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School Counselor Candidates' Shared Beliefs and Experiences Regarding the Rural Setting

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Abstract

Students in rural schools face multiple challenges such as lower funding, shrinking career opportunities, and lower educational attainment. People in rural areas are marginalized through negative perceptions and stereotypes in a form of prejudice called *ruralism*. School counselors must be trained to recognize biases about people from rural areas and to understand the unique challenges present in rural areas so that they address the challenges in the lives of rural school students. The authors present the findings of a qualitative study on the beliefs and lived experiences of school counselor candidates regarding the rural school context. The authors suggest ways school counseling education programs can better prepare students for their work in rural areas.

Keywords: school counseling, rural, counselor education

Over the last 50 years, researchers have addressed the needs of urban and suburban populations in the United States, while research related to rural communities has remained slim in comparison (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005; Truscott & Truscott, 2005). Definitions of rural vary within the United States; however, many definitions focus on the area population. The U. S. Census Bureau (2010) defined rural as not being a densely settled territory. Other government agencies define rural as communities that include the combination of open countryside and county populations of fewer than 2,500 people (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2013). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 19.3% of the total population reside in rural communities. Research indicates that rural communities struggle with significant economic difficulties, decreases of family agricultural commerce, low-paying jobs, and a lack of professional job opportunities (Budge, 2006; Kellogg Foundation, 2005; Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012). These challenges consequently affect the rural school environment and academic experience of students. In addition, increasing poverty, changing demographics, low high school graduation rates and college attendance rates, outward migration, sometimes referred to as rural brain drain, or the tendency of the highly educated to leave rural areas, as well as inequitable educational preparation and policies currently affect students in rural communities (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Cohn & Hastings, 2013; Griffin, Hutchins, & Meece, 2011; McIlveen, Morgan, & Bimrose, 2012; Sherman & Sage, 2011).

Rural school systems have more difficulty receiving state and federal funding (i.e., Title 1) when compared to their urban and suburban counterparts. Some scholars contend that because of the complexity of formulas for Title 1 funds, rural school systems have more difficulty receiving federal funding when compared to large urban schools (Ayers, 2011). With almost 34% of the nation's elementary and secondary student population attending schools in small towns and rural locales (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2006) it becomes imperative that educators are aware of the needs of rural residents (Strange et al., 2012). Understanding rural communities can be valuable in helping educators including school counselors address the sometimes negative rural stereotypes that may influence their role in rural communities. Counselor educators need to consider the importance for including in school counselor training information about rural schools and communities so that school counselor candidates are prepared to face the challenges in the rural areas (Breen & Drew, 2012). A more detailed description of rural challenges follows.

Several factors characterize rural challenges. The average per-capita income for rural residents was at $33,247, while the average per-capita income for all Americans in 2011 was $41,560 (USDA, 2013). Recently reported poverty rates for rural residents is 18.3%, in comparison to the national poverty rate of 15.9% (USDA, 2013). Research indicates that 16.9% of rural residents do not complete high school, while nationally the high school completion rate is 14.6% (USDA, 2013). The rural student population is both culturally diverse and economically disadvantaged (Davis, 2009; O'Connell, Atlas, Saunders, & Philbrick, 2010). The 2010 Census detailed that approximately 78% of the population in rural and small town communities is White and non-Hispanic, compared to 64% of the population in the nation as a whole, with Latino populations showing a trend for growth in rural populations over the last 10 years (Housing Assistance Council, 2010). Further, organizations such as the Rural School and Community Trust noted that

rural populations are becoming more diverse with their research pointing to national student populations of color at 25.8 % in rural schools (Strange et al., 2012). Research on educational factors state by state leads the authors to contend that "growth in rural school enrollment is outpacing non-rural enrollment growth in the United States, and rural schools are becoming more complex with increasing rates of poverty, diversity, and special needs students" (Strange, et al., 2012, p. 21).

The Rural School Counselor

Just as rural communities face challenges economically, rural school counselors face distinctive professional challenges (Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009). Research indicates that rural school counselors need to utilize specific counseling strategies and take on unique roles to support their students' needs (Grimes, Haskins, & Paisley, 2013). In small communities, they are often involved in multiple overlapping relationships that include home visits, parent meetings, and other supportive roles (Hann-Morrison, 2011; Hines, 2002). Current literature indicates that rural school counselors must use skills specifically suited to the challenges in these communities such as depression (Listug-Lunde, Vogeltanz-Holm, & Collins, 2013), college preparation (Guiffrida, 2008), career development (Hutchins & Akos, 2013; McIlveen et al., 2012), substance abuse (Ruiz, Stevens, McKnight, Godley, & Shane, 2005), obesity (Choi, 2012), and psychological issues (Evans, Radunovich, Cornette, Wiens, & Roy, 2008; Morsette, Swaney, Stolle, Schuldberg, van den Pol, & Young, 2009). Unlike school counselors in more populated urban and suburban areas, rural school counselors often are the only mental health professionals in their setting trained to respond to these challenges, making the collaboration and consultation that counselors depend on difficult or impossible (Grimes et al., 2013; Hines, 2002).

Multicultural and advocacy competencies, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model, and ethics codes indicate that school counselors are required to address the challenges of their students (American Counseling Association, 2000, 2014; ASCA, 2012; Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002;. Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). These standards encourage counselors to address issues of inequity and marginalization (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Specifically, current literature calls school counselors to address diversity challenges and oppressive structures by coordinating, collaborating, and advocating (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Cuervo, 2012; Grimes et al., 2013; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Mitcham-Smith, 2007; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). School counselors must understand marginalization in rural areas to be able to advocate for students there.

Perceptions of Rural Communities

While the current literature illuminates the needs of rural students and calls school counselors to address these unique needs through comprehensive school counseling programs and advocacy methods (ASCA, 2012; Grimes et al., 2013), existing research is limited in regards to investigating the views, beliefs, and perceptions of rural populations (Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Kellogg Foundation, 2001, 2005; Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milder, Leitner, & Skelton, 2006). In a study that included legislators, The Kellogg

Foundation (2005) found that participants perceive that rural communities are impoverished; lack jobs, and have a failed agricultural infrastructure. College students' perceptions of rural communities are consistent with The Kellogg Foundation's (2005) findings, indicating that rural residents are viewed as farmers, impoverished, and embodying negative rural stereotypes (Glaze, Edgar, Rhoades-Buck, & Rutherford, 2013). Glaze et al. (2013) also indicated that participants viewed rural populations as having strong family and community bonds. Additional research related to perceptions of rural school communities indicated that teachers, counselors, psychologists, social workers, and administrators perceive rural schools as lacking support services for prevention, mentoring, and advancement (Lee, Lohmeier, Niileksela, & Oeth, 2009). However, research also indicates that rural schools provide adequate consultation and instructional services (Lee et al., 2009). Some researchers contend that extreme negative stereotyping of rural residents as backward, lazy, and uneducated constitutes a form of prejudice referred to as *ruralism* (Bassett, 2003). While the effects of ruralism on rural dwellers leads to their being seen as less capable than their urban counterparts, perhaps more impacting, according to Bassett (2003), is the lack of awareness that surrounds this form of prejudice. The author argues that the impact of ruralism is similar to that of other forms of discrimination and that greater awareness of this form of prejudice is needed (Bassett, 2003, p. 322).

The current research, while useful in understanding generalized perceptions, is not specific to the school counselor experience. These perceptions may be of importance as counselor educators identify relevant curriculum and address concerns related to multicultural competence, issues of oppression and privilege, and social justice (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008). The purpose of this research study is to better understand school counseling candidates' experiences of the phenomenon of rural life, including the individuals there and the rural setting. Understanding what school counselor candidates believe as a result of their rural experiences can inform school counselor education programs about the importance of addressing these issues as a part of their curriculum. The research question guiding this study is as follows: What characterizes the experiences and perceptions of life in rural areas according to school counselor candidates in a school counseling graduate program?

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Of the qualitative research methods, phenomenology is the best choice when it is important to understand the shared beliefs or experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Understanding these common experiences is important so that policies or practices can be developed or so that a deeper understanding of the phenomena is discovered (Creswell, 2007). In phenomenology, the researcher collects data through in-depth and multiple interviews from individuals who have a shared experience, analyzes the data for meanings, and then writes a composite description that presents the common experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007).

Participants and Sampling

To find participants for this study, the first author used purposeful sampling by introducing the study to school counselor candidates at a university. The university is

located in the Southeastern United States in a rural area; however, the majority of the students who attend the university are from a large metropolitan area located in the same state. The program is accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and does not focus on rural studies as a part of its curriculum. Of note, none of the students who chose to participate were students of the primary researcher.

Eight students chose to participate. The participants shared the lived experience of being a graduate student in a school counseling program with experiences of and ideas about life in rural areas. Of the eight participants, seven were female, one was male; five were Black, and three were White; five reported that they had knowledge of rural areas but had not lived there, and three considered themselves rural residents. Each participant entered the study having completed the program's multicultural counseling course.

Development of Interview Questions

The first author entered into the dialogue with participants using an in-depth interview protocol (Creswell, 2007, p. 131), adapted as discussion occurred. The interview questions emerged from a selected review of the literature and focused on the factors highlighted there: rural SES challenges for families and schools, career opportunities, community demographics, and possible marginalization of residents. The categories of questions fell into the following topics: personal information and background, community of origin information, school counseling and multiculturalism, beliefs about rural places and people, ideas about rural marginalization.

Interview and Data Management Procedures

Before conducting interviews, the first author attempted to set aside her beliefs about rural life so that her personal experiences did not obscure her focus on the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). The first author shared with the research team that she grew up in a rural area, values rural life, and is an advocate for students in rural areas. Throughout the study, the team considered that the research was positioned in the first author's stance (Creswell, 2007). Next, interviews were conducted on the university campus where the participants were students. Participants fit the criteria for the study if they were students in a school counseling program with beliefs and experiences regarding rural areas. During interviews, the first author explained the study and invited participants to ask questions about the informed consent forms. Interviews were audio recorded and lasted about one hour each. Pseudonyms were used to provide confidentiality for participants. A transcriptionist transcribed the recorded interviews saved under the pseudonyms. Until the research was finalized, audio files of the interviews were saved on the first author's personal computer. All copies of the interviews have been destroyed since the study has reached its end.

Data Analysis

The data analysis occurred through the following steps: audio recorded interviews were transcribed; from the transcripts, the researcher found statements about how the individuals experienced the topic; lists of significant statements were created; a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements was created; significant statements were

grouped into units of information or themes (Creswell, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012). Data analysis occurred within a research team to be discussed in the following section.

Trustworthiness. Since in qualitative research the interviewer is the research instrument (Creswell, 2007), it is important to build into the study measures to establish the trustworthiness of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that the factors of trustworthiness in qualitative studies are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility. To build credibility into this study, member checks and a peer research team were employed. The first author sent transcripts of the interviews to the participants and asked that they read and give feedback. Participants agreed that the transcripts were accurate. To further strengthen the study, themes identified during the analysis steps were shared with participants so that they could judge the accuracy of the findings. Each participant responded that the themes resonated with his or her experiences. The research team consisted of the first author, a counselor educator, and two other members, one a counselor educator and the other a graduate student in the clinical counseling program. The research team assisted in the analysis of themes in a process called intercoder agreement after the transcription of interviews. As noted, the first author shared her assumptions and biases about the rural setting with the research team before conducting interviews as one step in bracketing her biases (Creswell, 2007). The first author's biases center around her positive views about rural areas because she considers herself rural by origin. She also recognizes her belief that people living in rural areas and their unique needs are overlooked in the multicultural counseling literature.

Transferability and dependability. For the results to transfer to others, the first author provided detailed descriptions and verbatim examples from the interviews. Readers can draw conclusions that may be transferable to other settings. Unlike quantitative research, findings from qualitative research cannot be generalized to other populations. The primary researcher kept a detailed audit trail of each step of the research process to strengthen the dependability of the study.

Confirmability. One of the measures Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested for confirmability of qualitative studies is the use of the reflexive journal. Throughout the study, the first author kept personal notes in which she made entries about methodological decisions and reflected upon her values, biases, and assumptions. The methods described led the research team to identify the following themes as representative of their participants' beliefs and perceptions of life in rural areas: limited or life-enriched ideas; personal or program-related experiences; and stereotyped or culturally aware perceptions. These themes are presented next.

Themes

Theme 1: Ideas, Limited or Life-Enriched

School counselor candidates expressed ideas both limited and life-enriched about the rural setting, including the diversity and socioeconomics represented. Many of the participants defined the word *rural* as meaning a place that is small, distant from a city, and with fewer resources such as retail and other professional venues. Stacy's definition captures that of several. "When I think of rural, I think of smaller than a suburban area. . . not much traffic. . . not much stores around and things kind of far away from each other."

Daisy said, "it's a small community with its own culture"; Amber said rural is mostly "less technical." Jen said, "it's a place where everybody knows everybody." Rebecca, a lifelong rural inhabitant before college, defined rural differently and referred to the people in her definition.

> The first thing that comes to my mind when defining rural is resourcelessness . . . rich in history and tradition . . . tight-knit community because the numbers are small and pretty much everybody's family, so the people pull together when you need it . . . [but] there's not the resources, the knowledge, that's needed . . .

Rebecca's rural definition based on resourcelessness predicts the split between the knowledge participants held about socioeconomics and diversity in rural areas. Five of the participants not from a rural background explained that they would expect to find some socioeconomic challenges for rural community members based on fewer career opportunities but that overall, they were not aware of SES struggles in rural areas. The participants from rural areas, Rebecca, Daisy, and Amber, each discussed at length the poverty and financial divide they witnessed in their rural areas growing up. Daisy explained that SES in her rural school was difficult for her. "I know a lot about [rural economic struggle]. . . I found that the ones who didn't have a lot of money were kind of isolated." Rebecca explained the ripple effect on business due to perceived quality of the schools. "One of the things that when people bring business in, they think about they're gonna have to bring employees in who will have children. So they suffer as far as bringing industry in because they don't want their kids to go to these schools . . . "

In terms of rural diversity, eight participants, Jen, Bailey, Marcus, Jessica, and Stacy, believed that rural areas are less diverse than urban and suburban areas. Jen, who described her background as predominately urban, discussed the lack of diversity. "Because of the simple fact that there is a lack of diversity there, diversity should be everywhere, diversity is a good thing, and you don't have it there, it's a bad thing." Amber, a lifelong rural community member before college, told a different story of the racial and cultural diversity in her former community:

> You have this one particular group in one area, and they kind of believe in one thing. And another particular group that lives in another area, and they're both either African American or Hispanic, or Caucasian, and they all value very different things. . . I think there's great diversity in rural areas and sometimes people forget that because it's so small.

Theme 2: Experiences, Personal or Program-Related

School counselor candidates' responses to questions about rural residents and places showed varying experiences with the importance of *place* in multiculturalism and how the rural place might affect needed school counseling skills. First, participants' responses shared the greatest commonalities around their personal definition of multiculturalism. Common words used in their definitions included *understanding, acceptance, sensitivity, being able to work with people different from you*. Jen added that knowing the worldview of students is necessary as a multiculturally competent counselor; Jessica extended the definition and added the importance of accepting people's differences as individuals and not using the same skills with every person [client/student]. Two participants, Jen and Bailey, stressed that multiculturalism is so much more than

race and a Black/White issue. Interestingly, three participants used *place* in their personal definition of multiculturalism. Marcus stated that counselors need to know where clients come from originally; Daisy added that the place a person comes from is part of multiculturalism; Jen explained that where you grew up is a part of multiculturalism. Five of the participants did not include any aspects of place in their discussion of multiculturalism.

Experiences surrounding the program-related counseling skills needed in rural areas contained shared commonalities. Bailey talked about the potential for problems with dual relationships; Jen stressed the understanding of generations of families and the need to be flexible when searching for student resources in rural areas. Daisy explained the skill of "doing their homework to know the different cultures there." Amber stressed the need to teach faculty about the effects of rural factors on their students. Rebecca, a strong speaker about generational cycles, explained that school counselors must understand that first-generation college students need extra support to break the cycle of underachievement. Stacy recognized that school counselors must seek open-mindedness and intentional reflection on their biases and preconceived notions of rural residents and places. At the same time, none of the eight participants said that the rural setting or skills needed there were a part of their counseling training. Stacy recognized that in her training program, school counselor master's students did not learn how to uncover and remove their biases about rural residents and places using strategies such as reflection.

Theme 3: Perceptions, Stereotyped or Culturally Aware

School counselor candidates' perceptions of rural places and people revealed stereotypes and cultural awareness. Each of the participants described idyllic images of rural places that included dirt roads, farms, open land and space, less traffic, even more quiet, sun, and sky. Amber pointed out that small schools are an image she has, and both she and Marcus added that they believe many rural images come from the media. In their perceptions of rural inhabitants, the participants' responses differed greatly. Bailey described rural residents in the following way: "They don't want to experience large things, you know, they're not gonna move away to a big city . . . they don't have aspirations of moving away or doing other things." Bailey went on to describe her idea of people in rural areas as poorly educated. Stacy said she believes that people in rural areas do not know about other cultures outside of theirs. Bailey and Marcus said they believe rural residents are friendlier than people from other settings, but added two exceptions. Bailey believed that people in rural areas would not accept people from outside their community, and Marcus postulated that rural residents would not be accepting of individuals from the LGBTQ community. Marcus quickly added that this perception is based strictly on stereotype. Four of the participants perceived the power of generations in rural communities. Jen, Bailey, and Rebecca pointed out that their idea of rural places and people included cycles rarely broken. Rebecca called these cycles *generational curses.* "Seems to be a kind of helplessness, just this is my life, this was the life of the generation before me, and now I have kids so I have to just suck it up and try to make the best of it." Rebecca went on to explain that she believes the helplessness she describes is tied to the lack of resources to which rural residents have access.

Three participants explained that people in rural areas do come from diverse races and cultures, and two discussed the major effect of a lack of opportunities in rural places

on its people. Rebecca said that when she thinks of rural residents, she sees people "who have dreams and maybe have tried or want to get out and have gotten shut down, and their hopes and ambitions just kind of die [her voice trails off here]. They just can't make it over the fence to make the next step."

In regard to the possible marginalization of people in rural areas and the existence of *ruralism*, participants concurred that the stereotypes and misconceptions that exist around rural residents and places leave rural inhabitants marginalized. Jessica, Marcus, and Stacy discussed that their own ideas of rural inhabitants are based on stereotypes, and Marcus recognized that the ideas he holds "would make them feel worthless." Amber defined the stereotypes as those from the media, particularly television.

> For instance, Honey Boo Boo . . . people think all people from Georgia maybe talk like that or act a certain way. And it's not really true. I think the media plays a big part in how people view what rural areas are like.

Daisy gave a similar example. "I think one is from the media . . . anytime you see a movie or something about rural things, you just see them all standing on the porch and they're just fanning. And you know it's not always like that." Bailey gave an example of the marginalization of rural inhabitants by saying that so many people believe them to be not only uneducated but not seeking an education. Jen offered that a person she met from a rural area arrived unprepared for college because her small, rural school did not offer the courses needed for college success. Ironically, Amber felt marginalized by her own teachers in a rural area when they suggested to her that she leave her rural area after graduation. "And that's just always confused me, I guess, is hearing my teachers growing up say, 'we want better for you.' And I'm just like, 'I kinda like it here.'" Rebecca stated the importance of discussing rural stereotypes and possible ruralism in school counseling programs. She asked the question, "how are you going to deal with the messages they've [rural students] been hearing all their lives if you don't know what those messages have been?"

Discussion

Researchers in this study examined the common experiences and ideas of school counselor candidates regarding life in the rural setting. From transcripts of interviews with participants, researchers developed significant statements, grouped statements into meaning units, and identified three themes. The themes emerging from this study indicate that these school counselors in training have developed beliefs about rural life and the challenges there and recognize the stereotypes of rural inhabitants. The participants report that rural life factors are not included in the multicultural curriculum of their counseling program. Socioeconomic struggle permeates the discussions of rural areas in the research literature (Budge, 2006; Strange et al., 2012). However, the participants were divided in their awareness of rural SES with only those originally from rural areas knowledgeable about the issue. In terms of their definition of *rural*, participants all described the setting with words such as *small* and *distant*, but only one participant, Rebecca, included qualities of life as defining rural when she spoke about the essence of rural containing the element of hopelessness.

In terms of rural schools, six of the eight participants recognized that schools in the setting often lack the resources of urban and suburban schools. Half of the

participants did not believe rural areas to be culturally diverse. Around the topic of multiculturalism, participants discussed ideas of acceptance and knowledge of ways of life different from their own as integral to success as a counselor. Open-mindedness, ongoing reflection, and recognition of biases were discussed as important. Of the eight, only three used *place* as a factor in understanding multiculturalism though. Of the culture of rural areas, half of the participants expressed the common stereotype of rural as idyllic in part as related to open spaces and personal relationships with others in the community. Each of the participants discussed the stereotypes of backwards and uneducated rural inhabitants though, and two expressed the belief that people in rural areas do not wish to change. Only the three participants originally from rural areas discussed the strong desire rural inhabitants have to achieve more than their place or sometimes generations of family cycles are able to offer them. Each of the participants believed that people in rural areas face marginalization due to the stereotypes and the possible assumptions made about them because of *ruralism*.

Implications and Limitations

The themes that emerged from this study point to this sample of school counseling candidates' limited experiences with rural areas and to their ideas for expanding multiculturalism to include *ruralism*. These themes, while they are limited to students in one program, may inform counselor educators as they train school counseling candidates across programs. The following considerations for school counseling programs come from the lack of knowledge of rural challenges and recognized biases discussed by these participants. First, counselor educators might consider including *place* as a factor when preparing school counselors to be multiculturally competent practitioners (Grimes et al., 2013). With the consideration of place is the need to recognize that the rural setting and the people there struggle with unique educational and socioeconomic challenges often not understood by individuals from outside the rural setting. School counseling courses therefore should not only include knowledge about rural areas that these participants reported being unaware of, but also should focus on the skills needed to be successful as a rural school counselor (Hann-Morrison, 2011). Opportunities to examine and practice rural school counseling skills can be included in programs through role plays and case studies centered on rural topics. In order for students to examine *ruralism*, including their own biases and to confront the possible marginalization of people in rural areas, counselor educators can include a focus on social justice in rural areas. One participant in this study spoke about the connectedness of people and generations in rural places. This factor presents unique challenges in terms of advocacy and requires special skills because of the ripple effects of advocacy on multiple and inter-related systems and generations in the rural community (Bradley, Werth, & Hastings, 2012; Grimes et al., 2013). Because rural economics are tied to rural education, counselor educators might consider including discussions of rural economies and the changing sociology of rural places as such change impacts community members. As school counseling programs often contain service learning components (Ockerman & Mason, 2012), counselor educators might identify rural areas in which students may complete their projects. Likewise, requiring school counseling practicum and intern

students to complete hours in a rural setting where available would help students learn about the rural context firsthand.

More research is needed on rural school counseling to determine best practices for meeting the needs of students in rural communities. Additional studies with individuals in rural areas to determine their beliefs and perceptions about the ways in which they wish to receive the educational consultation/guidance and mental health services offered by school counselors are warranted. Researchers might consider the development of a rural competency scale for use in teaching multiculturalism. Finally, a broader study than this one with school counselor candidates at other universities regarding their beliefs and perceptions about rural school counseling is warranted.

Several limitations affect this study. The number of participants, eight, is small, but since the goal of qualitative research is not generalization, the number is effective. Since the participants resided in the same geographic region, their viewpoints may be limited to that region. Likewise, each of the participants in this study was a school counseling candidate in the same program, limiting their knowledge and perceptions of other programs. Finally, the first author who served as primary investigator recognizes that her bias toward focusing more on rural issues in counseling programs could affect the interactions with and responses from the participants. Indeed, the first author believes that rural communities are unique places in need of school counselors who understand the culture, diversity, challenges, and benefits of life there. Studies such as this one show the importance of expanding school counselor training programs to include rural concerns because as Rebecca suggested, "How will [school counselors] deal with the messages [rural inhabitants] have been hearing all their lives unless [they] know what the messages have been?"

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