Advocacy Among Counseling Leaders: A Grounded Theory

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Overview

- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Findings
- Discussion/Implications
- Questions
Introduction

Social/political professional advocacy

- Vital for our profession (Dixon & Dew, 2012)
- Core component of counseling identity (CACREP, 2016)
- Component of the 20/20 vision (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011)

Problem

- Lack of empirical evidence
- Need to better equip professional counselors for advocacy demands
Literature Review: Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

- Client/student empowerment
- Client/student advocacy
- Community collaboration
- Systems advocacy
- Public information
- Social/political advocacy

Categories: Total, Empirical
Purpose of the Study

To develop a theory to explain the process of social/political or legislative professional advocacy for counseling leaders.
The research question

What is the process of social/political professional advocacy for counseling leaders?
Methodology

• Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2014)
• Purposive criterion sampling
  • Identify as professional counselors as evidenced by master’s and/or doctoral degrees in professional counseling, and/or maintenance of professional counseling credentials (e.g., Licensed Professional Counselor, National Certified Counselor, Certified School Counselor)
  • Self-identify as having engaged in leadership related to social/political advocacy or legislative advocacy.
Final Sample

- 15 (12 masked)
- 10 cisgender women and five cisgender men.
- Age range 25-61
- White/Caucasian/European American ($n = 10$), Caucasian/Hispanic ($n = 1$), Multiracial ($n = 1$), Multiracial (Black/White) ($n = 1$), and Chicano ($n = 1$)
## Participants’ Professional Demographics

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Recruitment & Data Collection

• CESNET, 20 ACA divisions and 50 branches, CSI leadership, and criterion snowball

• Email request, pre-screening survey, request for demographic, contact information, informed consent form, and schedule semi-structured intensive interview (Zoom)

• Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, with an average of 65 minutes

• 13 out of 15 participants responded to the email containing the transcript
Data analysis

• In Vivo codes for the initial coding method and focused coding for the second round of coding (Saldaña, 2016)

• Coding team met to categorize and compare initial codes after coding 3 interviews. Memoing journal for each team discussion

• Theoretical coding in later stages ($n = 10$)

• Continued to collect and analyze data until theoretical saturation ($n = 15$)
Rigor

Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow & Ponterotto (2016)
Defining Legislative Professional Advocacy

Advocacy related to legislation to improve or change policies that impact the counseling profession, clients, and counselors’ ability to practice.

Spike: “Well, either supporting or not supporting and I think bills in the legislature how it might impact our profession, but also how it might impact our clients.”

Karen: “having to improve or change policies that impact, um, mental health services access and the clients that we serve”
The Three Tiered Legislative Professional Advocacy Model
Advocacy Catalyst

Connection to Personal and Professional Identity and Use of Personal and Professional Community
Connection to Personal and Professional Identity

**Experience, knowledge, and passion** fueled and informed advocacy action. Advocates acted upon issues that were tied to their expertise, values, and interest.

Blair: “I would say I’m a counseling leader in areas that I am passionate about. So I’m passionate about research and I’m passionate about the human animal bond. If I’m passionate about something, people are gonna know it. (laughs) I’m gonna try to rally as many troops as I can to join in on that with me, if possible”

In contrast, lack of **experience, knowledge, and passion** limits advocacy action.

Benito: “Something is passionate to me I will get involved with it. There have been cases where something just doesn’t, that’s not me. That doesn't speak to me. I'd rather focus my energies on something else. So I'm trying to think if there's like a specific issue. It might be some of the advocacy that's happened nationally around having counselors be reimbursed for their work with veterans. While that's an important topic I get it. It's just not something that speaks to me as much”
Connection to Personal and Professional Identity

Personal values and personal characteristics fueled advocacy action

• Personality Traits
  Jason: “I would say I lean pretty heavily on the introverted end of the personality spectrum; and I think Western contexts like America, you know, when we think about leaders, we get a pretty extroverted type of advocate a lot of the time, because leadership probably fits with a lot of our images of the outspoken and bold leader. Doing lots of sort of leadership like organizing, meeting with community members, getting people together, things like that. I think that while all that's important, there's another expression of leadership that still relates to the advocacy stuff”

• Personal Values
  Karen: “I had seen my parents do that. Um, my dad was involved in some legislative advocacy kinds of things related to his work, we lived an hour from the state capital growing up, um, so I think I had some exposure to that growing up”
Use of personal and professional community

• Professional organizations and community needs
  Daniel “When I was in (state), I lived in the most rural county in (state). My clinic was one of only two mental health, well, I take that back, was one of only two private practices serving the county that I lived in. One of the issues that I ran into fairly routinely was the issue of dealing with suicidal patients who needed to be evaluated for, or really needed inpatient to protect them. As a professional counselor licensed in (state), I was not able to do that myself. I wasn’t able to pink slip patients when I judged them to be a danger to themselves or others”
  Josh: “Issues get identified and brought to light through our membership, and then based upon those issues coming up for one or many more people, those issues might become more a priority than other issues. I think we as a state organization we have many legislative issues, but some have more priority over others. So, depending on what our membership really sees as priorities, whether that be at the state level or the national level, are the things that we’re acting on and more aggressive on compared to some things that might be less of a priority”

• Community influence
  • Blair: “Here this community is so small that you know the delegates and I recently spoke at a legislative roundtable panel discussion so now quite a few of them know me because now my face is out there. It’s not that difficult to build a relationship out here with delegates. So I think at this point, I would feel comfortable now that I feel more integrated into the community, I would feel comfortable setting up a meeting to go meet with them”
• Professional Organizations
  • Connection
    Daniel: “I joined the Ohio Counseling Association soon after moving there, and then also the Ohio Association of Counselor Educators and Supervisors, and fairly quickly started getting involved with leadership and advocacy, and then stayed involved in leadership and advocacy the whole time I was there. To some degree, that continues”

• Information
  Lisa: “As far as the organization goes, the professional organization and associations, I think it's our job to keep an eye on the landscape and to let people know what's happening and what's coming, and what the bigger picture is. Then, and this is where I diverge a little bit from some others, I personally think that it's my job to let you know what's going on, and then your job to decide how you feel about it and what you want to see happen”

• Conduit
  Lynn: “So we do have some responsibility to help them understand who we are and what we do, why we do it. What we're trying to accomplish in the work that we do, not just with our clients individually, but as a collective. And so, in (state), we have an opioid crisis. It's just blown up in the last two years. And a lot of what the people on the ground are doing out there is work with substance abuse. And without that advocacy of people knowing what it is that we do and how important that work is”

• Lobbyist as a Resource
  Jason: “what our lobbyists do, because they're LMHCs, they have an inside perspective that means in a short amount of time, because it's likely to be a short amount, a short amount of face time they actually get with an assembly member or a state senator, they can break it down: what our needs are, why it's important, and why this bill should be supported in clear and concise language. They put a face to an issue; they put a story to an issue; they bring our letters. In my class, we submitted a letter last year, talking about the issues that are important for people living up here in the (part) country to call”
• Collaboration

Josh: “I think there’s a lot one person can do, but I think we could probably do more as a collective voice. But I think in regards to setting those priorities, I think members of those organizations can be pretty impactful and can steer the ship essentially and be active in those organizations in regard to shaping priorities and agendas. So, whereas one person can make a difference in regards to moving an issue along, or getting an issue identified, or navigating an issue in an organization, I think as a collective voice, we’d make a stronger impact”

• Community Representatives

Lisa: “So it's not enough just to send an email or call the office and leave a message. The goal needs to be very clear that not only do you know who they are, and did you actively participate in either getting them there or replacing them if that's your political viewpoint, but regardless of who is sitting in that office, the goal is for them to know who you are and what you do. So that any time there's an issue related to something that you care about, you can pick up the phone and it's not the first time that they've heard from you. The thing that I hear over and over from people who know, folks who've been in this space for a long time and who really understand how to be effective here is that politicians are people first. Nobody appreciates the very first time they've ever interacted with someone, they're being yelled at and things demanded of them. So developing that relationship is the responsibility of the individuals”
Advocacy
Action
Picking your Battles and Making it your Own
• Choosing when to use the power of your voice
  Christy: “So, choosing when to use the power of your voice so that it's the most effective. And I think that happens on both sides of the equation. And it's a very big system, and there's a lot of influence on those decisions, but I think it also comes down to those decisions. When am I willing to speak up, and put myself on the line, and be willing to be associated with this issue, and when am I not?”

• Beware of political ploy
  Lisa: “Okay if nobody's picking this up, is that because this is just a political ploy? Is this somebody making a statement that nobody thinks is gonna go anywhere? And there was some of that. So getting consultation from folks who know helped me from really embarrassing ourselves, because there were a couple of bills that were put forth that even the sponsor didn't think was gonna go anywhere, it was just to make a statement”
• Social justice and professional advocacy

Benito: "Legislative professional advocacy is about ... Unfortunately, it's been about legitimizing our existence as a profession. I think if we see what happened in Tennessee, if we see some of the ... I don't know how aware you are of some of the actions being taken in Arizona. There's this continual need to prove ourselves as a legitimate profession, that what we offer is of value. It's necessary, it's important, right? We need to prove why we exist, we need to prove the function that we serve. What I would like us to become more about is our clients and how our work serves to help clients, to protect clients, to empower clients"

Ava: “When you start to take on social justice causes, they're very, very big causes. I mean they're rooted in thousands, millions of years of injustices and complexities... on an individual level, or on a broader organizational level, to take on some of these causes? And is that helping us as a profession? I would argue it's not. I would argue that we need to be more focused – from an advocacy perspective- on things that impact us directly in our professional lives... I would just say that I think it's a slippery slope. I think we have to be careful with social political advocacy. We need to make sure that we're being strategic and smart about it, and that we're considering the context in which we're operating”

• Negotiating barriers to legislative professional advocacy

Daniel: “In part, I'm guilty of the same kind of things that a lot of counselors get guilty of, which is that I'll see a call to action and maybe I'm just too busy to deal with it. For example, we're coming up on finals week right now. If some big something came out right now, I'm not likely to be paying as much attention to it. That's not necessarily a good thing, but I only have so much time”
• Practical Advocacy

Ava: “So we got electronic voter voice, like these electronic systems that we set up so that we could email, and it'll shoot off to your representative,” so again, I think that practical piece if super, super important”

• Direct Advocacy

send out emails to people, and say, "Hey, all you have to do is put in your name and Spike: “I happen to work with a state senator who worked at the college and I made an appointment with him and brought in these two private practice counselors and we said, "This needs to change. Are you willing to help us get a bill through the legislature?" He thought it was worthwhile.... We are fortunate that our secretary lives in (capital of the state). She was able to testify at committee hearings and rally some folks in the (capital of the state) area to testify, bill pass on committee and it went through those three votes in the Senate, three votes in the House and it got passed”

• “Days on the Hill” & ACA’s Institute for Leadership Training
Advocacy Training

Demystifying Legislative Professional Advocacy
Having a better understanding about the legislative process helps advocacy action

Daniel “And I think one of the challenges for people who don't necessarily, aren't necessarily involved with understanding the political processes ... As an example, the Medicare issue, we've been actively working on trying to change legislation to get counselors approved as providers for Medicare for the entire time I've been in this career; long before I did anything to get involved, and then since I've been involved. That bill makes its way through Congress or the Senate, and then it dies, and then we have to start over again next year. You can have success in terms of getting people on board, moving it through, and then it can die and you go back to square one. I think when people don't understand that that's how the legislative process works, they feel defeated and want to give up. We have to keep on bringing it, and bringing it up, and bringing it up until it eventually gets through”
Understanding the legislative process can be facilitated:

• Collaboration/mentorship

  Sunny “The first thing that I think of is not taking it all on by myself and that kind of goes back to my ACE thing of advocate, collaborate, and educate.”

  Daniel “There were issues that came up on a fairly regular basis, hmm, whether it was proposals for changes to the law or issues that were being raised that we wanted to address. In those roles, I worked with our lobbyists to both understand what was going on, but also when they would bring issues to our attention, then I would be involved in both communicating that information out to our members and sending out calls for action to XCA members and working in that regard”

• Self-directed training

  Christy “To be honest. I learned about systems, but it's not really something that I was taught about, it's just something I'm kind of figuring out as I go along. I'm learning more from the other people, and working with them”

• Hands on training in counselor education

  Benito “It's got to be a component of counselor education. It's just not right now. I think I had a class on like advocacy and policy, but it ended up being more about like social justice, and social justice counseling than it was about actual tools”

  Jason “the training needs to involve real-life projects. At least, that's, I think, what needs to happen. I'll be curious to hear what your other, your co-participants say about that assumption”
Confirmed Findings

• Importance of personal connection and self-exploration (Lee & Rogers, 2008; Ratts et al., 2016; Schmid et al., 2008).

• Effectiveness through collaboration (Lee & Rogers, 2008; Lewis, 2002; Lewis et al., 2012), including state and national representatives (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Barstow & Holt, 2011; Lee & Rogers, 2008; Lewis et al., 2002).

• Consequences of advocacy for social justice issues or lack of knowledge about an issue (Lee & Rogers (2008; Ratts et al., 2007)

• Effectiveness of direct advocacy (Barstow & Holt, 2011).

• Understanding of the legislative process as a critical step (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Barstow & Holt, 2011; Lee & Rogers, 2008).
• Connection to personal and professional identity played as an advocacy catalyst, providing unique insight into what motivates advocates towards action.
• Use of personal characteristics to fuel advocacy
• Finding meaning
• The role of mentoring in legislative advocacy
• Self-learned advocacy.
Implications
Counselor Education Programs

- Implementation of the Three Tiered Legislative Professional Advocacy
- Cultivating Advocacy Catalyst
- Building relationship and partnering with POs
- Assist students in connecting with POs
Professional Organizations (POs)

• Facilitate relationship with CE programs
• Connect with their community
• Build connections with state and federal representatives
• Use of lobbyists
Further Research

• Historically marginalized groups and Advocacy Efforts
• Proactive legislative professional advocacy versus reactive legislative professional action
• Advocacy Action preparation
• Re-evaluation and re-targeting of Advocacy Action
• Interprofessional collaborations
• Advocacy using the Three Tiered Legislative Professional Advocacy model
• Implementation of Advocacy Catalysts
Discussion

• How can you infuse advocacy catalysts in your classes?
• How can you infuse advocacy action in your classes?
• Do you see implementing this model in your classes?
References


References


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