An Exploration of Career Counselors' Perspectives on Advocacy

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Advocacy with and on behalf of clients is a major way in which counselors fulfill their core professional value of promoting social justice. Career counselors have a unique vantage point regarding social justice due to the economic and social nature of work and can offer useful insights. Q methodology is a mixed methodology that was used to capture the perspectives of 19 career counselors regarding the relative importance of advocacy interventions. A two-factor solution was reached that accounted for 60% of the variance in perspectives on advocacy behaviors. One factor, labeled *focus on clients*, emphasized the importance of empowering individual clients and teaching self-advocacy. Another factor, labeled *focus on multiple roles*, highlighted the variety of skills and interventions career counselors use in their work. Interview data revealed that participants desired additional conversations and counselor training concerning advocacy.

Keywords: **social justice, advocacy, career counselors, Q methodology, counselor training**

Promoting social justice is a core value of the counseling profession (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014). C. C. Lee and Hipolito-Delgado (2007) defined social justice as "full participation of all people in the life of a society, particularly those who have been systematically excluded on the basis of race or ethnicity, gender, age, physical or mental disability, education, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or other characteristics" (p. xiv). Given ongoing social and economic disparities in the United States, social justice is a value for which much work remains to be done.

The terms *advocacy* and *social justice* often are used without clear distinction. Advocacy is the active component of a social justice paradigm. It is a direct intervention or action and is the primary expression of social justice work (Fickling & Gonzalez, 2016; Ratts, Lewis, & Toporek, 2010; Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009). Despite the fact that counselors have more tools than ever to help them develop advocacy and social justice competence, such as the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002) and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015), little is known about practitioners' perspectives on the use of advocacy interventions.

One life domain in which social inequity can be vividly observed is that of work. The economic recession that began in 2007 has had a lasting impact on the labor market in the United States. Long-term unemployment is still worse than before the recession (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2016a). Further, in the United States, racial bias appears to impact workers and job seekers, as evidenced in part by the fact that the unemployment rate for Black workers is consistently about double that of White workers (e.g., 4.1% White unemployment and 8.2% Black unemployment as of May 2016; Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2016b). Recent meta-analyses indicate that unemployment has a direct and causal negative impact on mental health, leading to greater rates of depression and suicide (Milner, Page, & LaMontagne, 2013; Paul & Moser,

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2009). Clearly, the worker role is one that carries significant meaning and consequences for people who work or want to work (Blustein, 2006).

The rate at which the work world continues to change has led some to argue that worker adaptability is a key 21st century skill (Niles, Amundson, & Neault, 2010; Savickas, 1997), but encouraging clients to adapt to unjust conditions without also acknowledging the role of unequal social structures is inconsistent with a social justice paradigm (Stead & Perry, 2012). Career counselors, particularly those who work with the long-term unemployed and underemployed, witness the economic and psychological impact of unfair social arrangements on individuals, families and communities. In turn, they have a unique vantage point when it comes to social justice and a significant platform from which to advocate (Chope, 2010; Herr & Niles, 1998; Pope, Briddick, & Wilson, 2013; Pope & Pangelinan, 2010; Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012).

It appears that although career counselors value social justice and are aware of the effects of injustice on clients' lives, they are acting primarily at the individual rather than the systemic level (Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2005; McMahon, Arthur, & Collins, 2008b; Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012; Sampson, Dozier, & Colvin, 2011). Some research has emerged that focuses on practitioners' use of advocacy in counseling practice (Arthur, Collins, Marshall, & McMahon, 2013; Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2009; McMahon et al., 2008b; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010). Overall, this research indicates that advocacy is challenging and multifaceted and is viewed as a central component of good counseling work; however, more research is needed if we are to fully understand how valuing social justice translates to use of advocacy interventions in career counseling practice. This study aims to fill this theory–practice gap by illuminating the perceptions of advocacy behaviors from career counselors as they reflect upon their own counseling work.

Methodology

Through the use of Q methodology, insight into the decisions, motivations and thought processes of participants can be obtained by capturing their subjective points of view. When considering whether to undertake a Q study, Watts and Stenner (2012) encouraged researchers to consider whether revealing what a population thinks about an issue really matters and can make a real difference. Given the ongoing inequality in the labor market, increased attention and energy around matters of social justice in the counseling profession, the lack of knowledge regarding practitioners' points of view on advocacy, and career counselors' proximity to social and economic concerns of clients, the answer for the present study is most certainly yes.

Q methodology is fundamentally different from other quantitative research methodologies in the social sciences. It uses both quantitative and qualitative data to construct narratives of distinct perspectives. The term *Q* was coined to distinguish this methodology from *R*; *Q* measures correlations between persons, whereas *R* measures trait correlations (Brown, 1980). Rather than subjecting a sample of research participants to a collection of measures as in R methodology, Q methodology subjects a sample of items (i.e., the Q sample) to measurement by a collection of individuals through a ranking procedure known as the Q sort (see Figure 1; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Individuals are the variables in Q methodology, and factor analysis is used to reduce the number of points of view into a smaller number of shared perspectives. Then interviews are conducted to allow participants to provide additional data regarding their rankings of the Q sample items. In this study, career counselors were asked to sort a set of advocacy behaviors according to how important they were to their everyday practice of career counseling. Importance to practice was used as the measure

of psychological significance since career counselors' perspectives on advocacy interventions were of interest, rather than self-reported frequency or competence, for example.

Q Sample

The Q sample can be considered the instrumentation in Q methodology. The Q sample is a subset of statements drawn from the concourse of communication, which is defined as the entire population of statements about any given topic (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). The goal when creating the Q sample is to provide a comprehensive but manageable representation of the concourse from which it is taken. For this study, the concourse was that of counselor advocacy behaviors.

The Q sampling approach used for this study was indirect, naturalistic and structured-inductive. Researchers should draw their Q sample from a population of 100 to 300 statements (Webler, Danielson, & Tuler, 2009). For this study, I compiled a list of 180 counselor social justice and advocacy behaviors from a variety of sources including the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis et al., 2002), the Social Justice Advocacy Scale (SJAS; Dean, 2009), the National Career Development Association (NCDA) Minimum Competencies (2009), the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Standards (2009), and key articles in counseling scholarly and trade publications.

Consistent with a structured-inductive sampling strategy, these 180 statements were analyzed to identify categories representing different kinds of advocacy behaviors. By removing duplicates and those items that were more aligned with awareness, knowledge or skill rather than behavior, I was able to narrow the list from 180 to 43 statements. These statements were sorted into five domains that were aligned with the four scales of the SJAS (Dean, 2009) and a fifth added domain. The final domains were: Client Empowerment, Collaborative Action, Community Advocacy, Social/Political Advocacy, and Advocacy with Other Professionals. Aligning the Q sample with existing domains was appropriate since advocacy had been previously operationalized in the counseling literature.

Expert reviewers were used to check for researcher bias in the construction of the Q sample, including the addition of the fifth advocacy domain. Three expert reviewers who were faculty members and published on the topic of social justice in career counseling were asked to review the potential Q sample for breadth, coverage, omissions, clarity of phrasing and the appropriateness of the five domains of advocacy. Two agreed to participate and offered their feedback via a Qualtrics survey, leading to a refined Q sample of 25 counselor advocacy behaviors (see Table 1). Five statements were retained in each of the five domains. Finally, the Q sample and Q sorting procedure were piloted with two career counselors, leading to changes in instructions but not in the Q sample itself. Pilot data were not used in the final analysis.

Participants

In Q methodology, participant sampling should be theoretical and include the intentional selection of participants who are likely to have an opinion about the topic of interest (McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Watts & Stenner, 2012). It also is important to invite participants who represent a range of viewpoints and who are demographically diverse. For the current study, the following criteria were required for participant inclusion: (a) holds a master's degree or higher in counseling and (b) has worked as a *career counselor* for at least one year full-time in the past two years. For this study, career counselor was defined as having career- or work-related issues as the primary focus of counseling in at least half of the counselor's case load. Regarding the number of participants in a Q study, emphasis is placed on having enough participants to establish the existence of particular viewpoints, not simply having a large sample since generalizability is not a goal of Q methodology (Brown, 1980). In Q

methodology, it also is important to have fewer participants than Q sample items (Watts & Stenner, 2012; Webler et al., 2009).

Participants were recruited by theoretical sampling of my professional network of practitioners, and one participant was recruited through snowball sampling. Nineteen career counselors participated in the present study from six states in the Southeast, West and Midwest regions of the United States. The participant sample was 68% female ($n = 13$) and 32% male ($n = 6$); the sample was 84% White and included two Black participants and one multi-racial participant. One participant was an immigrant to the United States and was a non-native English speaker. The participant sample was 95% heterosexual with one participant identifying as gay. Sixty-three percent of participants worked in four-year institutions of higher education and one worked in a community college. Thirty-two percent ($n = 6$) provided career counseling in non-profit agencies. The average age was 43 ($SD = 12$) and the average number of years of post-master's counseling experience was eight ($SD = 7$); ages ranged from 28 to 66, and years of post-master's experience ranged from one and a half to 31 years.

Q Sorting Procedure

The Q sort is a method of data collection in which participants rank the Q sample statements according to a condition of instruction along a forced quasi-normal distribution (see Figure 1). There is no time limit to the sorting task and participants are able to move the statements around the distribution until they are satisfied with their final configuration. The function of the forced distribution is to encourage active decision making and comparison of the Q sample items to one another (Brown, 1980).

Figure 1

Sample Q Sort Distribution
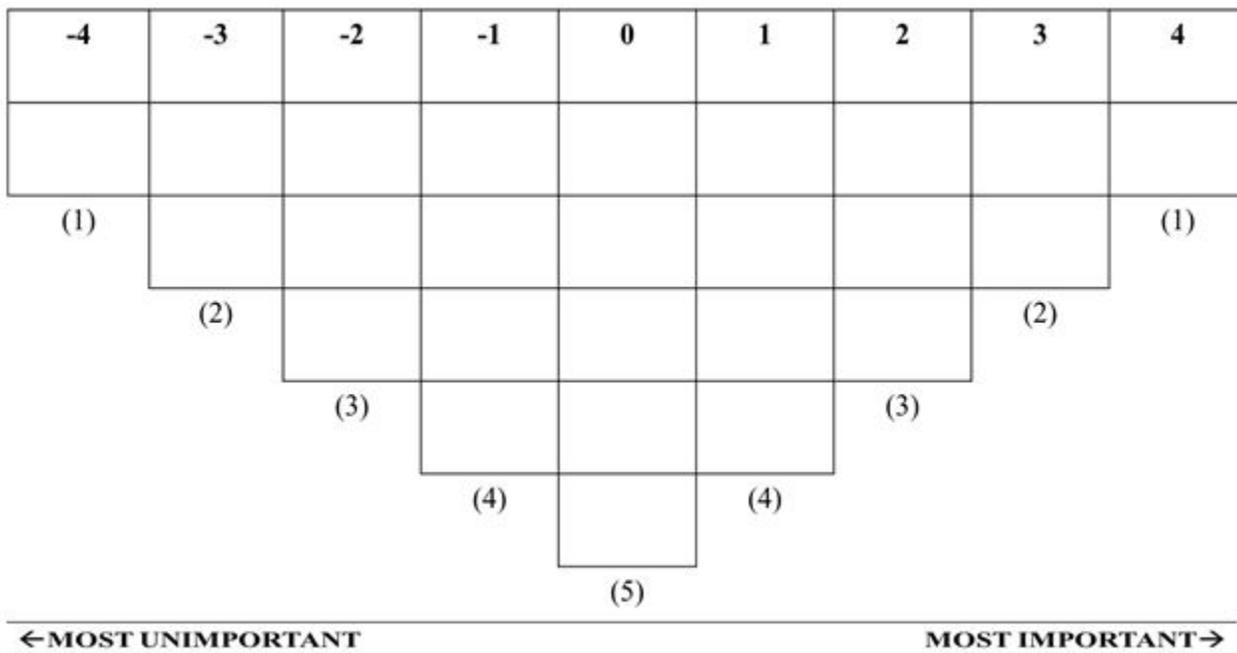
The condition of instruction for this study was, "Sort the following counselor advocacy behaviors according to how important or unimportant they are to your career counseling work." The two poles of the distribution were *most important* and *most unimportant*. Poles range from *most* to *most* so that the ends of the distribution represent the areas that hold the greatest degree of psychological significance to the participant, and the middle of the distribution represents items that hold relatively little meaning or are more neutral in importance (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

The Q sorts for this study were conducted both in person and via phone or video chat (i.e., Google Hangouts, Skype). Once informed consent was obtained, I facilitated the Q sorting procedure by reading the condition of instruction, observing the sorting process, and conducting the post-sort interview. Once each participant felt satisfied with his or her sort, the distribution of statements was recorded onto a response sheet for later data entry.

Post-Sort Interview
Immediately following the Q sort, I conducted a semistructured interview with each participant in order to gain a greater understanding of the meaning of the items and their placement, as well as his or her broader understanding of the topic at hand (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The information gathered during the interview is used when interpreting the final emergent factors. Items in the middle of the distribution are not neglected and are specifically asked about during the post-sort interview so that the researcher can gain an understanding of the entire Q sort for each participant. Although the interview data are crucial to a complete and rigorous factor interpretation and should be conducted with every participant in every Q study, the data analysis process is guided by the quantitative criteria for factor analysis and factor extraction. The qualitative interview data, as well as the demographic data, are meant to help the researcher better understand the results of the quantitative analysis.

Data Analysis
Data were entered into the PQMethod program (Schmolck, 2014) and Pearson product moment correlations were calculated for each set of Q sorts. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed that all sorts (i.e., all participants) were positively correlated with one another, some of them significantly so. This indicated a high degree of consensus among the participants regarding the role of advocacy in career counseling, which was further explored through factor analysis.

I used centroid factor analysis and Watts and Stenner's (2012) recommendation of beginning by extracting one factor for every six Q sorts. Centroid factor analysis is the method of choice among Q methodologists because it allows for a fuller exploration of the data than a principal components analysis (McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Next, I calculated the significance level at $p < .01$, which was .516 for this 25-item Q sample.

The unrotated factor matrix revealed two factors with Eigenvalues near or above the commonly accepted cutoff of 1 according to the Kaiser-Guttman rule (Kaiser, 1970). Brown (1978) argued that although Eigenvalues often indicate factor strength or importance, they should not solely guide factor extraction in Q methodology since "the significance of Q factors is not defined objectively (i.e., statistically), but theoretically in terms of the social-psychological situation to which the emergent factors are functionally related" (p. 118). Since there currently is little empirical evidence of differing perspectives on advocacy among career counselors, two factors were retained for rotation.

In order to gain another perspective on the data, I used the Varimax procedure. I flagged those sorts that loaded significantly (i.e., at or above 0.516) onto only one factor after rotation. Four

participants (2, 8, 9 and 17) loaded significantly onto both rotated factors and were therefore dropped from the study and excluded from further analysis (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Two rotated factors were retained, which accounted for 60% of the variance in perspectives on advocacy behaviors. Fifteen of the original 19 participants were retained in this factor solution.

Q methodology uses only orthogonal rotation techniques, meaning that all factors are zero-correlated. Even so, it is possible for factors to be significantly correlated but still justify retaining separate factors (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The two factors in this study are correlated at 0.71. This correlation indicates that the perspectives expressed by the two factor arrays share a point of view but are still distinguishable and worthy of exploration as long as the general degree of consensus is kept in mind (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Constructing Factor Arrays

After the two rotated factors were identified, factor arrays were constructed in PQMethod. A factor array is a composite Q sort and the best possible estimate of the factor's viewpoint using the 25 Q sample items. First, a factor weight was calculated for each of the 15 Q sorts that loaded onto a factor. Next, normalized factor scores (z scores) were calculated for each statement on each factor, which were finally converted into factor arrays (see Table 1). In Q methodology, unlike traditional factor analysis, attention is focused more on factor scores than factor loadings. Since factor scores are based on weighted averages, Q sorts with higher factor loadings contribute proportionally more to the final factor score for each item in a factor than those with relatively low factor loadings. Finally, factors were named by examining the distinguishing statements and interview data of participants that loaded onto the respective factors. Factor one was labeled *focus on clients* and factor two was labeled *focus on multiple roles*.

Factor Characteristics

Factor one was labeled *focus on clients* and accounted for 32% of the variance in perspectives on advocacy behaviors. It included nine participants. The demographic breakdown on this factor was: six females, three males; eight White individuals and one person who identified as multi-racial. The average age on this factor was about 51 (*SD* = 10.33), ranging from 37 to 66. Persons on this factor had on average 11 years of post-master's counseling experience (*SD* = 8.6), ranging from one and a half to 31 years. Fifty-six percent of participants on this factor worked in 4-year colleges or universities, 33% in non-profit agencies, and one person worked at a community college.

Factor two was labeled *focus on multiple roles* and accounted for 28% of the variance in career counselors' perspectives on advocacy behaviors. It included six participants. Five participants on this factor identified as female and one identified as male. Five persons were White; one was Black. The average age of participants on this factor was almost 35 (*SD* = 6.79), ranging from 29 to 48, and they had an average of just over seven years of post-master's experience (*SD* = 3.76), ranging from three and a half to 14 years. Four worked in higher education, and two worked in non-profit settings.

Factor Interpretation

In the factor interpretation phase of data analysis, the researcher constructs a narrative for each factor by incorporating post-sort interview data with the factor arrays to communicate the rich point of view of each factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Each participant's interview was considered only in conjunction with the other participants on the factor on which they loaded. I read post-sort interview transcripts, looking for shared perspectives and meaning, in order to understand each factor array and enrich each factor beyond the statements of the Q sample. Thus, the results are reported below

Table 1

Q Sample Statements, Factor Scores and Q Sort Values

No	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2	
		Factor Score	QSV	Factor Score	QSV
1	Question intervention practices that appear inappropriate.	0.09	1	0.54	1
2	Seek feedback regarding others' perceptions of my advocacy efforts.	-0.85	-2	-0.75	-1
3	Serve as a mediator between clients and institutions.	-0.47	-1	-1.05	-2
4	Express views on proposed bills that will impact clients.	-0.97	-2	-1.96	-4
5	Maintain open dialogue to ensure that advocacy efforts are consistent with group goals.	-0.19	0	-0.05	0
6	Encourage clients to research the laws and policies that apply to them.	-0.31	0	0.15	0
7	Collect data to show the need for change in institutions.	-0.67	-2	-0.75	-2
8	Educate other professionals about the unique needs of my clients.	0.87	1	0.86	2
9	Help clients develop needed skills.	1.67	3	0.42	1
10	Assist clients in carrying out action plans.	-1.31	3	1.06	2
11	Help clients overcome internalized negative stereotypes.	1.02	2	0.89	2
12	Conduct assessments that are inclusive of community members' perspectives.	-1.31	-3	0.5	1
13	With allies, prepare convincing rationales for social change.	-0.35	-1	-1.36	-3
14	Identify strengths and resources of clients.	2.17	4	1.62	3
15	Get out of the office to educate people about how and where to get help.	0.58	1	-0.47	-1
16	Teach colleagues to recognize sources of bias within institutions and agencies.	-0.37	-1	-0.37	-1
17	Deal with resistance to change at the community/system level.	-0.43	-1	-0.21	0
18	Collaborate with other professionals who are involved in disseminating public information.	-0.33	0	-0.4	-1
19	Help clients identify the external barriers that affect their development.	1.08	2	1.46	3
20	Use multiple sources of intervention, such as individual counseling, social advocacy and case management.	-0.32	0	1.73	4
21	Train other counselors to develop multicultural knowledge and skills.	0.15	1	0.19	0
22	Work to ensure that clients have access to the resources necessary to meet their needs.	1.03	2	0.85	1
23	Work to change legislation and policy that negatively affects clients.	-1.78	-4	-1.39	-3
24	Ask other counselors to think about what social change is.	-0.25	0	-0.22	0
25	Communicate with my legislators regarding social issues that impact my clients.	-1.45	-3	-1.28	-2

Note. Q sort values are -4 to 4 to correspond with the Q distribution (Figure 1) where 4 is *most important* and -4 is *most unimportant*; QSV = Q Sort Value.

in narrative form, incorporating direct quotes and paraphrased summaries from interview data, but structured around the corresponding factor arrays.

Results

Factor 1: Focus on Clients

For participants on the focus on clients factor, the most important advocacy behavior was to "identify client strengths and resources" (see Table 1). When speaking about this item, participants often discussed teaching clients self-advocacy skills, stating that this is a key way in which career counselors promote social justice. Identifying client strengths and resources was referred to as "the starting point," "the bottom line" and even the very "definition of career counseling." One participant said that counseling is about "empowering our clients or jobseekers, whatever we call them, to do advocacy on their own behalf and to tell their story." In general, persons on this factor were most concerned with empowering individual clients; for example, "I would say, even when we're doing group counseling and family counseling, ultimately it's about helping the person in the one-to-one." Similarly, one participant said, "Instead of fighting for the group in legislation or out in the community, I'm working with each individual to help them better advocate for themselves." Interview data indicated that social justice was a strongly held value for persons on this factor, but they typically emphasized the need for balancing their views on social injustice with their clients' objectives; they wanted to take care not to prioritize their own agendas over those of their clients.

Several participants on this factor perceived items related to legislation or policy change as among the least client-centered behaviors and therefore as the more unimportant advocacy behaviors in their career counseling work. Persons on this factor stated that advocacy at the systems level was neither a strength of theirs nor a preference. A few reported that there are other people in their offices or campuses whose job is to focus on policy or legislative change. There also was a level of skepticism about counselors' power to influence social change. In regard to influencing legislative change in support of clients, one participant said, "I don't think in my lifetime that is going to happen. Maybe someday it will. I'm just thinking about market change right now instead of legislative change."

Interview data revealed that career counselors on this factor thought about advocacy in terms of leadership, both positively and negatively. One person felt that a lack of leadership was a barrier to career counselors doing more advocacy work. Another person indicated that leaders were the ones who publicly called for social change and that this was neither his personality nor approach to making change, preferring instead to act at the micro level. Finally, persons on this factor expressed that conversations about social change or social justice were seen as potentially divisive in their work settings. One White participant said the following:

> There is a reluctance to do social justice work because—and it's mostly White people—people really don't understand what it means, or feel like they don't have a right to do that, or feel like they might be overstepping. Talking about race or anything else, people are really nervous and they don't want to offend or say something that might be wrong, so as a result they just don't engage on that level or on that topic.

Factor 2: Focus on Multiple Roles

One distinguishing feature of the focus on multiple roles factor was the relatively high importance placed on using multiple sources of intervention (see Table 1). Participants described this as being all-encompassing of what a career counselor does and reflective of the multiple roles a career counselor

may hold. One participant said, "You never know what the client is going to come in with," arguing that career counselors have to be open to multiple sources of intervention by necessity. Another participant indicated that she wished she could rely more on multiple sources of intervention but that the specialized nature of her office constricted her ability to do so.

Participants on this factor cited a lack of awareness or skills as a barrier to their implementing more advocacy behaviors. They were quick to identify social justice as a natural concern of career counselors and one that career counselors are well qualified to address due to their ability to remain aware of personal, mental health and career-related concerns simultaneously. One participant said:

> I don't know if the profession of career counseling is really seen as being as great as it is in that most of us have counseling backgrounds and can really tackle the issues of career on a number of different levels.

In talking about the nature of career counseling, another participant said, "Social justice impacts work in so many ways. It would make sense for those external barriers to come into our conversations."

Regarding collaborating with other professionals to prepare convincing rationales for social change, one participant stated that there are already enough rationales for social change; therefore, this advocacy behavior was seen as less important to her. Persons on this factor placed relatively higher importance on valuing feedback on advocacy efforts than did participants on factor one. One participant said she would like to seek feedback more often but had not thought of doing so in a while: "I did this more when I was in graduate school because you are thinking about your thinking all the time. As a practitioner, as long as social justice and advocacy are on my radar, that's good."

Discussion

Neither setting nor gender appeared to differentiate the factors, but age and years of post-master's experience may have been distinguishing variables. Younger individuals and those with fewer years of post-master's experience tended to load onto factor two. Factor one had an average age of 51 compared to 35 for factor two, and the average age for all study participants was 43. It is interesting to note that the four participants who loaded onto both factors and were therefore dropped from analysis had an average of just over two years of post-master's counseling experience versus 11 for factor one and seven for factor two. It is possible that their more recent training regarding advocacy may account for some differences in perspective from those of more experienced counselors.

Participants on factor one (focus on clients) who emphasized the importance of individual clients tended to perceive it as more difficult to have conversations about social justice with their peers or supervisors. In contrast, participants on factor two (focus on multiple roles) were more likely to cite a lack of knowledge or skills regarding their reasons for not engaging in more advocacy behaviors beyond the client level. Factor arrays indicated that factor one participants viewed engaging at the community level as more important, whereas participants on factor two viewed conversations with colleagues and clients about social justice as more important to their work.

The broader view of persons on factor two regarding the career counselor's role and their openness to acknowledging their own lack of awareness or skills may reflect a different kind of socialization around advocacy compared to persons on factor one. Career counselors who graduated from counseling programs prior to the emphasis on multicultural competence in the early 1990s or

before the inclusion of social justice in the literature and CACREP standards in the first decade of the 21st century may have had limited exposure to thinking about contextual or social factors that impact client wellness. Persons on both factors, however, expressed interest in social justice and felt that the vast majority of advocacy behaviors were important.

In post-sort interviews, participants from both factors described a gradual shift in emphasis from a focus on the individual on the right hand (most important) side of the Q sort distribution to an emphasis on legislation on the left hand (most unimportant) side. For example, the statement *identify strengths and resources of clients* was one of the most important behaviors for nearly every participant. Likewise, the statement *work to change legislation and policy that negatively affects clients* was ranked among the most unimportant advocacy behaviors for both factors. Interestingly, the statement *encourage clients to research the laws and policies that apply to them* was a consensus statement with a Q sort value of 0, or the very middle of the distribution. Since this advocacy behavior is both client focused and presumably would provide clients with important self-advocacy skills, it is interesting that it was ranked lower than other items related to client self-advocacy. Some participants indicated that they considered this item a "passive" counselor behavior in that they might encourage clients to research laws but could not or would not follow up with clients on this task. One participant said she would like to encourage clients to research laws that apply to them but shared that she would first need to learn more about the laws that impact her clients in order to feel effective in using this intervention.

Participants were asked directly about potential barriers to advocacy and potential strengths of career counselors in promoting social justice. Responses are discussed below. The questions about strengths and barriers in the post-sort interview did not reference Q sample items, so participant responses are reported together below.

Barriers to Promoting Social Justice

In the post-sort interviews, lack of time was mentioned by nearly every participant as a barrier to implementing more advocacy in career counseling, and it often came in the form of little institutional support for engaging in advocacy. For example, participants indicated that while their supervisors would not stop them from doing advocacy work, they would not provide material support (e.g., time off, reduced case load) to do so. This finding is consistent with other literature that suggests that career counselors report a lack of institutional support for engaging in advocacy (Arthur et al., 2009).

Another major barrier to advocacy was a lack of skill or confidence in one's ability as an advocate. Advocacy at the social/political level requires a unique set of skills (M. A. Lee, Smith, & Henry, 2013), which practitioners in the present study may or may not have learned during their counseling training. Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins, and Mason (2009) reviewed 54 syllabi from required multicultural courses in American Psychological Association (APA)- and CACREP-accredited programs and found that awareness and knowledge tended to be emphasized more than skill building or application of social justice advocacy. This seems to have been reflected in the responses from many participants in the present study.

Participants on both factors indicated that they held some negative associations to advocacy work, calling it "flag waving" or "yelling and screaming" about inequality or social issues. They expressed some concern about how they might be perceived by their peers if they were to engage in advocacy; however, involvement in this study seemed to provide participants with a new understanding of advocacy as something that happens at the individual as well as at the social level. Participants

appeared to finish the data collection sessions with a more positive understanding of what advocacy is and could be.

Strengths of Career Counselors in Promoting Social Justice
In addition to discussing barriers to advocacy, participants were asked directly about strengths of career counselors in promoting social justice and were able to identify many. First and foremost, participants saw the ability to develop one-on-one relationships with clients as a strength. One participant nicely captured the essence of all responses in this area by stating, "The key thing is our work one-on-one with an individual to say that even though you're in a bad place, you have strengths, you have resources, and you have value." Participants indicated that social change happens through a process of empowering clients, instilling hope and seeing diversity as a strength of a client's career identity. The ability to develop strong counseling relationships was attributed partially to participants' counseling training and identity, as well as to their exposure to a broad range of client concerns due to the inseparable nature of work from all other aspects of clients' lives (Herr & Niles, 1998; Tang, 2003).

Career counselors in this study served diverse populations and highly valued doing so. These participants described multicultural counseling skills and experience as central to competent career counseling and to advocacy. They felt that they possessed and valued multicultural competence, which bodes well for their potential to engage in competent and ethical advocacy work with additional training, experience and supervision (Crook, Stenger, & Gesselman, 2015; Vespia, Fitzpatrick, Fouad, Kantamneni, & Chen, 2010).

Finally, participants felt that career counseling is seen as more accessible than mental health counseling to some clients, giving career counselors unique insight into clients' social and personal worlds. Participants reported having a broad perspective on their clients' lives and therefore unique opportunities to advocate for social justice. Relatedly, participants noted that the more concrete and tangible nature of career counseling and its outcomes (e.g., employment) may lead policymakers to be interested in hearing career counselors' perspectives on social issues related to work. One participant noted that "there's a huge conversation to be had around work and social justice" and that career counselors' key strength "is empowering clients and the broader community to understand the role of work."

Implications for Career Counselors, Counselor Educators, and Supervisors
Nearly all participants described the sorting process as thought provoking and indicated that social justice and advocacy were topics they appreciated the opportunity to think more about. There was a strong desire among some practitioners in this study to talk more openly with colleagues about social justice and its connection to career counseling, but a lingering hesitation as well. Therefore, one implication of the present study is that practitioners should begin to engage in discussions about this topic with colleagues and leaders in the profession. If there is a shared value for advocacy beyond the individual level, but time and skills are perceived as barriers, perhaps a larger conversation about the role of career counselors is timely. Career counselors may benefit from finding like-minded colleagues with whom to talk about social justice and advocacy. Support from peers may help practitioners strategize ways to question or challenge coworkers who may be practicing career counseling in ways that hinder social justice.

To move toward greater self-awareness and ethical advocacy, practitioners and career counseling leaders must ask themselves critical and self-reflexive questions about their roles and contributions in promoting social justice (McIlveen & Patton, 2006; Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012). Some authors have

indicated there is an inherent tension in considering a social justice perspective and that starting such conversations can even lead to more questions than answers (Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012; Stead & Perry, 2012). Counselors should turn their communication skills and tolerance for ambiguity inward and toward one another in order to invite open and honest conversations about their role in promoting social justice for clients and communities. The participants in this study seem eager to do so, though leadership may be required to get the process started in a constructive and meaningful way.

Counselor educators and supervisors can provide counselors-in-training increased experience with systemic-level advocacy by integrating the ACA Advocacy Competencies and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies into all core coursework. Even though broaching issues of social justice has been reported as challenging and potentially risky, counselor educators should integrate such frameworks and competencies in active and experiential ways (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; M. A. Lee et al., 2013; Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009; Manis, 2012). Singh and colleagues (2010) found that even self-identified social justice advocates struggled at times with initiating difficult conversations with colleagues; they argued that programs should do more to help counselors-in-training develop skills "to anticipate and address the inevitable interpersonal challenges inherent in advocacy work" (p. 141). Skills in leadership, teamwork and providing constructive feedback might be beneficial to prepare future counselors for addressing injustice. Furthermore, Crook and colleagues (2015) found that advocacy training via coursework or workshops is associated with higher levels of perceived advocacy competence among school counselors, lending more support in favor of multi-level training opportunities.

Limitations

The current study is one initial step in a much-needed body of research regarding advocacy practice in career counseling. It did not measure actual counselor engagement in advocacy, which is important to fully understand the current state of advocacy practice; rather, it measured perceived relative importance of advocacy behaviors. Researcher subjectivity may be considered a limitation of this study, as researcher decisions influenced the construction of the Q sample, the factor analysis and the interpretation of the emergent factors. By integrating feedback from two expert reviewers during construction of the Q sample, I minimized the potential for bias at the design stage. Factor interpretation is open to the researcher's unique lens and also may be considered a limitation, but if it is done well, interpretation in Q methodology should be constrained by the factor array and interview data. Although generalizability is not a goal of Q methodology, the sample size in this study is small and therefore limits the scope of the findings.

Suggestions for Future Research and Conclusion

Advocacy is central to career counseling's relevance in the 21st century (Arthur et al., 2009; Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; McMahon, Arthur, & Collins, 2008a), yet due to the complexity and personal nature of this work, more research is required if we are to engage in advocacy competently, ethically and effectively. There appears to be interest among career counselors in gaining additional skills and knowledge regarding advocacy, so future research could include analyzing the effects of a training curriculum on perceptions of and engagement with advocacy. Outcome research could also be beneficial to understand whether career counselors who engage in high levels of advocacy report different client outcomes than those who do not. Finally, research with directors of career counseling departments could be helpful to understand what, if any, changes to career counselors' roles are possible if career counselors are interested in doing more advocacy work. Understanding the perspectives of these leaders could help further the conversation regarding the ideals of social justice and the reality of expectations and demands faced by career counseling offices and agencies.

This research study is among the first to capture U.S. career counselors' perspectives on a range of advocacy behaviors rather than attitudes about social justice in general. It adds empirical support to the notion that additional conversations and training around advocacy are wanted and needed among practicing career counselors. Stead (2013) wrote that knowledge becomes accepted through discourse; it is hoped that the knowledge this study produces will add to the social justice discourse in career counseling and move the profession toward a more integrated understanding of how career counselors view the advocate role and how they can work toward making social justice a reality.

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