

**Counseling Relationship Experiences for K-12 School Counselors**

**Who Also Fulfill the Role of Anti-Bullying Specialist**

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative study explores school counselors' experiences of the counseling relationship with students when also fulfilling the role of anti-bullying specialist. School counselors who also serve students as the anti-bullying specialist embrace a dual role with students. Interviews with school counselors practicing multiple role to include counselor and anti-bullying specialist were analyzed by the researcher for consistent and inconsistent experiences. The findings can provide guidance for the development and evaluation of school counselor role definitions that safeguard counseling effectiveness. Given that anti-bullying efforts in schools are required by federal law, understanding the indicated model policy, the outcomes in the state of New Jersey and their implications for school counselors in their role as an anti-bullying specialist is imperative. Participant feedback can provide school counseling graduate programs with data to analyze effectiveness of training practices for current real-world job roles and current school counselors with evidence for advocacy efforts.

*Keywords:* school counselor, role, bullying

## **Counseling Relationship Experiences for K-12 School Counselors**

### **Who Also Fulfill the Role of Anti-Bullying Specialist**

Currently, 46 states in the United States have bullying laws and 45 states require school districts to adopt bullying laws (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, & Springer, 2011). School counselors must be aware of anti-bullying laws and policies and include anti-bullying/harassment prevention programs that foster a positive school climate in their comprehensive school counseling program (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2011). New Jersey, appoints school counselors to serve students additionally in the role of anti-bullying specialist in accordance with the state's harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying policy for schools. Currently, New Jersey is the only state to do this. The U.S. Department of Education found that New Jersey had a greater extent of coverage of identified key components and expansiveness in their state bullying legislation compared to other states (Stuart-Cassel et al., 2011). However, since New Jersey's anti-bullying policy has been noted to be a model for other states (Hu, 2011), this role deserves inquiry regarding its implications for school counselors.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (n.d.) bullying is a serious and prevalent problem. Twenty-eight percent of students in Grades 6-12 within the United States report experiencing bullying (National Center for Education Statistics and U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010) and 30% of school-aged individuals admit to bullying others while 70.6% shared that they have witnessed someone else being bullied while at school (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007).

*Bullying* is defined as a repeated pattern of actions (nonverbal, verbal, or electronic) that expresses aggressive behavior, involves an imbalance of power, and

purposely inflicts harm on a victim physically or emotionally (Arcuri, 2015; Long & Alexander, 2010). “*Harassment* is defined as an act committed by a person(s) with the purpose to alarm or seriously irritate another person” (Arcuri, 2015, p. 1; New Jersey Statue Amendment [N.J.S.A.] 2C:33-4, 2015). With media reporting numerous stories of victimization and bullying, states are amending their anti-bullying laws (Hu, 2011). For instance, in January 2011, the state of New Jersey enacted the nation’s toughest law against bullying and harassment after Rutgers’ University college student, Tyler Clementi, committed suicide after his roommate, Ravi, recorded and shared via the web him being intimate with another male (Hu, 2011; Zernike, 2012).

Noting New Jersey’s law as being the model policy, understanding how a school counselor’s role is impacted by the additional role of anti-bullying specialist is a necessity to ensure the well-being of students is being safeguarded. According to the American Counseling Association (ACA), counselors “consider the risks and benefits of extending current counseling relationships beyond conventional parameters... to ensure that judgment is not impaired and no harm occurs” (2014, A.6.b., p. 5). More specifically, ASCA’s ethical guidelines advise school counselors to “avoid dual relationships that might impair their objectivity and increase the risk of harm to students. If a dual relationship is unavoidable, the school counselor is responsible for taking action to eliminate or reduce the potential for harm to the student through use of safeguards” (2016, A.5.a., p. 3). Therefore, understanding school counselor multiple relationships with students when serving them in the role of anti-bullying specialist is a necessity in understanding implications of the counseling relationships.

## **New Jersey Anti-bullying Policy**

As of September 2011, New Jersey school districts are required to have a harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) policy. In addition, school districts are required to have at least one anti-bullying coordinator per district and each school within the district must have one anti-bullying specialist and a school safety team (NJDOE, 2011). New Jersey's Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights, NJ Rev Stat § 18A:37-15 (2013), mandates school principals to appoint a counselor, school psychologist, or another individual similarly trained, if they are currently employed in the school, as the school's anti-bullying specialist. The anti-bullying specialist will need to (a) lead the investigations of reported HIB incidents, (b) act as the primary school official responsible for preventing, identifying, and addressing incidents of HIB in the school, (c) assist the principal in defining a range of ways to respond to HIB, and (d) provide input to the local board on reevaluation, reassessment, and review of the policy annually (NJ Rev Stat § 18A:37-15, 2013).

New Jersey Rev Stat § 18A:37-15 (2013) outlines the role of the anti-bullying specialist as the following:

1. After a school's principal provides the anti-bullying specialist with an initial report from an individual who personally witnessed an act of HIB or received reliable information indicating that a HIB act occurred;
2. The anti-bullying specialist begins the investigation;
3. The anti-bullying specialist's concluding investigation will determine if three key components occurred in order to be considered an act of HIB:
  - a. a substantial disruption or interference with the orderly operation of school or students' right,

- b. an actual or perceived distinguishing characteristic as the motivating factor, and
  - c. either a physical or emotional harm to students or their property or fear of harm to students or property, an effect of insulting or demeaning students or a creation of a hostile educational environment interfering with students' education.
4. The results will then be given to the school's principal. If the anti-bullying specialist concludes an act of HIB occurred, the students involved will receive disciplinary action. Additionally, if new information concerning this case is revealed, the original case can be amended through further investigation by the anti-bullying specialist in which results will again need to be given to the principal. Furthermore, at any time within the investigation, if a police matter is involved, the concern must be reported immediately. For instance, because harassment is a crime, a victim can also file a police report at any time.

### **Serving Students in an Alternate Role**

School counselors can serve many students at one time with classroom lessons. In fact, the ASCA National Model recommends that a school counselor spend 25-35% of their time providing academic content through classroom guidance (2003; 2012). This allows the school counselor to not only present the counseling curriculum but also meet with students in the context of their day to gain insight concerning student needs.

When school counselors provide classroom lessons, they are tasked with managing a group of students. Classroom guidance allows counselors to view the struggles of individual within the context of a group (Geltner & Clark, 2005). If a student is not following the group's rules and is reprimanded, the school counselor needs to mend the counselor-student relationship to allow the student to understand they are genuinely cared for (Geltner & Clark, 2005). Therefore, when a school counselor must

cross the boundaries for the benefit of the group, the counselor is expected to meet with that student to address the student's behavior in context to the group and explore needs of the student. School counselors may be cautioned that their role is to manage, not discipline (Buchanan, Mynatt, & Woodside, 2017). Understanding effective management stems from the school counselors understanding who their students are, what student needs are, and minimize off-task behaviors with on-task motivation (Buchanan et al., 2017). Behavior management strategies allowed for the rapport between student and school counselor to be maintained through acknowledgement of each student's unique needs by the school counselor; showed the school counselor genuinely cared.

### **Serving Students in the Role of Anti-Bullying Specialist**

School counselors who are appointed by their principal to act in the role of anti-bullying specialist now serve their students in two roles: (a) counselor and (b) anti-bullying specialist. School counselors have the ethical duty to understand how additional roles they fulfill impact the counseling relationship since the student's well-being is the primary responsibility of the counselor (ACA, 2014, A.1.a, A.6.d; ASCA, 2016, A.1, A.5). Currently, this is the only known study to explore school counselors' counseling relationships with students when they serve students in the role of counselor and anti-bullying specialist. It has been noted that successful counseling relationships develop between school counselors and students when school counselors have nonjudgmental and nondirective foundations (Rogers, 1951). A counselor being able to provide clients with the ability to trust them is one of the most basic counseling skills (Corey & Corey, 2011; Rogers 1951). In order for students to experience positive

counseling outcomes, they must fully participate and be willing to work toward goals with the counselor (Rogers, 1961). At this time, no literature could be found to help understand school counselors' counseling relationship experiences with students when they are also serving the students in the anti-bullying specialist role. How trustworthiness will be impacted in the school counselors' relationship with students with the addition of anti-bullying specialist role is unknown. Yet, in the state of New Jersey, the anti-bullying law has resulted in the appointment of many school counselors who have the additional role of serving students as the anti-bullying specialist.

### **Training School Counselors for the Role of Anti-Bullying Specialist**

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) sets the national standards for school counselor programs. School counselors who were appointed as anti-bullying specialist from 2011 to now graduated from CACREP'S 2009 standards. According to CACREP (2009) standards, master's level counselors are required to have an understanding of professional roles, functions, and relationships with other human service providers, including strategies for interagency or interorganization collaboration and communications as well as counselors' roles and responsibilities as members of an interdisciplinary emergency management response team during a local, regional, or national crisis, disaster or other trauma-causing event (II.G.1.b-c). However, there is no specific mention of the anti-bullying specialist role. After implementation of New Jersey schools' 2011 HIB policy when CACREP revised and adopted their standards in 2015, the new standards did not address school counselors fulfilling the anti-bullying specialist role.



ASCA's National Model acts as a guide for school counselors when they create their comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors' comprehensive school counseling program must include anti-bullying education for students (2003, 2011, 2013) but there is no mention of counselors serving in the anti-bullying specialist role. ASCA's ethical standards, both pre and post New Jersey's schools' HIB policy, declares school counselors should function in a nonthreatening role and avoid serving students in additional roles which can impair counselor objectivity (ASCA, 2016; A.5.a.). Currently, this is the only known research addressing the experiences school counselors have when serving students also in the anti-bullying specialist role.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study intended to provide an understanding of how the school counselors experience the counseling relationship with students when serving students in the counselor and anti-bullying specialist roles. Through conducting interviews with school counselors who also serve students as an anti-bullying specialist, the findings are anticipated to provide guidance in evaluation of how HIB policies affect the counseling relationship and counselors' effectiveness with students, refinement of school counselor role definition, suggest limits of role affecting the counseling relationship and its effectiveness with students, and to guide the training needed to for current counselors-in training to fulfill the role of anti-bullying specialist.

### **Research Question**

The research question was: What is the counseling relationship experience of K-12 educators in the role of school counselor and anti-bullying specialist? The participants were asked a variety of questions including: contextual, rapport-building

questions; central questions along with sub-questions; reflection questions; and probes for clarification. Moreover, generic qualitative methodology offered for the demographic information additional analysis of the data collected from the interviews.

### **Contextual Questions**

1. What is your gender?
2. How do you describe your ethnicity?
3. Would you describe the school you work in to be in an urban, suburban, or rural setting?
4. Before working as a school counselor, what did you think school counselors did?
5. Now that you work as a school counselor, please tell me about what you do in this role.
  - a. Is there a difference between what you thought you would be doing and what you do?
6. I understand that you also work with students in the anti-bullying specialist role. Can you please share what you do in the anti-bullying specialist role?
  - a. How do you think your anti-bullying specialist role compares to your school counselor role?

### **Central Questions Intended to Explore Experiences**

7. What do you think about your counseling relationships with students you just work with in the school counselor role?
8. Tell me about your relationships with students when you work with them as the anti-bullying specialist.
9. Tell me about your counseling relationships with students when you work with them in both roles.

- a. Please describe how it does or does not make a difference if you work with students first as a counselor or if you work with them first as an anti-bullying specialist.
  - b. Can you please explain any positive or negative results of working with students in both roles?
10. Is there any other information you feel is important to share?

### **Closing Questions**

11. Please describe how your school counseling training did or did not prepare you for the school counselor role.
12. Please describe how your school counseling training did or did not prepare you for the anti-bullying specialist role.
13. Please tell me how you feel this study can affect your future as a school counselor and anti-bullying specialist.

Questions were asked in the same manner for each participant in order not to implicate judgment about the matter or expectations of expected data to be collected. The following probes were used to follow up with the participants and clarify their intention (Denhart, 2008):

- You said \_\_\_\_\_. Can you please elaborate?
- Can you give an example?
- Are there any specific words you would use to describe the relationship?

All interview questions were formulated to promote participants' in-depth disclosure concerning their experiences with the counseling relationship with students when serving the students both in the school counselor and the anti-bullying specialist role simultaneously.

### **Expected Findings**

Based on the ACA (2014)'s ethical guidelines, school counselors who are also anti-bullying specialists for the same caseload may be viewed as having a dual relationship. School counselors who also act as the school's anti-bullying specialist may experience conflict with the counseling relationships with students from the experiences collected from the interviews the school counselor conducts in the anti-bullying specialist role since anti-bullying specialist role can impair objectivity (ASCA, 2016, A.5.a.). The hypothesis is substantiated due to the conflicting duties of a school counselor and an anti-bullying specialist in respect to the Rogerian nonjudgmental counseling approach.

### **Methodology**

A generic qualitative research study was utilized with the purpose of discovering experiences of the people involved (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). A constructivist paradigm was chosen to examine human being subjectivity from the participants' experiences (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

According to the New Jersey Department of Education's County District School Information System (2014), there were 2,347 anti-bullying specialists in the states. Recruitment took place via the New Jersey Department of Education's school directory website, which identified each school's anti-bullying specialist(s). The researcher reviewed each school district's school websites to obtain email addresses for the anti-bullying specialists to email an invite for participation in the study to. By law, school districts must indicate on their school district's websites who the anti-bullying specialists are along with contact information (NJ Rev Stat § 18A:37-15, 2013). Within 21 counties,

which included 602 school districts, individuals that met the criteria of serving students in the role of the anti-bullying specialist and school counselor were included in an e-mail listserv. The New Jersey Anti-Bullying Task Force 2013's annual report indicated there to be 2,347 anti-bullying specialists, 467 responded to their survey and 57.4% participants indicated they fulfilled the role of school counselor (New Jersey Department of Education [NJDOE], 2014).

For this study, 12 participants were selected. All 12 participants were New Jersey public school counselors and the anti-bullying specialists for the same caseload of students. Purposeful, stratified sampling was utilized to have four participants in each of the levels: (a) elementary, (b) middle, and (c) high school setting. Additionally, the participants were between 25 and 60 years of age had to meet specific inclusion criteria: (a) held a master's degree in school counseling, (b) a minimum of 3 years of school-based, full-time employed counseling experience, and (c) a minimum of acting as the school's anti-bullying specialist as well as school counselor simultaneously for 2 years. Due to time and budget constraints, the first twelve volunteers which fit the categories were chosen. The selected participants did not have any known personal and/or professional relationships with the researcher. Please see Appendix A for participant demographics.

The researcher conducted open-ended, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews utilizing 13 interview questions which were recorded via Skype. Interviews averaged an hour in duration. All components of the interview had the focus of uncovering the experiences of the additional school counselor relationship of an acting

school counselor who is the anti-bullying specialist for the same caseload in regard to the counseling relationship.

Participant checks during the interview occurred by utilizing probes to gain feedback for developing ideas (Denhart, 2008). Probing examples, selected from a predesigned list to promote consistency among participants' interviews, were utilized when needed to gain clarification of the participants' intentions (Turner, 2010).

Once the participants' interviews were completed, the interviews were transcribed for analysis. Participants' experiences were examined for common themes. The transcripts were explored to discover themes of participants' experiences regarding the counseling relationship. Purposeful, stratified sampling sanctions derived experience themes of the counseling relationship for the anti-bullying specialist/school counselor participants to be transferable for elementary, middle, and high schools in New Jersey.

### **Data Analysis**

Miles and Huberman's (1994) thematic analysis was used to examine any repeated themes and patterns in each participant's Skype interview. The Miles and Huberman thematic data analysis model suggests qualitative data analysis consists of three procedures: (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion drawing, known as *verification*. Thematic data analysis occurred for each transcript independently. Each transcript was thematically analysed independently to decipher patterns and identify similar and contrasting findings. Conclusions were derived from these findings. Step two was data reduction and consisted of three phases. During the first phase of data reduction, an interview transcript was read at least twice for a

comprehensive understanding. Each word in each transcript was carefully analysed. During the second phase of data reduction, the irrelevant information from the interviews was discarded. The words and phrases of importance relating to the research question were highlighted, high-frequency words as well as common statements. The transcript was read again after the initial identification of important information to ensure all words and statements were relevant. During the third phase of data reduction, the interview transcripts were analysed to decipher what the data were indicating (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each word and/or statement was assigned a theme, or category. Related statements were organized under each designated theme. Transcripts were then reread to check for appropriate categorizing and/or missing content. Each theme derived was representative of the whole text. During this time, an outside reviewer, evaluated if the themes were compatible with the whole text and confirmed the excerpts supported the designated theme with the purpose of establishing reliability in themes analysis coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By validating themes early on in the process, a safeguard was maintained to avoid misrepresentation and categorization.

Step three was the second main step of the Miles and Huberman (1994) thematic data analysis model, data display. Data were organized to identify similar concepts to make sense of the data. Themes were collated to compare the information to ultimately draw conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data were displayed in tables, graphs, and quotations to provide more opportunities to analyse the data (Yin, 2010). The themes were explored in a table to decipher first and second levels. The graph distinguished the frequency of the theme whereas quotations provide supportive meaning to the interpretation of statements (Patton, 2002).

Step four was the final step of the Miles and Huberman (1994) thematic data analysis model, data drawing and conclusions, which aimed to generate meaning from the data. The data displays were analysed for patterns or themes. Special attention was made to indicate similar and contrasting statements. Information was grouped into categories to identify interrelations. Step five included member checking to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A summary of each of the participants' transcript analysis was provided to the specific participant asking them to review and judge the analysis for adequacy of findings. If the participants believed there was an error in the conclusion derived or clarification was needed, the participant was able to add the necessary edits by hand and/or call me and schedule a time to review the data analysis summary. The researcher made the necessary revisions during the review. After all participants confirmed accuracy of researcher's interpretations, across thematic analysis occurred among all participants' transcripts.

In step six, repeated phrases among participants were identified and sorted to uncover themes. The data then were collected from interview responses and sorted to identify categories. Any derived clusters of meaning relating to the Rogerian counseling approach were explored. In Step seven, the strata of the school level the anti-bullying specialist served (elementary, middle, and high school) were explored in respect to within strata and across strata findings. Additionally, data analyses considered the participants' age, gender, ethnicity, and identified school environment (suburban, urban, rural) when contrasting findings (Patton, 2002). See Appendix B for a summary of the data.



## Results

The central research question explored in this study was: What is the counseling relationship experience of K-12 educators in the role of school counselor and anti-bullying specialist? The findings are important to understanding the New Jersey anti-bullying law (NJ Rev Stat § 18A:37-15, 2013), which allows school counselors to be appointed as the school's anti-bullying specialist and is being described as the model policy for states when instituting anti-bullying laws (Hu, 2011). The results of this generic qualitative study begin to document the experiences school counselors have related to their counseling relationships with students when serving as a counselor and anti-bullying specialist. Seven themes derived from the study: (a) school counselor role, (b) anti-bullying specialist role, (c) counseling relationship, (d) school counselor versus anti-bullying specialist role, (e) graduate school counseling training preparation for the school counselor and anti-bullying specialist roles, (f) Rogerian approach in school counselor and anti-bullying specialist roles, and (g) suggestions for the future in respect to the anti-bullying specialist role.

The themes interpreted are consistent with literature on a Rogerian nonjudgmental counseling approach, dual roles, and school counseling training programs. The first two themes related to role. Participants supported Rogerian tenets and indicated that a school counselor's role should be nonjudgmental/nondirective and advocate for students. Participants reported the anti-bullying specialist role should be investigative in nature. One participant shared:

I feel like the counseling role is different because I'm dealing with more of the feelings aspect and just kind of reinforcing and seeing how the student's doing and making sure they're okay. I feel like with the HIB law, I'm getting more of the

facts that are occurring, not dealing with the feelings and all that, trying to get all the facts so I can write down the report (Arcuri, 2015, p. 139).

The findings from the participant interviews revealed effective counseling relationships occur when the student can trust the counselor and the counselor is nonjudgmental, again supporting Rogers.

Essentially, what we're doing is we're looking for evidence of guilt or innocence and it's very difficult. The hardest part for me as a counselor is when I have to make that judgment. And my principal has the final say within our building and then, of course, our superintendent and our school board, but to have to, especially when you're coming in with a guilty verdict, it's just difficult for you if you have the heart of a counselor because that's not what you ever want to do. Your hope is always that students recognize their wrongdoing but they still feel valued themselves and that it becomes a learning experience and a growth experience for them and a teachable moment. And when sometimes the investigation piece can start to feel like you're focusing more on the crime and punishment, so to speak, than you are on the growth and the learning.

Another participant shared even when completing the investigation for the victim they felt the counselor-student relationship to be compromised. "They usually don't like me, to be honest. They feel like I'm the bad guy, like I'm getting them in trouble instead of the bully." "It goes against myself as a school counselor because now these kids don't even want to come to me with a problem because they're afraid I'm going to be reporting them or getting somebody in trouble." The fourth theme highlighted the school counselor and anti-bullying specialist role were contradictory in nature. Additionally, a dual role that could compromise the counseling relationships for students was indicated. Participants shared they were put in an awkward position to judge students versus what they are trained to do as advocates.

I see it being a conflict, to be honest with you. I see the school counselor role being an advocate. The anti-bullying specialist is, I would say, an enforcer of the policies but also, you're really investigating the matter, and I see it as being a conflict because I don't necessarily know that you're being an advocate for the student who is possibly bullying somebody else. To be honest with you, we're really trying to get that. We are trying to build a case. We're trying to gather as much evidence as possible to support this harassment complaint, the bullying complaint, and turn it over to the disciplinarian for consequences. So, I don't necessarily know that I see it as an advocacy role. I see that more as an investigative role.

This finding, also supported a Rogerian approach. Participants specified that their graduate school counseling programs did train them to counsel but did not prepare them to fulfill other roles such as the anti-bullying specialist. One participant shared:

Looking back on my schooling, it did not prepare myself for this role. It did not see the connection between the two things. Police officers and legal teams with attorneys have offered workshops to help anti-bullying specialists better understand the HIB law. I am not a lawyer so I can only get so much out of it. The police and detectives will teach us investigative techniques to help with our HIB investigations but I would not say that I am a trained detective. I feel like one, though.

Another participant stated:

I'm not a lawyer and therefore I am not, I don't feel that I should have the final decision in deciding whether or not someone breaks the law. I mean, we are being trained by lawyers and law enforcement on what the law is. Well, then, lawyers or law enforcement should be dealing with these situations.

The sixth theme derived supported a Rogerian approach by asserting counseling relationships should not be compromised by disciplinary roles. The seventh theme

recommended counselors avoid dual roles when not benefiting the client, thus supporting ACA's (2014) and ASCA's (2016) ethical guidelines. The theme cautioned school counselors about roles which compromise their purpose. This research allowed school counselors to tell their first-hand experiences about the impact to the counseling relationships with students they have experienced when also serving the students in the anti-bullying specialist role.

### **Discussion**

The findings offer the first examination of the school counselors' additional relationship as serving the same population of students in the anti-bullying specialist role. The findings may be useful in guiding future research as well as serve as an informational resource for graduate school counseling training programs. The data collected yielded initial empirical evidence regarding the unique dual/multiple role (counselor and anti-bullying specialist) counseling relationship experiences with students.

When Bachelor et al. (2007) studied counseling clients about their counseling experience, results indicated clients rated counseling as more effective when the client did not feel judged. The generic qualitative research's findings further support the student-centered counseling approach. Based on the word counts and quotes from the participants, interpretation asserts participants in this study reported having more effective counseling relationships with students when their students could trust them.

The researcher interpreted the school counselor is forming a dual relationship with students when working with students as (a) an investigator of HIB (anti-bullying specialist role; NJ Rev Stat § 18A:37-15, 2013) and (b) student advocate (school

counselor role; ASCA, 2016). The ACA's (2014) code of ethics encourages professional counselors to avoid dual relationships because the counselor's influence and the client's vulnerability will also be present in the second relationship. If extending the counseling relationship is unavoidable, ACA (2014) encourages counselors to document when the counseling relationship boundary is extended, ensure no harm is done to the client, and make certain the counselor's judgment does not become impaired (A.6.b and c.). ASCA (2016) also encourages counselors to avoid any dual role that impairs objectivity in relation to the students and/or the counselors' judgment (A.5.a.). The researcher's interpretation was consistent with a Rogerian perspective that (1949) stressed an importance to avoid judgmental roles due to the ability to negatively affect the counseling relationship. Based on the participants' descriptions of the participants' experiences as the school counselor's role also serving students simultaneously in the anti-bullying specialist role as being contradictory, compromised, and conflicting, the researcher interpreted the additional school counselor role negatively impacts the school counseling relationship. Participants explained how they experienced a decrease in trust within the counseling relationships when the counselor also served the students in the additional role of anti-bullying specialist role. Participants from this research further elaborated how serving students in multiple roles, the counselor and anti-bullying specialist, is awkward and causes conflict in roles.

“ASCA (2010, 2013) asserts school counseling training programs train counselors to create a comprehensive school counseling program that has the school counselor in the role of a neutral resourceful consultant, mediator, and student advocate who maintains nonthreatening relationships with students” (Arcuri, 2015, p. 197).

Participants indicated they did not receive training within their graduate counseling programs to fulfill non-counseling related duties such as the anti-bullying specialist. CACREP, ASCA, and ACA do not indicate counselors in training must be trained in investigatory approaches or anti-bullying policy. Even when school counselors provide classroom lessons they are tasked with approaching the class as a group. Thus, providing lessons in accordance as counselor facilitating a group. Even in this setting, the art of counseling is not lost in the counselor's task.

### **Implications for Counselor Educators and Supervisors**

When school counselors are in their fieldwork experience, it is the ethical duty of their faculty supervisors to ensure their students practice ethically to safeguard the well-being of their clients (ACA, 2014, A.1.a., F.1.a.; Association for Counselor Education and Supervision [ACES], 1993). Additionally, CACREP (2015) asserts it is the ethical duty of counselor educators and supervisors to ensure students understand and are efficient in demonstrating their role and responsibilities as a professional counselor (II.f.1.). Thus, counselor educators and supervisors are ethically obligated to train students to how to ethically navigate when being asked to fulfill the role of anti-bullying specialist. Understanding how each state expects their school counselors to assist in the anti-bullying efforts will be important for counselor educators to monitor since school counselors are reporting not feeling prepared to fulfill the role of anti-bullying specialist, ethically, they must self-assess their competence in this area as well as their effectiveness in helping counselors-in-training prepare for this role (ACA, 2014, F.5.b.).

This study can be utilized to help counselor educators teach and prepare their aspiring school counselors to advocate to safeguard their students' well-being.

Additionally, by educating the community about this unique compromising role school counselors fulfill along with the components needed to foster growth, they are indirectly advocating for the profession (Cashwell & Barrio Minton, 2012).

### **Implications for School Counselors**

School counselors should monitor their job role descriptions. Understanding what is expected of them and their bounds of competence is important (ASCA, 2016, B.3.c.; ACA, 2014, F.5.b.). When a counselor feels they are unprepared to provide specific services, they are ethically responsible to seek professional development (ASCA, 2016, B.3.e.; ACA, 2014, C.2.f.).

Furthermore, a school counselor must ensure the practices asked of them are to the benefit of the students on their caseload. Therefore, if asked to perform a role that may impair the effectiveness of them being able to meet their students' needs, advocating for most effective practices is a necessity (ASCA, 2016, B.2.c.). When in doubt, the counselor should seek consultation (ASCA, 2016, B.3.h.; ACA, 2014, C.2.e.). Suggesting school counselors actively engage in ongoing assessment of their services and effectiveness to ensure most effective practices.

For school counselors who practice in the state of NJ and are unable to avoid the additional role of anti-bullying specialist, advocating for best practices is needed. As noted with research pertaining to classroom management, school counselors can assert they approach the students in terms of discussing managing their behaviors versus disciplining them due to their actions. For instance, providing students with an opportunity to meet with the counselor to explore their behaviors in context to school, community, and/or society rules will allow the student to process why their behavior was

reprimanded a long with activating events and discussion concerning the consequences of the behavior (Geltner & Clark, 2005). Utilizing an ABC approach from cognitive-behavioral therapy can individualize the experience for the student and allow the student to see the counselor is genuinely concerned for the student (Geltner & Clark, 2005). Additionally, a proactive relationship is formed between the student and counselor to reinforce appropriate behaviors for the setting. Reinforcing acceptable behaviors and indicating workable plans to help the student be emotionally, academically, and sociable success supports not only the student-counselor relationship (Buchanan et al., 2017) but also meets the goals of the comprehensive school counseling curriculum (ASCA; 2012).

### **Limitations**

There are numerous limitations to the design and findings of this study. Being the first study, these findings offer an initial window into the experiences educators have with student counseling relationships when serving the students in the counselor and anti-bullying specialist role. This study had an uneven balance of male and female participants for this study. Seventy-seven percent of school counselors are women (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011), however, this study consisted of 58.33% female participants. This study's sample was even less representative of national demographic average at the high school strata since 75% of the participants were male in this study. Additionally, the participants only represented the urban and suburban school districts within the state of New Jersey. Even though only 8% of the New Jersey public school districts are considered rural (Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester, 2014), it is important to explore the impact or lack of to the counseling relationship in a rural setting.



These limitations may have been related to the fact that this study had a limited budget of time and resources. Also, the length of the interview may have deterred some individuals from volunteering. The average duration was one hour. If a qualitative survey assessment was utilized, perhaps more participants may have been interested due to the ability to complete on their own time and without their direct involvement with the researcher.

### **Future Research**

As this is the first study to explore the counseling relationships school counselors have with students when also serving the same caseload in the role of anti-bullying specialists, there are still a plethora of ideas to explore. First and foremost, a researcher must consider if variations of strata would render varying sights. To mention just a few possibilities: (a) participant religion, (b) school counselor past teacher experience, (c) training received in respect to legal and or law enforcement avenues, (d) availability of administration to school counselors, (e) number of anti-bullying specialist per school, (f) size of school, (g) student-school counselor/anti-bullying specialist ratio, or (h) anti-bullying specialists' receiving school counseling training in the state of New Jersey versus another state.

Throughout the study, the researcher was contacted by numerous anti-bullying specialists who also served students in the role of social worker, substance awareness counselor, or school psychologist with interest to participate. Expanding the study to other helping professionals appointed to serve students additionally in the role of the anti-bullying specialists may be able to provide more insight into if findings are or are not generalizable across helping professionals.

Another worthy study would be to examine the relational impact from the students' perspective. This study limited the findings to the experiences school counselors have in respect to the counseling relationship when serving students also in the role of anti-bullying specialist. Understanding how the students experience the counseling relationships would provide insight into how students respond to the counselors' specific additional role as anti-bullying specialist.

This generic qualitative study only begins to fill the gap in the literature in New Jersey K-12 educators counseling relationships with students when serving students in the counselor and anti-bullying specialist role. The results from this study provide the first empirical insight into the experiences of these selected participants' counseling relationships with students.

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## Appendix A

### *Participant Demographics by School Level*

	School level			Total
	Elementary	Middle	High	
<u>Gender</u>				
Female	3 (75%)	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	7 (58.33%)
Male	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	5 (41.67%)
<u>Ethnicity</u>				
Caucasian	3 (75%)	4 (100%)	1 (25%)	8 (66.67%)
African American	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (50%)	2 (16.67%)
African American/Latino	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	1 (8.33%)
Asian American	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (8.33%)
<u>School setting</u>				
Rural	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Suburban	3 (75%)	3 (75%)	2 (50%)	8 (66.67%)
Urban	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)	4 (33.33%)



## Appendix B

### *Word Counts of Participant Transcripts*

Word	Word count	Participant school level			Participant school setting		Participant gender	
		Elementary	Middle	High	Suburban	Urban	Male	Female
Advocate	10	1	8	1	10	0	9	1
Awkward	6	0	6	0	3	3	5	1
Bad guy	5	5	0	0	5	0	0	5
Compromise	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Conflict	30	7	15	8	27	3	14	16
Cop	2	0	0	2	0	2	0	2
Detective	4	0	4	0	2	2	1	3
Disciplinarian	9	0	5	4	4	5	8	1
Disciplinary	8	0	6	2	6	2	6	2
Discipline	11	0	2	9	9	2	9	2
Duties	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
Fact finder	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Facts	28	11	9	8	14	12	11	17
Hat	3	0	2	1	2	1	0	3
In charge	11	2	9	0	2	9	0	11
Investigate	9	1	4	4	8	1	6	3
Investigative	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0
Investigator	2	0	0	2	1	1	1	1
Judge	2	1	1	0	0	2	1	1
Law	53	20	16	17	45	8	24	29
Law enforcement	3	0	3	0	2	1	0	3
Lawyer	4	0	4	0	4	0	1	3
Legal	2	1	1	0	2	0	1	1
Paperwork	13	3	5	5	6	7	4	9
Police	5	2	2	1	4	1	4	1
Rapport	4	3	1	0	4	0	1	3
Separate	4	0	2	2	2	2	4	0
Strained	3	2	1	0	2	1	1	2
Stress	4	4	0	0	3	1	2	2
Student-centered	2	2	0	0	2	0	2	0
Testing	23	7	15	1	14	9	11	12
Trust	15	5	3	7	13	2	9	6