewed as "the reasoning process that is applied to a particular ethical dilemma, which involves an integration of professional knowledge of ethical codes, principles, and moral values in forming judgments about what to do" (Dufrene &

Glosoff, 2004, p. 6). The scale is comprised of six (6) dilemmas with twelve (12) items for each dilemma, totaling seventy-two (72) items. Factor analysis yielded a total of eight (8) factors with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .62 to .85. The factors include: Internal Orientation, External Orientation, Sexual Relationships with Clients, Confidentiality with Suicidal Client, Confidentiality with an Abused Minor, Professional Competence and Confidentiality of a Minor, Confidentiality and Multiple Relationships, and Confidentiality and Illness. A sample dilemma includes:

> "Pat has been working with an elderly man who is very sick. His doctors all agree he has very little time left to live. He is in terrible pain. The client tells Pat that he cannot afford to continue to pay his healthcare bills. He admits that he is planning to commit suicide, and explains exactly how he intends to do it. He has even discussed the plan with his wife. He has given up hope, and finds no purpose in continuing to live" (Dufrene & Glosoff, 2004, p. 14).

The questionnaire has a reliability of $\alpha = .90$, meaning there is acceptable internal consistency. Test-retest reliability was $r = .65$. The EDMS-R yields level scores and P index scores. The P index score was used to analyze ethical decision-making across the predictor variables. It is an interpretation of "the degree to which a participant thinks principled considerations are important in making ethical decisions" (Dufrene & Glosoff, 2004, p. 6) and is the sum of Level 5 (Principle) scores across all 6 dilemmas divided by a base total of 60 points. Principle orientation suggests a concern for legal, professional, or societal consequence and counselors' decision-making is based on their "self-chosen principles of conscience and internal ethical formulations" (Dufrene, 2000, p.26).

Dilemmas 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 each have at least two principle items, while Dilemma 2 has three. Respectively, dilemmas have 7 or 9 possible points for principle items, with a total of 44 points for principle items. P index scores range from 0 to 73. An example: “If a Level 5 item was ranked in the first place (4 points) and another Level 5 item was ranked in the fourth place (1 point) on the first dilemma, followed by a Level 5 item on the next dilemma ranked in the first place (4 points) and another Level 5 item ranked in the third place (2 points) on the third dilemma, then the Level 5 points would be 4 + 1 + 4 + 2. If no other Level 5 items were ranked for any of the other dilemmas, a participant's Level 5 score would equal 11. The P index score would be 18.3 (i.e., Level 5 score; 11/.60 = 18.3)” (Dufrene & Glosoff, 2004, pp. 5-6). The P index score was used to compare mean group differences in this study. It is important to note, P index scores are derived from the possible scores given. In other words, if a participant did not rank a Level 5 item for a dilemma, the P index is only calculated for the Level 5 items that were ranked. Four of the 102 participants did not rank Level 5 items, indicating principled consideration of decision-making were not true of those participants; therefore, only 98 cases were examined in the regression analysis.

Global Belief in a Just World Scale

The Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS; Lipkus, 1991) measures general belief that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. Using a 6-point Likert-type scale, participants rate level of agreement (1 = *strong disagreement* to 6 = *agreement*) on 7 items. Scores may range from 7 to 42 (Lipkus, 1991), with higher scores indicating stronger just world beliefs (O’Connor et al., 1996). Sample questions for the scale include: “I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.” “I feel that

people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves." The scale maintains a factor structure that is consistent regardless of the respondent's gender. The scale has a reliability of α = .83. The total score was used in the present study.

Social Justice Scale

The Social Justice Scale (SJS; Torres-Harding et al., 2012) measures "attitudes towards social justice and social justice related values, perceived self-efficacy around social justice efforts, social norms around social justice efforts, and intentions to engage in social justice related activities and behaviors" (p. 80). The SJS has 24-items amongst four (4) factors with a Cronbach's alpha range of .82 to .95. These factors include: Social Justice Attitudes, Social Justice Perceived Behavioral Control, Social Justice Subjective Norms, and Social Justice Behavioral Intentions. Inter-scale correlations, .34 to .58, suggest distinct related subscales. Responses are on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *disagree strongly* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include: "I believe that it is important to try to change larger social conditions that cause individual suffering and impede well-being." "Other people around me are supportive of efforts that promote social justice." The total score was used in the present study.

Training

Training was assessed via participant self-report on questions included in a demographic questionnaire that address respondent's level of ethical training. Sample questions include: Within your counseling preparation program, how many courses covering counselor ethics or ethical principles did you complete? (_1, _2, _3 or more, _ I did not complete an ethics course in my program.); If you did not complete at least one course covering counseling ethics or ethical principles, in the past six (6) years, how

many trainings or workshops have you completed in ethics? (_1, _2, _3 or more, _ I have not completed any ethics training or workshops within the past 6 years.)

Research Design

This study utilized survey research methodology to collect data for examining the relationship between ethical decision-making and the predictor variables. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the relationship of global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training to ethical decision-making.

Research Questions

1) Does global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training relate to ethical decision-making of professional school counselors?
2) Does training mediate the relationship of global belief in a just world and social justice advocacy to ethical decision-making?

Research Procedures

To minimize total survey error and gain an optimal response rate, the survey design followed the suggestions of Dillman et al. (2014) and was tailored to the particular survey situation, taking not only the topic and population into consideration but also the recruitment procedure and design of the questionnaire. This design sought to decrease costs, increase benefits, and establish trust of the researcher by the participants (Dillman et al., 2014). Access to and completion of the questionnaire was made convenient to the extent possible. Recruitment invited participants to contribute to the study and avoided language that insinuated obligation to participate. Additionally, trust was established by outlining data protection, providing contact information, and showing appreciation for participation within both the recruitment and informed consent.

Data Screening Procedures

Assumptions for multiple linear regression analysis were screened prior to analysis. Tests for evaluating independence, homoscedasticity, normality, linearity, and noncollinearity were performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 26 software (IBM SPSS). Screening helped ensure the data was legitimate and ascertained the degree assumptions were met (Hahs-Vaughn, 2017). Data was also screened for missing data and multivariate outliers.

Data Analysis

The relationship between the independent variables (global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training) and the dependent variable, ethical decision-making was analyzed via a multiple regression statistical analysis using IBM SPSS. In examination of one outcome variable and multiple predictor variables, multiple regression analysis is appropriate to use (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Mediation effects were examined using PROCESS in IBM SPSS.

Chapter Summary

This chapter was an overview of the methodology for the present study. A description of participants, data collection procedures, and instrumentation were discussed. Utilizing a quantitative, non-experimental, multiple regression analysis, this study sought to answer the following research questions: 1) Does global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training relate to ethical decision-making of professional school counselors? 2) Does training mediate the relationship of global belief in a just world and social justice advocacy to ethical decision-making?

Chapter 4: Results

This study examined the relationship of global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training to ethical decision-making of professional school counselors. Particularly, the research questions for this study were 1) Does global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training relate to ethical decision-making of professional school counselors? 2) Does training mediate the relationship of global belief in a just world and social justice advocacy to ethical decision-making? This chapter reviews the procedures and results of the regression analysis done to address the research questions. The chapter begins with a discussion of reliability of the measures used in this study (EDMS-R, GBJW, and SJS). Data screening procedures are then discussed. Descriptive statistics and results of the multiple regression follow. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

Instrument Reliability

The instruments used within this study are the Ethical Decision-Making Scale – Revised (EDMS-R; Dufrene & Glosoff, 2004); the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJW; Lipkus, 1991); the Social Justice Scale (SJS; Torres-Harding et al., 2012); and a demographic questionnaire developed by the researcher. Reliability of each instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α) of internal consistency (Table 1).

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha (α) for Survey Instruments

Instrument	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Ethical Decision-Making Scale - Revised	72	.90
Global Belief in a Just World	7	.83
Social Justice Scale	24	.82 - .95

Data Screening

Prior to analysis, the data was screened and examined for the assumptions for multiple regression analysis. Using IBM SPSS Statistics 26 (IBM SPSS), data was first screened for missing values. The data was also screened for outliers. Lastly, tests for evaluating independence, homoscedasticity, normality, linearity, and noncollinearity were performed. The results of these screenings are discussed in greater detail below.

Missing Values

The survey was administered via the SurveyShare online platform. SurveyShare reported the total of incomplete and complete responses. 613 of those who opened or started the survey did not continue the survey in its entirety. Of the 103 completed responses reported by SurveyShare, due to non-scorable responses on the EDMS-R, one participant's results were excluded from the analysis and were not included in the final dataset resulting in a total of 102 participants. Missing data for the EDMS-R is handled by adjustment of the p-index on the responses given (Rest et al., 1997; Dufrene, 2000). Using IBM SPSS, a Missing Value Analysis (MVA) with expectation maximization (EM) was also completed. The results of Little's MCAR test was not statistically significant suggesting missing data could be treated as completely missing at random.

Test of Assumptions

Data was also screened for regression assumptions prior to running a regression analysis. Outliers were examined by use of box plots and Mahalanobis' distance. While outliers were discovered on the Social Justice Scale, these were left in the data analysis as they are representative of the sample population. Variation inflation factor (VIF) statistics for each variable were at least 1.0, indicating no problems with multicollinearity and

singularity. Residuals analyses suggested that the assumption of linearity, homoscedasticity, and normality was tenable.

Demographic Information

A demographic questionnaire (Appendix I) was included at the end of the survey, capturing additional information about the sample that was not included in the regression analysis. This questionnaire accessed participant organization membership, professional code and guideline usage, years of licensed employment, current school level, current school sector, credentials held, level of confidence in addressing an ethical dilemma ethically, usage of ethical decision-making models, gender, race/ethnicity, and age. Frequencies of the demographics are presented below.

Personal Demographics

Participants' demographics are reported in Table 2. Female participants made up 85.3% (*n*=87) of the sample. 13.7% (*n*=14) of respondents were male and 1% gender non-binary. The majority of respondents reported race/ethnicity as European American/ White (non-Hispanic)/ Caucasian (72.5%); 20.6% African American/ Black; 2.0% Latino/Hispanic; Latinx, Multiracial, Native American/ Alaskan Native each had a response of 1%; and 2% of respondents reported "other" race/ethnicity. The median age range reported was 44-49 years. Approximately 5% reported an age range of 20-25, 6.9% 26-31, 17.6% 32-37,19.6% 38-43 years, 14.7% 50-55, 6.9% 56-61, and 7.8% 62 or older.

Table 2

Demographic Frequencies

Variable	Number of Responses (*N*=102)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	14	13.7
Female	87	85.3
Non-Binary	1	1.0
Racial Identity		
African American/Black	21	20.6
Asian/Pacific Islander/Asian	0	0
American	2	2
Latino/Hispanic	1	1
Latinx	1	1
Multiracial	1	1
Native American/Alaskan Native	74	72.5
European American/White (Non-Hispanic)/Caucasian	2	2
Other		
Age		
20-25	5	4.9
26-31	7	6.9
32-37	18	17.6
38-43	20	19.6
44-49	21	20.6
50-55	15	14.7
56-61	7	6.9
62 or older	8	7.8
Did Not Respond	1	1.0

Employment

Next, participants were asked about their employment (Table 3). Particularly, participants were asked how long they had been employed as a licensed counselor at the time of survey completion. 23.5% of respondents had been employed 0-3 years, 17.6% 4-7 years, 9.8% 8-10 years, 15.7% 11-14 years, 13.7% 15-18 years, and 19.6% 19 or more years. Participants reported a fairly even disbursement of placements when asked to indicate the level (elementary, middle, high school, or combination (e.g. K-6, K-8) in

which they work. Elementary school counselors accounted for 20.6% (*n*=21) of the sample population; while 23.5% were middle school counselors, and 38.2% were high school counselors. Counselors who worked in a combination school, which includes any combination of the three levels, made up 17.6% (*n*=18) of the sample population.

The majority of respondents (87.3%) reported working in the public school sector, while 9% reported private sector, and 4% reported charter sector. The majority of respondents (55.9%) were licensed professional school counselors. Five (4.9%) participants were licensed professional counselors (LPC) and one participant was a licensed professional counselor associate (LPCA). It is interesting to note, 8 participants reported not currently holding licensure. However, there were no missing data for school level or sector. Lack of licensure could allude to misinterpretation of the answer choices or differing licensure requirements within the respective respondent's state.

Table 3

Professional Demographic Frequencies

Variable	Number of Responses (*N*=102)	Percentage
Years Employed		
0-3	24	23.5
4-7	18	17.6
8-10	10	9.8
11-14	16	15.7
15-18	14	13.7
19 or more	20	19.6
Level		
Elementary	21	20.6
Middle	24	23.5
High School	39	38.2
Combination	18	17.6
Sector		
Public	89	87.3
Private	9	8.8
Charter	4	3.9

Variable	Number of Responses (*N*=102)	Percentage
Credentials		
Licensed Professional School Counselor	57	55.9
Licensed Professional Counselor	5	4.9
Licensed Professional Counselor Associate	1	1
Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist	0	0
No Licensure	8	7.8
Other	5	4.9
Licensure Combinations		
LPSCA and LPC	10	9.8
LPSCA and LPCA	2	2.0
LPSCA and LPCS	3	2.9
LPSC and other	11	10.8

Professional Ethical Guidelines

Table 4 displays frequencies for organization membership, use of professional codes and guidelines, as well as confidence in addressing ethical dilemmas. Participants were asked, "Are you a member of any of the following organizations? (Select all that apply.)" and were given the following choices: American Counseling Association (ACA), American School Counseling Association (ASCA), Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), your local/state School Counseling Association, or your local/state Counseling Association. Of the 102 participants, 96 (94.1%) reported membership in a professional organization; with the majority holding ASCA (73.5%) and local/state school counseling association (67.6%) memberships. Six (5.9%) participants did not report any organizational membership.

Participants were also asked, "Which professional codes and guidelines do you utilize in making ethical decisions? (Select all that apply)." Thirty-six participants (35.3%) reported utilizing the ACA Code of Ethics, 97 (95.1%) reported use of the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, 8 (7.8%) participants used other guidelines such as NACAC and local/state organization, Oklahoma Board of Licensed

Drug and Alcohol Counselors, American Association of Christian Counselors, state ethical standards, local school district policies, LPC Board, National Association of School Social Workers, and NASW. No speculation has been made regarding the meaning of acronyms used by participants. One respondent skipped this question.

To ascertain level of confidence in addressing dilemmas ethically, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: When faced with an ethical dilemma, I feel confident in addressing such in an ethical manner. A 4-point Likert-type scale was used (1 = *Completely Agree* to 4 = *Completely Disagree*). Most participants either completely agreed (n=38) or somewhat agreed (n=58). Five respondents remained neutral, while 1 respondent somewhat disagreed. None reported complete disagreement.

As the dependent variable within this study is ethical decision-making of school counselors, it was important to ascertain participants' use and knowledge of ethical decision-making models, particularly the ACA Ethical Decision-Making Model (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016) and the Solutions to Ethical Problems in Schools model (STEPS; Stone, 2013). Frequencies are reported in Table 4. In a previous study, it was reported only 8% (N=92) of sampled school counselors referred to ethical codes frequently (Bodenhorn, 2006). In the present study, 12.7% (N=102) reported always using the ACA Ethical Decision-Making Model; 7.8% the STEPS model; and 7.8% other decision-making models. Close to 50% of respondents reported having never heard of either listed model or other models.

Table 4

Professional Ethical Guidelines Frequencies

Variable	Number of Responses (*N*=102)	Percentage
Organization Membership		
ACA	20	19.6
ASCA	75	73.5
ACES	4	3.9
local/state school counseling organization	69	67.6
local/state counseling organization	17	16.7
no membership	6	5.9
Professional Guidelines		
ACA	36	35.3
ASCA	97	95.1
Other	8	7.8
Level of Confidence		
Completely agree	38	37.3
Somewhat agree	58	56.9
Neutral	5	4.9
Somewhat disagree	1	1.0
Completely disagree	0	0
ACA Ethical Decision Making Model Use		
Always	13	12.7
Sometimes	26	25.5
Rarely	26	25.5
Never	15	14.7
I have never heard of it	22	21.6
STEPS Model Use		
Always	8	7.8
Sometimes	21	20.6
Rarely	10	9.8
Never	13	12.7
I have never heard of it	50	49.0
Other Ethical Decision-Making Model Use		
Always	8	7.8
Sometimes	26	25.5
Rarely	13	12.7
Never	7	6.9
I have never heard of another model	48	47.1

Research Question One

The first research question for this study was 1) Does global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training relate to ethical decision-making of professional school counselors? Ethical decision-making was measured using the P-index value from the EDMS-R. Global belief in a just world was measured by the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. Social justice advocacy was measured by advocacy attitudes on the Social Justice Scale. Training was measured via the self-reported demographics questionnaire. The means and standard deviations for the variables are reported in Table 5 and frequencies in Table 6.

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations, GBJW, SJS, Coursework, Comprehensive, Trainingyr

Variable	Mean	SD
p_index	12.313	6.274
GBJW	2.695	.754
SJS	5.846	1.141
Training		
coursework	1.765	.869
comprehensive	3.190	.741
trainingyr	1.588	1.205

Table 6

Frequencies of Education, CACREP

Variable	Number of Responses (*N=102)*	Percentage
Training		
education		
MA, MS	96	94.1
Doctorate	6	5.9
CACREP		
Yes	79	77.5
No/Do Not Know	23	22.5

Ethical Decision-Making

The EDMS-R was used to measure the dependent variable of this study, ethical decision-making of professional school counselors. The EDMS-R scoring is comprised of two scores: level scores and the P index score. The means and standard deviations for these scores are in Table 7. There are five level scores which describe an individual's level of ethical orientation (Punishment, Institutional, Societal, Individual, and Principle). These scores are derived from sections B and C of each of the 6 dilemmas in the EDMS-R. In section B, respondents rated the importance of 12 issues in making their decision on handling the given dilemma. Each of the 12 issues have a level score assigned to them. Section C then asked respondents to rank 4 of the 12 statements in order of most important item (4), second most important item (3), third most important item (2), and fourth most important item (1). Each ranking is assigned points (indicated in parentheses), which yields the level score.

Table 7

Means and Standard Deviations for Level and P Index Scores

Level	*n*	Mean	SD
Level 1 - Punishment	75	5.107	4.112
Level 2 - Institutional	99	9.667	5.206
Level 3 - Societal	102	17.333	4.706
Level 4 - Individual	102	20.873	6.196
Level 5 - Principle	98	7.388	3.841
P index score	98	12.313	6.402

Global Belief in a Just World

The Global Belief in a Just World Scale (Lipkus, 1991) was used to measure participants' level of belief of a just world. The scale utilizes a 6-point Likert-type scale, and participants rated their level of agreement (1 = *strong disagreement* and 6 =

agreement) to 7 items. Higher scores indicate stronger just world beliefs (O'Connor et al., 1996). Participants had a mean score of 2.695 (*SD*=.754), suggesting weaker just world beliefs amongst school counselor participants.

Social Justice Advocacy

The Social Justice Scale (SJS; Torres-Harding et al., 2012) was used to measure participants' "attitudes towards social justice and social justice related values, perceived self-efficacy around social justice efforts, social norms around social justice efforts, and intentions to engage in social justice related activities and behaviors" (p. 80). Responses are on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *disagree strongly* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The total score was used in the present study. Higher scores on the SJS indicate stronger attitudes and commitments to social justice work. Participants' mean score of 5.846 (*SD*=1.141) suggests the school counselors that participated in this study have strong attitudes and commitments toward social justice work.

Training

Training was assessed by 5 questions that measured participants' education and ethical training. Particularly, participants were asked to report their level of graduate education (MA, MS or doctorate); whether they completed a CACREP accredited counseling preparation program or not (yes, no, I don't know); the number of courses in ethics taken in one's preparation program (1, 2, 3 or more, none); the comprehensiveness of the course in its coverage of ethics and ethical principles (comprehensive, somewhat comprehensive, somewhat noncomprehensive, noncomprehensive); and the number of ethical trainings they completed within the past 6 years (none, 1, 2, 3 or more, none).

Correlations

Correlations for the predictor and outcome variables are reported in Table 8. There was a negative statistically significant correlation between pindex and GBJW (r=-.236, p<.01). This suggests the more a person believes in a just world, the less likely they are to make ethical decisions. Further, GBJW was negatively statistically correlated to social justice advocacy (r=-.235, p<.01), suggesting the more a person believes in a just world, the less likely they are to have positive attitudes and commitments toward social justice. Zero correlations were found between the remaining variables.

Table 8

Correlation Matrix Between Predictor and Outcome Variables

Variable	pindex	GBJW	SJS	education	cacrep	coursework	comprehensive	trainingyr
pindex	1	-.236*	.053	-.099	.081	.190	.048	.074
GBJW	-.236*	1	-.235*	.094	.062	.116	.034	-.001
SJS	.053	-.235*	1	-.199	-.053	-.017	-.112	.011
education	-.099	.094	-.199	1	.135	-.076	.105	.086
cacrep	.081	.062	-.053	.135	1	.179	.197	-.048
coursework	.190	.116	-.017	-.076	.179	1	.082	.020
comprehensive	.048	.034	-.112	.105	.082	.088	1	.131
trainingyr	.074	-.001	.011	.086	-.048	.020	.131	1

Note. *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Regression Analysis Results

The total scores of the Global Belief in a Just World scale and the Social Justice Scale, along with values from the four training questions, were used in the regression analysis. All predictor variables were entered into the model. Approximately 11.9% of the variance in participant's principle ethical orientation were accounted for by the model and was not statistically significant, $F(7, 94) = 1.812$, p=.094, $R^2 = .119$, adjusted $R^2 = .053$. Unstandardized regression coefficients (B) and intercept, the standardized regression coefficients (β), and t-values are reported in Table 9. Though the model was not statistically significant, global belief in a just world had a statistically significant relationship to principle ethical orientation (pindex). This suggests global belief in a just world is statistically significant ($p = .01$) and negatively related to ethical decision-making, or lower just world beliefs increase one's principled ethical orientation. Specifically, a 1 unit decrease in global belief in a just world is related to a 2.16 decrease in P index value (principle ethical orientation). Number of ethics courses completed was also statistically significant ($p = .05$). Suggesting a 1 unit increase in completed ethics course is related to a unit 1.43 unit increase in observed P index value (principle ethical orientation). Additionally, all other predictor variables were not statistically significant.

Table 9

Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (B) and Intercept, Standard Error, Standardized Regression Coefficients (β), t-values, and p-values

Measures	B	Std. Error	*β*	*t*-value	*p*-value
Intercept	16.282	6.156		2.645	.010
GBJW	-2.162	.836	-.260	-2.585	.011*
SJS	-.082	.560	-.015	-.146	.884
Education[a]	-2.166	2.679	-.082	-.808	.421

Measures	B	Std. Error	β	*t*-value	*p*-value
CACREP[b]	1.059	1.516	.071	.699	.486
Coursework	1.427	.720	.198	1.981	.050*
Comprehensive	.202	.852	.024	.237	.813
Training Years	.404	.512	.078	.789	.432

Note. [a]1 = MA, MS, 2 = doctorate. [b] 0 = no/I do not know, 1 = yes. *p-value <.05

Research Question Two

The second research question sought to examine if training was a mediating variable to GBJS and social justice advocacy. Using IBM SPSS, a PROCESS analysis was performed. A simple mediation, Model 4, was conducted to further examine the mediating effect of the training variable coursework on GBJW to ethical decision-making. The total effect of GBJW on p-index was statistically significant (b = -2.116, $t(96)$ = -2.475, p<.05). The direct effect of GBJW to coursework was not statistically significant (b = .085, se = .119, p =.482). Within the total model (Table 10, Figure 2), however, coursework, controlling for GBJW, was negative and statistically significant (b = -2.248, se = .841, p = .009), indicating the lesser a person's belief in a just world, the more likely the person is to have had more coursework in ethics. Furthermore, controlling for coursework, GBJW was a significant predictor of p index scores (b = 1.562, se = .715, p = .031), suggesting coursework is not a mediating variable. Bootstrap confidence interval further suggests the indirect effect of coursework on p index is not statistically significant (IE = .132, se = .238, 95% CI = (-.2381, .6084)).

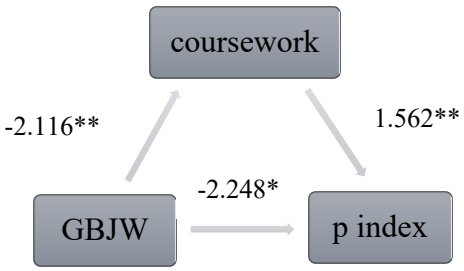
Table 10

Simple Mediation Model Coefficients

	coeff	se	*t*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
constant	15.608	2.587	6.033	p<.01	10.472	20.744
GBJW (X)	-2.248	.841	-2.673	.009	-3.918	-0.579
course (M)	1.562	.715	2.184	.031	0.142	2.982

Figure 2

Mediation Model



Note. This mediation model shows associations between p index scores and GBJW, controlling for coursework. *$p < .01$. **$p < .05$.

Summary

This chapter examined the results of the data analysis conducted in this study. The chapter began with descriptive statistics of the population, followed by discussion of the means, standard deviations, and frequencies of the outcome and predictor variables, respectively. Multiple regression analysis was used to address the first research question: Does GBJW, social justice advocacy, and training relate to ethical decision-making of professional school counselors. The analysis revealed global belief in a just world and amount of ethics courses completed in preparation programs are statistically significantly related to ethical decision-making, measured by principle ethical orientation. To address

the second research question: Does training mediate the relationship of global belief in a just world and social justice advocacy to ethical decision-making, a PROCESS analysis was conducted. The results of the PROCESS analysis suggested coursework did not have statistically significant mediating effect on GBJW and ethical decision-making (p index).

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, training, and ethical decision-making of professional school counselors. This chapter continues this work with a discussion of the results, implications, and limitations of the study. Suggestions for future research, along with recommendations for counselor educators and supervisors, are also discussed. The chapter concludes with final thoughts regarding this study.

Demographic Information

Demographic information of the participants was reported by descriptive statistics. Membership in professional organizations is ideal to maintaining professional status and gives members access to disseminated professional codes of ethics and professional resources (Bauman, 2008). A small portion of respondents (5.9%) reported no professional counseling organization membership. The majority of participants were members of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA; $n = 75$) and their local or state school counseling association ($n = 69$). Roughly 20% of participants also reported being members of the American Counseling Association (ACA) and 17% were members of their local or state counseling association. West (2016) found no statistically significant differences in school counselors who were members of professional organizations (state, local, national) and those who held no membership and EDM of school counselors, suggesting membership in professional organizations alone is not indicative of EDM.

Herlihy and Dufrene (2011) identified the most important issue of counselor preparation was EDM training. Unlike previous findings of nearly 30% of school

counselors reporting feeling unprepared to make ethical decisions despite training (Brown, 2017), almost all participants (94.2%) within the present study reported complete or somewhat agreement with being confident in their ability to address a dilemma in an ethical manner. This discrepancy could be attributed to response bias, in that participants responded in a favorable way to appear ethically strong in their abilities. Professional ethical codes are in place to guide practitioners in ethical behavior; however, equally important is preparing students on how to utilize such codes (Brown, 2017). While 95.1% (n = 97) of participants within the present study reported using the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, almost 50% (n = 50) of respondents reported having never heard of the ASCA STEPS: Solutions to Ethical Problems in Schools (Stone, 2013) ethical decision-making model, outlined in Section F of the Ethical Standards. Previous findings suggested only 25.2% of school counselors had awareness of the STEPS model (Brown, 2017). This incongruence in knowing the ethical standards that exist but not the EDM models that complement them suggests a lack of thorough knowledge or implementation of the standards. Only eight (7.8%) participants reported using the STEPS model always, while 21 (20.6%) participants reported sometimes using it, 10 (9.8%) rarely using the model, and 13 (12.7%) never using it.

The ACA Code of Ethics was utilized by 35.3% (n = 36); however, the ACA Ethical Decision Making Model (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016) was sometimes used by a quarter of respondents (25.5%), rarely used by a quarter (25.5%), always used by 12.7%, never used by 14.7% and never heard of by 21.6% of school counselor participants. Other EDM models were also reportedly used always (n = 8), sometimes (n = 26), rarely (n = 13), and never (n = 7). Though use of ethical codes exhibited within the

present sample population of school counselors is an improvement from the 8% seen in Bodenhorn's (2006) sample of school counselors frequently using ethical codes, the use of EDM models remains lacking, as found in Brown's (2017) study where only 58.6% of respondents reported familiarity with EDM models. This lack of use and familiarity suggests a continued lack of school counselor preparation in ethical decision-making via utilization of EDM models.

Global Belief in a Just World

Previous research has found just world beliefs to interact with decision-making and behaviors in various ways; however, the present study is the first to examine the relationship of just world beliefs and ethical decision-making of professional school counselors. Previous research has found behavior stemming from holding a belief that the world is just and people are deserving of what they get, whether it be fortune or misfortune, can be situational and influenced by external factors (Shah & Ali, 2012). In a study of cognitive moral development (CMD) and ethical decision-making, an interaction between just world beliefs and moral reasoning was observed (Ashkanasy et al., 2006). Particularly, managers with low CMD, high just world beliefs, and expectations that unethical behavior was condoned within the workplace had less ethical decision-making than managers who had high CMD, high just world beliefs, and expected unethical behavior to be rewarded. High CMD managers with higher just world beliefs and expectancy that unethical behavior was condoned made more ethical decisions.

The results of the present study add to previous findings that just world beliefs, coupled with moral reasoning, influence ethical decisions. Furthermore, results indicate one's level of belief in a just world is related to one's principled ethical orientation. The

less a person believes individuals deserve what they get or that the world is just, the more likely they are to make ethical decisions based on their conscience principles and internal ethical constructs that often coincide with legal or societal constructs (Dufrene, 2000). People with this level of ethical orientation are predisposed to virtuous morality and doing the right thing. Recall, professional ethics include personal values as well as professional behavior that is deemed acceptable (Brown et al., 2017). Further, moral judgement is guided by what is ethically appropriate. These findings are consistent with the theoretical model guiding this study. The Integrated Ethical Decision-Making Model (I-EDM; Schwartz, 2016) postulates one's moral capacity, or ability to behave ethically despite challenges to behave unethically, guides ethical decision-making. Adhering to both our internal moral compass and professional norms align with a principled ethical orientation.

Social Justice Advocacy

Bradley et al. (2012) stressed the importance of ethical considerations while engaging in social justice work. However, no statistically significant relationship between social justice advocacy and ethical decision-making was observed within this study. This finding is surprising given the vast directives of social justice advocates to act in an ethical manner (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2011; Storlie & Jach, 2012; Toporek & Daniels, 2018; Trusty & Brown, 2005). School counselors work with largely diverse populations and should be skilled in serving all students in an ethical manner (Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015). Laws mandate, and ethical standards guide, school counselors to advocate for students (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001) and may sometimes conflict (Stone & Zirkel, 2010); leaving the school counselor within a dilemma of

choosing the best course of action. Field & Baker (2004) also discussed how school counselors' advocacy efforts stem from ethical beliefs and may lead counselors to behave from a different ethical perspective than their other educator counterparts.

Training

Training was measured by questions constructed by the researcher on the demographic questionnaire that assessed participant's level of education, whether or not they attended a CACREP accredited preparation program, number of ethics courses taken, comprehensiveness of courses taken, and number of additional training received outside of their preparation programs within the previous 6 years. Development of counselor trainees' ethical and legal knowledge and decision-making takes place within their counselor preparation programs (Lambie et al., 2010). Dufrene & Glosoff (2004) postulated an assumption that increased education coincides with higher ethical decision-making ability. Within the present study, the majority of respondents (n = 96) possessed a master's degree and a small amount (n = 6) possessed a doctoral degree. No statistically significant impact was found from level of education on EDM. This was perhaps due to the skewness of the pool of master's level school counselors compared to doctoral level counselors. Dufrene (2000) found no significant differences in level and p index scores for pre-internship master's students, post-internship master's students, and doctoral students.

CACREP standards state programs should incorporate ethical standards and the application of ethical and legal considerations within professional counseling, which, in turn, promote ethical development and practice via in-person and virtual relationships, group design and facilitation, assessment administration and interpretation, and research.

Furthermore, Section 5.G.2.n. specifically states preparation programs should cover "legal and ethical considerations specific to school counseling" within the curriculum. With these guidelines in place, attendance in CACREP programs suggest participants received or were at least exposed to instruction in ethical principles and practice. A total of 79 (77.5%) participants reported attending a CACREP accredited preparation program, while 18 (17.6%) did not and 5 (4.9%) did not know whether their program was accredited or not. Even and Robinson (2013) reported 81.7% of counseling ethics sanctions were committed by graduates of non-CACREP accredited programs. This suggests CACREP accredited counselor preparation programs may reinforce ethics compliance.

Further, ASCA (2014a, 2019c) suggests training programs should ensure its graduates have knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively apply professional, legal, and ethical principles when faced with ethical, legal, and professional issues. Of the 102 participants in this study, only 4 participants reported not completing an ethics course in their program. Almost half (n = 49) completed at least one course that covered ethics or ethical principles, 32 participants completed two courses, and 17 completed three or more courses. These results are comparable to Bodenhorn's (2006) study in which over half (55%) of school counselors (N = 92) had taken a general course that covered some ethics within their master's program. Further, 58% of the respondents completed a specific ethics and legal issues course (Bodenhorn, 2006). Lambie et al. (2010, 2012) found legal and ethical knowledge scores on the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Questionnaire increased significantly after students completed a school counseling ethics course within a CACREP accredited program. In the present study, high levels of

comprehensiveness of course training related to ethical dilemmas specifically faced by professional school counselors was reported by participants (34.3% comprehensive, 52% somewhat comprehensive). Four participants reported their coursework was non-comprehensive. Though a small portion of the overall sample ($N = 102$), this suggests room for continued improvement within preparation programs, as all programs should be comprehensive in this regard. Recall, Brown (2017) found that 30% of school counselors felt unprepared to make ethical decisions and only 59% were familiar with EDM models. Interestingly, Lambie et al. (2011) found lower EDM scores in average counselors than scores in counselors-in-training, suggesting the need for further training. Comprehensive instruction can improve school counselor preparation. A single course, or one that lacks comprehensiveness, will not be very influential in the development of moral judgement (Kitchener, 1986).

As the Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2016) has been updated within the past six years and includes guidelines for continued training to practice ethically, the current study sought to ascertain the amount of supplemental ethics training or professional development school counselors had participated in. A quarter ($n = 24.5$) of participants reported having completed no supplemental trainings or workshops within the past 6 years. Bodenhorn reported 46% of school counselors attended conferences or continuing education sessions within 2 years of her study, yet only 8% reported utilizing an EDM model when making decisions. Noel and Hathorn (2014) further support the notion of increased ethics training, whether via a college course or work-related training, significantly predicts ethicalness. It is by frequent training, coupled with self-reflection and moral competence, that counselors' ability to make sound ethical decisions and

judgements is strengthened (ASCA, 2017; Evans et al., 2012; Oramas, 2017; Remley & Herlihy, 2020). This previous research suggested ethical decisions would be impacted by increased training, yet the amount of post-graduate trainings in ethics was not found to be statistically significant to participants' P index scores in the present study. As P index only measures the principle ethical orientation respondents, supplement trainings may have an impact on other areas of ethical orientation that were not examined within the scope of this study.

Results of the regression analysis did indicate, however, the amount of coursework in ethics was found to have a positive statistically significant relationship to ethical decision-making. The more courses dedicated to ethics or ethical principles taken, the more principled ethical orientation was salient within the population. A statistically significant relationship suggests the more courses dedicated to ethics or ethical principles taken, the more principled ethical orientation was salient within the population. Further, the indirect effect of coursework on GBJW was found not statistically significant, indicating no mediating effect of training within the model. These findings are supported by previous research that has suggested training increases ethical behavior and reasoning. Particularly, training can enhance one's ethical reasoning (Linstrum, 2009; Remley & Herlihy, 2019; Rest, 1984), ethical sensitivity (Cannon, 2010), overall ethicality (Noel & Hathorn, 2014), and strengthen ethical decision-making (Evans et al., 2012; and Oramas, 2017).

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. The projected sample of participants to reach power of 95 (α=.05, f^2 = .15) was N = 119. The actual sample size was N = 102. A

larger sample may be more representative of the population. Additionally, the majority of respondents were master's level school counselors. Only a small portion of the sample (*n* = 6) reported having a doctoral degree. Furthermore, as responses were self-reported, there is a possibility that social desirability was present and respondents may have felt the need to respond in a way that was socially pleasing, though all responses were anonymous. Over 2000 members of the school counseling profession were invited to participate in the study; and, over 650 people began the survey but did not complete it in its entirety. The required time commitment attached to the survey may have been a strong deterrent of completion for the study. Feedback from potential participants regarding the EDMS-R, in particular, was received via email: in addition to the lengthiness of the measure, only one of the six dilemmas used in the instrument pertained to working with youth. A validated measure specifically focusing on dilemmas faced by school counselors is needed (West, 2016; Brown, 2017).

Implications and Recommendations for Education and Practice

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, training and the ethical decision-making of professional school counselors. Statistical analyses suggest just world belief and the number of courses covering ethics and ethical principles taken are statistically significantly related to ethical decision-making, as measured by principle ethical orientation. Beliefs can influence decision-making and one's behavior towards others. School counselor preparation courses which focus on increasing self-awareness of one's biases and worldviews, such a multicultural and theory courses, should incorporate the implications

one's beliefs can have upon one's ethical behavior. Therefore, as CACREP Standards mandate, ethical development should be a part of each counselor preparation course.

While training has been linked to ethical and moral reasoning within other professions, the focus of such within the school counseling realm is limited. One's moral and ethical professional foundation can be enhanced by the guidance received through consultation, supervision, and continuing education (Remley & Herlihy, 2019); and, counselor preparation programs should aide in the development of ethical decision-making skills within counseling students (Springer, 2016). Counselor educators could incorporate use of ethical decision-making models across their courses. Evans et al. (2012) suggested ethical decision-making should be practiced proactively within training. Following such suggestion, while many technique courses utilize role-play to help trainees apply the skills and techniques they have learned, role-play could be used to apply ethical decision-making processing. Students can be given school counseling scenarios that place the counselor in an ethical dilemma, and then be instructed to utilize an ethical decision-making model to address said dilemma during role-play.

Further, as EDM training can help counselors reconcile their professional and personal beliefs (Ametrano, 2014), counselor educators could incorporate ethical dilemma papers that allow students to carefully assess decision-making and reflect upon how one's professional and personal beliefs coincide. Using this method, Ametrano (2014) observed a positive development of tolerance, awareness of values, and decision-making skills in community and clinical mental health counseling students. Preparation programs could also incorporate discussions of ethical reasoning and moral development within course discussions centered around professional and personal development (such

as multicultural and theory courses). To this end, ideally, an ethical stance will be as innate to the school counselor as is an empathetic disposition.

Evans et al. (2012) contended self-awareness includes a person's belief and value systems, and having counselors-in-training evaluate their self-awareness can facility ethical decision-making. Belief in a just world is an avenue of self-awareness that can be explored within training programs. As just world beliefs have impacted school counselors' decisions to place students in alternative learning settings (Dameron et al., 2019), as well as counselors-in-training's increased likelihood to view clients who are members of poor and working classes in more negative light than members of middle and upper classes (Smith et al., 2011), focus on the impact of values and beliefs, such as just world beliefs, within counselor preparation programs is essential.

Likewise, as school counselors are charged to have a continuous self-awareness of their values, attitudes, and beliefs (ASCA, 2016), supervision of school counselors and school counselor trainees can further reinforce self-reflection in this regard. Supervision provides space of reflection, development, and growth of the supervisee while protecting client welfare (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Supervisors should be competently trained in reinforcing implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs and ethical practices (ASCA, 2016). Particularly, site supervisors are tasked with assisting supervisees' self-exploration during supervision (Herlihy et al., 2002). In addition to modeling ethical behavior, the supervisory relationship can incorporate assessment and discussion of one's just world beliefs and how they may influence decisions made that impact the students served. Supervision can assist school counselors in navigating challenging ethical decisions (ASCA, 2016; Brown, 2017; Springer, 2016).

ACA (2014) postulates training is an ongoing proficiency. To this end, continuous professional development is appropriate. Many, if not all, professional counseling organizations offer ethical training and resources in the form of continuing education. For those school counselors without membership of said organizations, however, other avenues of continuing education are needed. Consultation and collaboration are key components of successful comprehensive school counseling programs and school counselors have a moral obligation not only to future generations of students but school counselors as well (Dahir, 2009). Extending upon these concepts, school counselors can work together and with their administration, teachers, and districts to foster ongoing proficiency of ethical decision-making.

School counselors can work with their district leaders to disseminate resources regarding the ethical decision-making process. The ACA infographic displaying the Ethical Decision Making Model (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016) could be distributed to all school counselors and discussed during professional learning communities, for instance. Further, school counselors can utilize the tools at their disposal to educate one another via social media platforms. Many school counseling social media groups exist for the purpose of sharing support and information. EDM resources and information can and should be a part of such information shared.

Future Research

Future research should expand upon the present study's findings by further examining other levels ethical orientation of participants and global belief in a just world, social justice advocacy, and training, as only Level 5 – Principled Orientation was used as the dependent variable within this study. Furthermore, within their study, Dufrene and

Glosoff (2004) compared the results of the master's pre-internship level, master's internship level, and doctoral level students that were surveyed. The means and standard deviations for the level and P index scores found within the present study (previously shown in Table 7) closely resemble those found in the Dufrene and Glosoff (2004) study. The authors found doctoral level students' P index scores were statistically significantly higher than master's level pre-internship students, but scores were not statistically significantly different than master's level internship students. A replication of the present study should seek to not only recruit a more even amount of master's level to doctoral level sample, but also examine the mean differences as with the Dufrene and Glosoff (2004) study.

Additional research is also needed in focusing on the ethical and moral development training of school counselors-in-training. While we have learned that ethics devoted coursework impacts the ethical decision-making of school counselors, future research should expand upon these findings to further examine the degree to which ethical courses impact school counselors-in-training. We recall Linstrum (2009) completed an experimental study that examined the effects of training master's level counseling students in the use of an ethical decision-making model upon the students' ethical decision-making skills. While no statistically significant effects were found from training on EDM skills, the study did reveal a disconnect between counselors knowing appropriate ethical behaviors and actual ethical intentions. Brown (2017) found a similar phenomenon in that though school counselors reported receiving training in ethical decision-making models, participants also reported being unfamiliar with models. We know that training is effective, but further research should seek to answer the question of

how to reinforce its effectiveness – better preparing clinicians to utilize EDM skills once they graduate from our counselor preparation programs.

Lastly, this study is the first known study to examine the relationship between social justice advocacy and ethical decision-making. While statistically significant results were not found in this study, additional research is needed to assess school counselors' advocacy attitudes, self-efficacy, behaviors and ethical decision-making. The guiding standards and codes of the school counseling profession call for advocacy on behalf of the students served by school counselors and the profession as a whole. Future research can give more insight into how school counselors' ethical and advocacy behaviors may align.

Conclusion

School counselors are on the frontlines of the academic, socio-emotional, and college/career development of youth and adolescents across society. While attending to the welfare of every student, school counselors often face adversity in delivering comprehensive school counseling programs, honoring the mandates of school and district administration, and still maintain ethically-sound practice. Effective ethical preparation of our school counselors-in-training can better equip them to handle the ethical dilemmas that will arise. While there are many guidelines and support in place to help practitioners, research shows these guidelines are not only followed loosely but are often unheard of by practicing school counselors. As counselor educators, supervisors, researchers, colleagues, and licensing boards, it is upon us to ensure all practicing school counselors are not only aware of ethical mandates but also confidently adhere to them in all situations. It is my hope that the present study helps us move further toward that end.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL – INITIAL

Dear School Counselor,

You are invited to participate in a dissertation research study about school counselor decision-making. Your responses can contribute to school counselor practice, as well as data-driven school counselor training programs.

If you meet the following criteria, will you please help in this study?

1. Must be a licensed school counselor.
2. Must be practicing as a school counselor within a (pre-)K-12 public or private school. Online schools are included.

The survey should take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete. Your time is truly appreciated. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be participating as a volunteer. Participation may be withdrawn at any time. All data collected in this study will remain confidential. Electronic data will be stored on a secure University network. Any information collected as part of this study will remain confidential to the extent possible and will only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law.

Participants who meet the above criteria can complete the survey via the following link: _____

If you do not meet the criteria and/or know of someone who may, please, share this invitation and survey link.

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the Office of Research Compliance at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual study, please contact the Principal Investigator: Jennifer Perry - jperry64@uncc.edu or the Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Sejal Parikh Foxx – sbparikh@uncc.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL – 1 WEEK FOLLOW-UP

Dear School Counselor,

If you have already participated in this study, thank you! If you have not had the chance to participate, I wanted to reach out to you again.

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, conducting dissertation research in school counselor decision-making. The study seeks contribute to school counselor practice, as well as data-driven counselor education courses and programs.

If you meet the following criteria, will you please help in this study?

1. Must be a licensed school counselor.
2. Must be practicing as a school counselor within a (pre-)K-12 public or private school. Online schools are included.

The survey should take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete. Your time is truly appreciated. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be participating as a volunteer. Participation may be withdrawn at any time. All data collected in this study will remain confidential. Electronic data will be stored on a secure University network. Any information collected as part of this study will remain confidential to the extent possible and will only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law.

Participants who meet the above criteria can complete the survey via the following link:

_____

If you do not meet the criteria and/or know of someone who may, please, share this invitation and survey link.

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the Office of Research Compliance at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual study, please contact the Principal Investigator: Jennifer Perry - jperry64@uncc.edu or the Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Sejal Parikh Foxx – sbparikh@uncc.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL – 2 WEEK FOLLOW-UP

Dear School Counselor,

If you have not had the chance to participate in this research, it is not too late!

We want to know what contributes to school counselor decision-making. Your responses can contribute to school counselor practice, as well as data-driven school counselor training programs.

If you meet the following criteria, will you please help in this study?

1. Must be a licensed school counselor.
2. Must be practicing as a school counselor within a (pre-)K-12 public or private school. Online schools are included.

The survey should take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete and we appreciate your time. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be participating as a volunteer. Participation may be withdrawn at any time. All data collected in this study will remain confidential. Electronic data will be stored on a secure University network. Any information collected as part of this study will remain confidential to the extent possible and will only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law.

Participants who meet the above criteria can complete the survey via the following link:

_____

If you do not meet the criteria and/or know of someone who may, please, share this invitation and survey link.

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the Office of Research Compliance at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual study, please contact the Principal Investigator: Jennifer Perry - jperry64@uncc.edu or the Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Sejal Parikh Foxx – sbparikh@uncc.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT EMAIL – FINAL

Dear School Counselor,

Thank you if you've already completed this study! If you have not had the chance to participate, this is your final opportunity to contribute to this important work. I do hope you take the time to do so.

The purpose of this dissertation study it to explore factors related to the decision-making of professional school counselors, with hopes to contribute to school counselor practice, as well as data-driven counselor education courses and programs.

Should you meet the following criteria, I invite you to participate in this research:

1. Must be a licensed school counselor.
2. Must be practicing as a school counselor within a (pre-)K-12 public or private school. Online schools are included.

The survey should take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be participating as a volunteer and can withdraw from the study at any time. All data collected in this study will remain confidential. Electronic data will be stored on a secure University network. Any information collected as part of this study will remain confidential to the extent possible and will only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law.

Participants who meet the above criteria can complete the survey via the following link:

_____

If you do not meet the criteria and/or know of someone who may, please, share this invitation and survey link.

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the Office of Research Compliance at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual study, please contact the Principal Investigator: Jennifer Perry - jperry64@uncc.edu or the Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Sejal Parikh Foxx – sbparikh@uncc.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

APPENDIX E: SUBSEQUENT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Freely Distribute to Other School Counselors!

Fellow School Counselor,

Thank you if you've already completed this study! I am still in need of many participants. If you have not had the chance to begin or finish the survey in its entirety, I ask you to please contribute to this important work.

As a school counselor myself, I know the **value of your time**. The survey will take no more than 20-25 minutes. For your convenience, you are able to **save and return to the survey for completion at your leisure**.

As a final requirement of my doctoral dissertation, this study explores factors related professional school counselors' decision-making, with hopes to contribute to school counselor practice and training. Your participation will help me advocate for our profession via research. Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. All data collected in this study will remain anonymous and stored on a secure University network.

Should you meet the following criteria, I invite you to participate in this research:

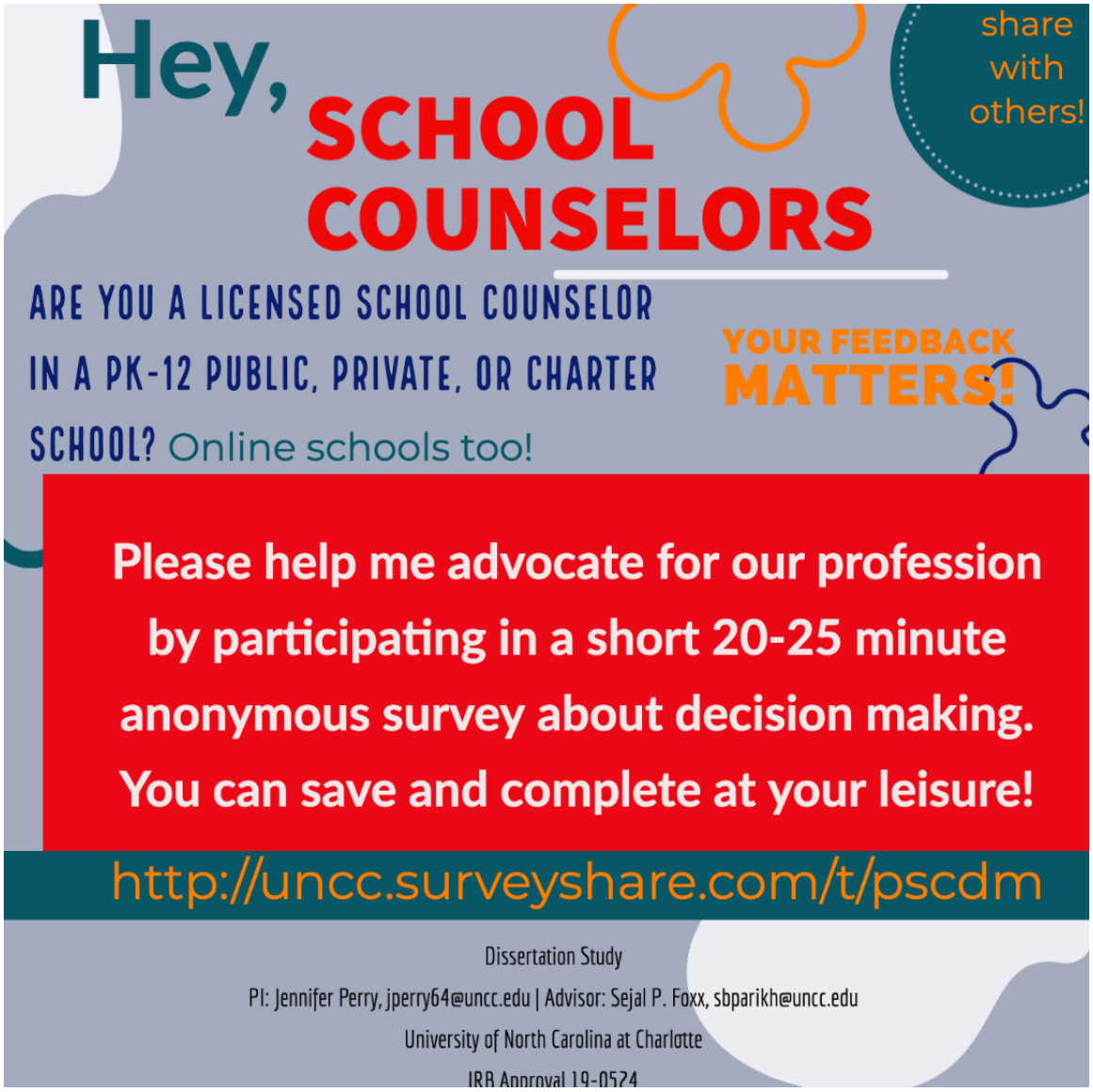
1. Must be a licensed school counselor.
2. Must be practicing as a school counselor within a (pre-)K-12 public, private, or charter school. Online schools are included.

Complete the survey via the following link: http://uncc.surveyshare.com/t/pscdm

The study has been approved by the UNC Charlotte IRB (Approval # 19-0524). If you have any questions, please contact the Principal Investigator: Jennifer Perry - jperry64@uncc.edu or the Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Sejal Parikh Foxx – sbparikh@uncc.edu.

Thank you for your contribution to school counselor research!

APPENDIX F: SOCIAL MEDIA FLYER



APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANT

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Perry, M.S., M.A., NCC
Dissertation Chair / Faculty Research Advisor: Sejal Parikh Foxx, Ph.D.
Organization/Affiliation: University of North Carolina at Charlotte

T**his Informed Consent Form has two parts:**
- **Information**
- **Certificate of Consent**

Part I: Information

Introduction
I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. In partial fulfillment of doctoral requirements, I am conducting research on school counselor decision-making. You are invited to participate in this research study. Participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions or need explanation of anything within this form or about the research study, you may ask any time.

Purpose of the Research
The purpose of this study it to explore factors related to school counselor decision-making. Particularly, this study hopes to contribute to school counselor practice, as well as data-driven counselor education courses and programs.

Participant Selection
Participants of this study should A) be a licensed school counselor and B) be practicing as a school counselor within a (pre-)K-12 public, private, charter school. Online school settings are acceptable.

Overall Description of Participation
You are invited to take part in this research study. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to:

1. Complete an online assessment via Qualtrics and provide demographics about yourself (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, school level, years of school counseling experience, training experience). The assessment is estimated to take 20-25 minutes to complete.

Risks and Benefits of Participation
There are no known personal risks or benefits anticipated from participating in this study. The study may involve risks that are not currently known. Should risks arise, you will be notified immediately. Although there are no direct benefits to study participants, benefits to society may include valuable information about school counselor ethical decision-making and implications to improve counselor training programs and practice.

Volunteer Statement

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be participating as a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to consent to be a part of the study, you may stop participation at any time.

Confidentiality Statement
All data collected in this study will remain confidential with the research team. Dr. Roxane Dufrene created and gave permission to use the Ethical Decision-Making Scale - Revised used within this study. Unidentifiable data from the EDMS-R will be shared with Dr. Dufrene. Electronic data will be stored on a secure University approved network. Any information collected as part of this study will remain confidential to the extent possible and will only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law.

Statement of Fair Treatment and Respect
UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the Office of Research Compliance at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu if you have questions about how you or your child are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual study, please contact the Principal Investigator: Jennifer Perry - jperry64@uncc.edu or the Dissertation Chair / Faculty Advisor: Dr. Sejal Parikh Foxx – sbparikh@uncc.edu.

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have read the information in this consent form or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions I have asked, have been answered to my satisfaction. By clicking on the ***Continue*** *button below, I consent to voluntarily participate in this research study.*

APPENDIX H: ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING SCALE – REVISED

(Sample)

Dilemma 1

Pat works for a Christian organization that clearly supports faithful relationships. As a mental health professional for this organization, Pat has seen a husband and wife individually for several sessions. When they are seen together, the husband responds to his wife's accusations that he has slept with other women by charging her with paranoia and insecurity. From individual sessions with the husband, Pat knows that the husband has had extramarital relations in the past. However, he is not currently having an affair. In addition, the wife is currently very unstable, and the confirmation of her suspicions could make her suicidal.

A. What should Pat do? Select one response.

O 1. Respect the man's confidentiality.
O 2. Tell his wife.
O 3. Insist the man tell his wife.
O 4. Refer the couple to another counselor.
O 5. Consult with supervisor at the Christian organization.
O 6. Can not determine.
O 7. Other (Specify) _____

*B. Based on the following scale, please **rate** the importance of each issue in making your decision. Remember, for this section you may rate more than one item at a specific level of importance.*

Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Unimportant
1	2	3	4	5

1 2 3 4 5	
O O O O O	1. Whether Pat should inform the couple that the wife is correct so Pat doesn't get in trouble.
O O O O O	2. Whether the institution's policies on faithful relationships will be upheld.
O O O O O	3. Whether society's expectations of honoring the marital relationship is important.
O O O O O	4. That the Christian organziation's policy is important.
O O O O O	5. That as a society we would be better off without marriage and the complications of marriage.
O O O O O	6. Whether the potential danger to the wife is important.
O O O O O	7. Whether the husband's right to privacy should be respected.
O O O O O	8. Whether Pat has a plan to discuss the wife's feelings and attempt to have the husband understand how she could be reacting in this way.
O O O O O	9. Whether Pat is married and has considerable experience with being married.
O O O O O	10. What values are going to be the basis for governing how people act toward each other.
O O O O O	11. That society's expectation is that an individual's life must be protected.
O O O O O	12. Whether Pat should disregard her knowledge of this situation because it was told to her in confidence.

*C. Now, please **rank** only **four** of the above listed items from the most important (1) to the least important (4). You can use each ranking number only **once**. If there are more than four reasons, please choose only the most important four.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Most important item	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Second most important	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Third most important	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Fourth most important	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

APPENDIX I: GLOBAL BELIEF IN A JUST WORLD SCALE

1 = *strong disagreement,* 6 = *strong agreement*

1. I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.
2. I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded.
3. I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get.
4. I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.
5. I feel that people get what they deserve.
6. I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.
7. I basically feel that the world is a fair place.

APPENDIX J: SOCIAL JUSTICE SCALE

7-point Likert-type scale (1 = Disagree Strongly, 4 = Neutral, 7 = Strongly Agree)

I believe that it is important to make sure that all individuals and groups have a chance to speak and be heard, especially those from traditionally ignored or marginalized groups

I believe that it is important to allow individuals and groups to define and describe their problems, experiences and goals in their own terms

I believe that it is important to talk to others about societal systems of power, privilege, and oppression

I believe that it is important to try to change larger social conditions that cause individual suffering and impede well-being

I believe that it is important to help individuals and groups to pursue their chosen goals in life

I believe that it is important to promote the physical and emotional well-being of individuals an groups

I believe that it is important to respect and appreciate people's diverse social identities

I believe that it is important to allow others to have meaningful input into decisions affecting their lives

I believe that it is important to support community organizations and institutions that help individuals and group achieve their aims

I believe that it is important to promote fair and equitable allocation of bargaining powers, obligations, and resources in our society

I believe that it is important to act for social justice

I am confident that I can have a positive impact on others' lives

I am certain that I possess an ability to work with individuals and groups in ways that are empowering

If I choose to do so, I am capable of influencing others to promote fairness and equality

I feel confident in my ability to talk to others about social injustices and the impact of social conditions on health and well-being

I am certain that if I try, I can have a positive impact on my community

Other people around me are engaged in activities that address social injustices

Other people around me feel that it is important to engage in dialogue around social injustices

Other people around me are supportive of efforts that promote social justice

Other people around me are aware of issues of social injustices and power inequalities in our society

In the future, I will do my best to ensure that all individuals and groups have a chance to speak and be heard

In the future, I intend to talk with others about social power inequalities, social injustices, and the impact of social forces on health and well-being

In the future, I intend to engage in activities that will promote social justice

In the future, I intend to work collaboratively with others so that they can define their own problems and build their own capacity to solve problems

APPENDIX K: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Are you a member of any of the following organizations? (Select all that apply.)
- American Counseling Association (ACA)
- American School Counseling Association (ASCA)
- Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES)
- Your local/state School Counseling Association
- Your local/state Counseling Association

Which professional codes and guidelines do you utilize in making ethical decisions? (Select all that apply.)
- ACA Code of Ethics
- ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors
- Other (please specify)

How long have you been employed as a licensed counselor?
- 0-3 years
- 4-7 years
- 8-10 years
- 11-14 years
- 15-18 years
- 19+ years

What school level do you currently work in?
- Elementary
- Middle
- High School
- Combination (e.g. K-6, K-8)

What sector do you currently work in?
- Public School
- Private School
- Charter School

What credentials do you hold? (Select all that apply.)
- Licensed Professional School Counselor
- Licensed Professional Counselor
- Licensed Professional Counselor Associate
- Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor
- Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist
- Other (please specify) _____
- I do not currently hold licensure.

What is your highest completed level of counselor education?
- MA, MS
- Doctorate

Was your school counselor preparation program CACREP accredited?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Within your counseling preparation program, how many courses covering counselor ethics or ethical principles did you complete?

- 1
- 2
- 3 or more
- I did not complete an ethics course in my program.

If you completed at least one course covering counselor ethics or ethical principles, how comprehensive was your training related to ethical dilemmas, specifically faced by professional school counselors?

- Comprehensive
- Somewhat Comprehensive
- Somewhat Non-comprehensive
- Non-comprehensive

Within the past six (6) years, how many non-counselor preparation program trainings or workshops have you completed in ethics?

- 1
- 2
- 3 or more
- I have not completed any ethics training or workshops within the past 6 years.

When faced within an ethical dilemma, I feel confident in addressing the issue in an ethical manner.

- Completely Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neutral
- Somewhat Disagree
- Completely Disagree

How often do you utilize the ACA Ethical Decision-Making Model (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016) when making ethical decisions?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- I have never heard of the ACA Ethical Decision-Making Model.

How often do you utilize STEPS: Solutions to Ethical Problems in Schools (Stone, 2013) when making ethical decisions?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- I have never heard of STEPS: Solutions to Ethical Problems in Schools.

Many models for decision-making exist. If you know of another decision-making model, other than the ACA Ethical Decision-Making Model or STEPS, how often do you utilize such when making ethical decisions?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- I do not know of any other decision-making models.

What is your gender identification?

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary

What is your race/ethnicity?

- African American/Black
- Asian/Pacific Islander/Asian American
- Latino/Hispanic
- Latinx
- Multiracial
- Native American, Alaskan Native
- European American/White (Non-Hispanic)/Caucasian
- Other _____

What is your age range?

- 20-25
- 26-31
- 32-37
- 38-43
- 44-49
- 50-55
- 56-61
- 62 or older