


Applications of Intersectionality Theory to Enhance Career Development Interventions in Response to COVID-19

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Abstract

The school counseling profession has an ethical responsibility to provide and advocate for individual students' career planning and development, while expanding school counselors' own multicultural and social justice advocacy to become effective culturally competent professionals. Additional literature is needed to identify how school counselors can adapt their career counseling approaches to fit the unique challenges and barriers of historically marginalized students both during and after the global COVID-19 pandemic. We describe how school counselors can use intersectionality theory as a framework for career development with marginalized populations in response to COVID-19 and its impact on the economic decline.

Keywords

school counselors, intersectionality, career planning, multicultural, COVID-19

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic instigated more than 30 million adults filing for unemployment in the United States (Rugaber, 2020). Although these rates have demonstrated mild improvement, employment impacts have extended beyond the peak of the pandemic, while inciting significant stress and burden on students' attitude toward postsecondary employment among historically marginalized students including Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC); LGBTQ+ individuals; those from lower income backgrounds; and people living with disabilities (Blustein & Guarino, 2020; Martin, 2020). The economic crisis is one of many indicators associated with an increase in traumatic psychological and social impacts (Fortuna et al., 2020), which intersects with other social determinants of health (SDOH) and forms of minority stress for historically marginalized communities (Holman & Grisham, 2020). As secondary students are challenged with facing adjustments and life stressors due to COVID-19 aftermath effects (e.g., virtual school–life balance, social life, partental unemployment), barriers and anxieties related to career development are expected to increase (Kazlauskas & Quero, 2020).

Despite the negative career outlook and difficulties adjusting to changes caused by the pandemic, preparing secondary students to become career ready remains a critical standard for school counselors (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2016). Here, we describe the overarching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on workforce development, career disparities, and college and career readiness, and consider the relationship with career development and SDOH. We then

elaborate on the philosophical underpinnings and core tenets of intersectionality theory specific to school counseling practices. In light of this, we propose that secondary school counselors integrate intersectionality theory when approaching postsecondary career planning strategies for students. We provide a framework for school counselors to utilize intersectionality theory in career development interventions and practices among historically marginalized student populations that are challenged with barriers related to SDOH.

COVID-19 and Career-Related Disparities

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021), SDOH are conditions that affect individuals' risks and outcomes regarding quality of life and are affected by the community of residence and location of school or occupation. SDOH conditions, both positive and negative, shape occupational experiences of students, families, and communities, and include conditions such as education level, social support, and economic stability (Blacker et al., 2020; Johnson & Brookover,

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2021). Inequities regarding career SDOH have existed prior to the global pandemic; however, COVID-19 further exacerbated career inequities, particularly for historically marginalized students (Dawes, 2020; Flores et al., 2019).

When reviewing the impacts of COVID-19 on historically marginalized communities, researchers have demonstrated overt disparities in comparison to White communities, including physical health; mental health; and financial, environmental, and social aspects, all of which directly affect career development for secondary students (Claweson et al., 2021; Dawes, 2020; Fortuna et al., 2020). Holmes and colleagues (2020) found that 34% of COVID-19 deaths were among non-Hispanic Black individuals, despite this population only accounting for 12% of the U.S. population. Factors that contribute to health inequity among marginalized populations include: (a) discrimination existing in systems, (b) limited healthcare access and utilization, (c) disproportionate rates as essential or front-line workers (i.e., healthcare facilities, food services, grocery stores, public transportation), and (d) the inability to convert occupations to remote positions (Holmes et al., 2020). According to researchers, non-Hispanic Black adults are 60% more likely than non-Hispanic White adults to live in a household with a healthcare worker, and 64.5% of Hispanic or Latino adults at high risk from COVID-19 lived in households where at least one worker was unable to work from home (Selden & Berdahl, 2020). Further, individuals in essential work settings have increased risk of coming into close contact with others and working when sick due to unpaid sick days (CDC, 2021).

Career disparities influenced by the global pandemic not only affect individuals within the workforce, but extend to secondary students as they face obstacles toward career development. Challenges such as remote education attainment, barriers to career and college readiness, and impacts of social isolation are common issues that make school-to-work transition difficult since the inception of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the next sections, we expand on the impacts of these ongoing disparities on historically marginalized students' postsecondary employment opportunities, and how students may still be affected even with returning to in-person schooling.

Impact of Remote Education Attainment

A significant disparity that affects students' career development is the increased risks to educational attainment, particularly as schools across the United States dramatically transitioned to distance schooling in the spring of 2020 (Bubb & Jones, 2020). Researchers with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2020) found that although 82% of U.S. schools reported aiding their students with transitioning to remote learning, access was not adequate for all racial and socioeconomic populations. NCES reports found that the majority of student households with sufficient internet access and remote schooling accessibility were White and had a minimum income of \$75,000 or higher (Tienken, 2020). In a qualitative study examining students' experiences of distance learning formats

during the pandemic, Hipolito-Delgado et al. (2021) identified challenges related to online learning, such as adjusting to a new platform, a lack of relevance to schoolwork, and technological inequities. Further challenges included balancing schoolwork in combination with familial context issues, such as aiding younger siblings with homework and health concerns of family members contracting the virus (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2021).

The challenges related to drastic educational platform changes highlight the connection between education attainment and school-to-work transition. Distance learning has expanded the gaps in achievement and student engagement, both of which are primary concepts that impact career development and exploration (Trinidad, 2021). Students in households that have difficulties with economic stability and belong to lower SES communities are at a notably higher risk for gaps in educational attainment, and inequitable access to technology heightens this challenge (Johnson & Brookover, 2021; Wood et al., 2017). The transition to distance learning platforms also has decreased student motivation, with in-person support eliminated and educational responsibilities placed on parents and guardians. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020), damage to the perceived relationship between educational success and labor market outcomes increases motivational risks. Therefore, a review of the impact of distance learning barriers on college and career readiness is vital.

College and Career Readiness

Differences in college and career readiness have been a challenge for secondary students since the pandemic outbreak. Regardless of students' goals for postsecondary education level or career (e.g., college, school-to-work, trade), COVID-19 disrupted each occupational avenue in some capacity and has affected students' outlook toward perceived opportunities (Stanislaus et al., 2021). In an investigation observing job-readiness scores among high school graduates, Alam and Parvin (2021) found that students who attended face-to-face teaching prior to the pandemic achieved higher job-readiness scores in comparison to students who utilized online methods during the pandemic. Further, Mann et al. (2020) reported that in multiple countries, including the United States, all secondary students are at risk of lowered career motivation and increased career uncertainty as a result of the pandemic, directly associating this decreased motivation with unstable career decisions and lower earnings.

For students who reside in homes with limited technology access, distance career guidance has increased risks for lack of information regarding job opportunities and career skills. Career uncertainty is linked to lack of career information, lower academic performance and socioeconomic status, poor understanding of the workforce, and unclear career ambitions (Edwin & Dooley Hussman, 2019; Fernandes & Bance, 2015). Following the transition to remote learning, students shared frustrations concerning lack of communication from educators and

school personnel regarding classes, school events, and other extracurricular activities, with academics appearing to be the only priority among educators (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2021). Secondary students are at higher risk of career uncertainty due to COVID-19 quarantine mandates and unaddressed career needs. The economic crisis also represents barriers for students who were required to narrow or change the focus of their education in the midst of career confusion and uncertainty related to the job market (OECD, 2020).

Divergence of career opportunities for historically marginalized populations existed prior to spring of 2020 but have magnified during the pandemic. For individuals of marginalized backgrounds, work environments and labor markets enact systems of power, privilege, and oppression (Flores et al., 2019). Since the beginning of COVID-19, low-SES communities are further at risk because of the unpredictable and overwhelming nature of the pandemic and the job market (Johnson & Brookover, 2021). Having multiple identities of marginalization further increases the risk of oppression in work systems. Privileged and affluent populations are typically granted educational, economic, and professional development opportunities that are structurally denied to historically marginalized populations (e.g., BIPOC individuals, women, people of low SES). Therefore, intentional career guidance for these populations is warranted for secondary students.

Influence of Social Isolation

In response to the physical health risks of COVID-19, mandates to quarantine and socially distance created an increase in mental health disorders and risks. Researchers have noted increases in the percentages of adolescents with clinical symptoms associated with mental health disorders, particularly depression (25.2%) and anxiety (20.5%; Racine et al., 2021). Social isolation conditions created an additional barrier for students looking to find employment or engage in career development activities (Brooks et al., 2020). Blacker et al. (2020) observed a positive correlation between relational processes and career-associated tasks, such as interviewing and networking. Social isolation resulting from the pandemic also was found to affect work productivity and decision making, both vital processes that aid in job-seeking behaviors (Blacker et al., 2020).

Quarantine mandates increased vulnerability among historically marginalized populations. For instance, schools commonly provide a means of support for intersectionally marginalized LGBTQ+ youth from diverse backgrounds, who utilize school-based mental health services for identity development (Salerno et al., 2020). The switch to distance learning formats following social distancing guidelines created a lack of a significant resource and safe place for LGBTQ+ youth (Green et al., 2020). Impacts of quarantine mandates on students with disabilities may include increased concerns regarding online learning accessibility compared to able-bodied individuals and difficulties social distancing due to reliance on caregivers (Zhang, 2022) and other external supports such as school counselors and peers. For these

reasons, vulnerable youth populations were likely to experience increased distress related to COVID-19, directly affecting their outlook for postsecondary transitions.

Intersectionality Theory and Career Development Disparities

At its core, SDOH are primary determinants toward safe access for many dimensions of wellness, including occupation (Dawes, 2020). Many of the aforementioned disparities can negatively affect career development for secondary students who are planning for their career transition, particularly in light of increased risks for students who may belong to minimal-resource communities. Therefore, exploring use of intersectionality theory is vital for school counselors in addressing career development

Notably, intersectionality theory has surfaced within school counseling, higher education, and career development literature as a critical social movement broadening the practice of multiculturalism and social justice (Chan, 2019; Singh et al., 2020). Because intersectionality has drawn from a longstanding history of women of color and queer women of color across several disciplines (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 1986; Combahee River Collective, 1977/1995; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1984; Lorde, 1984), the approach continues to mirror the complexity of social identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, social class, academic identity) with larger structural forces of oppression. Thus, proponents of intersectionality tether their analysis to Black feminism (Cole, 2020; Settles et al., 2020) and link intersecting forces of oppression foundationally to racism (Collins, 2015; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

At its core, intersectionality integrates various facets of oppression, including racism, genderism, sexism, and classism (Bryant-Davis, 2019). For individuals of marginalized backgrounds, work environments and labor markets enact systems of power, privilege, and oppression (Flores et al., 2019) or disenfranchise historically marginalized populations from entering specific industries (Chan, 2019; Duffy et al., 2018). Aside from recruitment and entry into the workforce, institutional and structural forms of oppression contribute to racial and cultural climates of workplaces, organizations, and institutions that diminish the cultural capital of employees from historically marginalized backgrounds (Settles et al., 2020). In more extreme cases, the culmination of these overlapping structural forms of oppression can force culturally diverse and historically marginalized communities to assimilate to the dominant culture (Buchanan & Wiklund, 2021; Chan & Henesy, 2018; Settles et al., 2020).

To foundationally underscore the major tenets of intersectionality, Collins and Bilge (2020) emphasized six themes that holistically define its rich history and applied approach of social analysis: (a) social context, (b) social inequality, (c) relationality, (d) complexity, (e) power, and (f) social justice. *Social context* is defined as the background or environment that conveys the organization of power relations and which groups

have access to resources, power, and representation (Cole, 2020; Hankivsky et al., 2014; McKinzie & Richards, 2019). *Social inequality* is determined by the location of inequities and the numerous obstacles facing historically marginalized groups (Grzanka et al., 2017; Santos & Toomey, 2018). *Relationality* demonstrates how social identities are connected and, more important, how they relay intersecting forms of oppression (Bowleg, 2012; Erby & White, 2022). *Complexity* is characterized as multiple layers that demonstrate the depth of social inequities and experiences of power, particularly while navigating multiple social identities (e.g., race, gender identity, social class, sexuality; Buchanan & Wiklund, 2021; Chan & Henesy, 2018). For instance, BIPOC students may have to navigate interpersonal experiences of cultural insensitivity from school professionals, incidents of white supremacy embedded within U.S. history and society, and foreclosure of specific opportunities. However, this monolithic viewpoint does not elaborate on queer BIPOC students who might be enduring racial, gender, and sexual prejudice within their communities while attempting to establish a sense of safety within their schools and homes.

Power is a central focal point for intersectionality because it augments the analysis to a structural viewpoint that preempts barriers and exclusion for historically marginalized communities (Bowleg & Bauer, 2016; Collins, 2019). Power is often a missing feature in the application of intersectionality, given that many researchers and practitioners reduce the definition of intersectionality to diverse identities or multiple identities (Chan & Howard, 2020; Grzanka, 2020; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). The examination of hierarchies of power, social inequities, and experiences with privilege and oppression reinforces the *social justice* ethos underlying intersectionality's philosophical underpinnings (Collins, 2015; Settles et al., 2020). Intersectionality demonstrates an active social justice agenda that dismantles inequities rather than merely emphasizing them (Bowleg, 2017).

Intersectionality integrates several dimensions of power to reflect how school counselors make sense of the cultural clashes or rich connections between social identities. In light of COVID-19, intersectionality represents a promising framework to map career opportunities and disparities together with social identities and power inequities. The theory proposes that change within political structures, such as educational institutions, is possible by transferring from a micro-level to macro-level perspective (Chan & Henesy, 2018; Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2019). In the next section, we elaborate on applying intersectionality to address the aforementioned disparities that have challenged secondary youth since the emergence of COVID-19.

Applying Intersectionality to Address COVID-19 Disparities

Although racial, ethnic, gender, and social class disparities existed for decades prior to the emergence of COVID-19, the

pandemic has rendered the confluence of these disparities even more visible (Kantamneni, 2020) because COVID-19 disproportionately affects BIPOC communities and has resulted in severe anti-Asian sentiment (Litam, 2020; Litam & Hipolito-Delgado, 2021). In terms of career development, intersectionality builds upon a multitude of psychosocial factors that connect complex, personal experiences of power, privilege, and oppression to workforce trends and barriers (Bowleg, 2017, 2021). Through intersectionality's focus on a structural analysis (Hankivsky et al., 2014; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017), career and educational outcomes are organized structurally with other SDOH, including housing, food security, and culturally responsive care of providers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, intersectionality has broadened the viewpoint of SDOH by underscoring that career and educational opportunities are diminished by multiple layers of trauma, stress, and family issues (Fortuna et al., 2020; Kantamneni, 2020). Intersectionality highlights these complex tensions when individuals must enter risky health situations, manage food security and stable housing, and forego educational opportunities, especially in BIPOC communities (Bowleg, 2020; Litam & Hipolito-Delgado, 2021). To expand the practice of intersectionality on multiple systemic levels in career development, we highlight three areas for school counselors to conceptualize and apply intersectionality theory within their profession: (a) school counselors reflecting on their own privileges and biases related to COVID-19, (b) embracing multiple dimensions and interconnectedness across social identities of students toward career development, and (c) accentuating multiple overlapping forms of oppression rendered visible by COVID-19 and SDOH.

Self-Awareness of the Complexity of Privilege and Oppression as a Lens for SDOH

A critical process for school counselors is to actively engage in self-awareness of their own privilege to better understand its influence on providing career guidance to diverse and historically marginalized populations (Chan et al., 2021; Chan & Henesy, 2018). School counselors can draw on the tenet of complexity to explore multiple identities as an avenue for identifying which groups are located in privileged or oppressed statuses (Chan et al., 2021). Intersectionality emphasizes new points of inquiry for school counselors to interrogate their own biases and explore how they might unintentionally trivialize the problem of COVID-19 in their schools (Hankivsky et al., 2014). Even for school counselors with historically marginalized identities, considering the ways they hold and leverage access to SDOH through their positions of power is crucial. For instance, school counselors who carry multiple privileged identities may not recognize the need for various resources, such as access to technology and internet and information regarding career readiness, and ignore the widespread effects of trauma. When school counselors are blocked by their own biases and lack of awareness around privileged identities, they ignore crucial

resources, such as food security, housing, and finances, that can drastically impact career, vocational, and educational aspirations of historically marginalized students.

Social Inequities as the Map for SDOH in Schools

At its foundation, intersectionality introduces social inequity as a crux for its analysis. By integrating other tenets (e.g., power, complexity), school counselors can become more attuned to social inequities. Applied to the problems rendered visible by COVID-19, intersectionality illuminates social inequities in light of multiple forces of oppression. COVID-19 became the harbinger of several health disparities, including those based on race and class, by shaping access to healthcare (Clawson et al., 2021; Gravlee, 2020) and access to education and career opportunities (Ji & Charles, 2020). For instance, school counselors can attend to the ways that an inadequate infrastructure for technology resources might affect students at the intersection of classism and ableism. Further, the disproportionate effects and health disparities associated with BIPOC families and communities might direct focus to economic resources for healthcare access, rather than investing personal resources in vocational exploration (Fortuna et al., 2020; Kantamneni, 2020). Given the intersections across multiple forms of oppression (e.g., racism, genderism, classism, ableism), school counselors can leverage the tenet of social inequity to understand disparities in health, education, access, and career opportunities. The multitude of social inequities might also provide opportunities to examine the reasons for students' hesitancy to seek help or students' disengagement with academic environments and school supports.

Intersections of Power with SDOH and Career Development

Proponents of intersectionality carefully link power as a central factor in applying the lens of intersectionality responsibility (Bowleg & Bauer, 2016; Cole, 2020; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017; Settles et al., 2020). Namely, power characterizes the intersection of power relations, which leave certain groups with more power in a system and others with less (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Power is characteristically mapped onto a variety of social contexts in educational settings (Chan et al., 2021; Collins, 2019; Settles et al., 2020). Without adequate awareness of social inequities that ultimately affect SDOH, school counselors run the risk of punishing students with multiple marginalized identities or foreclosing their career opportunities by imposing stereotypes. In the presence of COVID-19, the notion of power shows how systems of domination were replicated through cascading effects of trauma including the combined unemployment and deaths of BIPOC workers and families (Fortuna et al., 2020; Misra et al., 2020). As another example, queer and trans students of color may be less likely to

seek help either from a school counselor or from healthcare providers, leaving them with fewer interpersonal support systems for engaging in vocational learning programs, internships, or early employment opportunities.

Enacting Changes to Social Context as a Vehicle for SDOH

Intersectionality entails a deeper reflection that yields insights on structural barriers and inequities for historically marginalized communities during the pandemic (Grzanka, 2020). Because intersectionality implores school counselors to undertake a structural analysis, the approach situates policies and cultural implications of the school climate as a map to synthesize COVID-19, career inequities, and SDOH. For instance, school counselors can critically analyze their own awareness of the effects of COVID-19 as the social context determining the social location of power and privilege for historically marginalized students. In mapping this backdrop on career disparities and SDOH, school counselors can examine the effects on their own careers and expand this awareness to the effects on career trajectories for students and community members (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017). As school counselors unpack their own experiences with privilege and oppression, intersectionality invites school counselors to harness their social identities, locate barriers, and enhance the school climate (Hankivsky et al., 2014). This approach not only incorporates an interpersonal level of culturally responsive care, but also concretizes multifaceted experiences of career development and SDOH. School counselors can consider how the need for housing and food security during COVID-19 may entice students to pursue specific vocations as an immediate means of survival (Blustein & Guarino, 2020). In this vein, school counselors can identify the long-term ramifications of SDOH as structural barriers that diminish the hope and foresight of historically marginalized students within specific industries (Kang et al., 2015). For instance, school counselors can pinpoint how stereotypes within specific industries are representative of accessibility issues (e.g., insurance availability) and how they alter perceptions of career opportunity for BIPOC students with disabilities. More distinctly, school counselors can contextualize the confluence of racism and ableism rather than imposing assumptions of career pathways on BIPOC students with disabilities.

As school counselors become more attuned to the interlocking nature of privilege and oppression, they must expand their critical thinking, renegotiate definitions of the pandemic's effects on career development, and leverage the insights for expanding career opportunities. To this end, school counselors can interrogate how they have typically defined barriers through the lenses in their own social identities and explore how students with different social identities may describe the effects of COVID-19. Further, school counselors can explore missed aspects of career development, hope, and career aspirations. This approach would allow school counselors to openly discuss

how structural barriers affect perceptions and foreclose cultural assets. By adopting a mindset that encourages historically marginalized students to define the effects of COVID-19 in their homes, neighborhoods, and career exploration, school counselors can support agency and growth (Kang et al., 2015; Singh, 2013).

Embracing Relationality, Interlocking Social Identities, and Effects on SDOH

Given the confluence of social context and relationality (Grzanka, 2020; McKinzie & Richards, 2019), students with multiple marginalized identities are forced to creatively navigate social services, school supports, and community resources. The principles of relationality and complexity explicate how attending to a single form of oppression (e.g., racism, classism, genderism) renders an incomplete portrayal of the social and political climate within institutions (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). In the scope of school counseling practices and school climates, attempts to eradicate one form of oppression without considering intersecting power relations and forms of oppression can hinder intentional efforts for collective change and action (Collins & Bilge, 2020). In the context of career development, school counselors often craft a litany of interventions to address single cultural groups and social identities rather than explore intersections of structural inequities and gaps in identity representation (Chan, 2019; Speciale & Scholl, 2019). According to Speciale and Scholl (2019), without the lens of intersectionality, students lack a space to broach the connections among identities that ultimately produce holistic career experiences and embrace different forms of cultural capital. This approach is ultimately problematic for historically marginalized students because it leaves out complex cultural nuances and fails to hold school professionals accountable for interventions in response to the effects of COVID-19.

In the aftermath of COVID-19, embracing the connections between social identities can produce a more holistic outlook on vocational well-being, resilience, and hope. Jackson and colleagues (2020) reinforced this notion of intersectionality by showing that psychological distress occurs when Black LGBTQ+ individuals are forced to separate their identities. In this vein, intersectionality breeds possibilities to embrace social identities as forms of love, cultural assets, and resilience, given that intersectionality makes individuals more conscious about hierarchies of power (see Love, 2017; Singh, 2013, 2019). Individuals are able to cultivate a possibility of self-determination with which they can define their own realities, experiences, commitment, and interest in career pathways (Speciale & Scholl, 2019). For school counselors, explicitly affirming these intersections can elicit meaningful cultural interactions, allow spaces for naming trauma and loss, and provide opportunities for hope in career development (Kang et al., 2015). This aspect is crucial for the cascading effects of COVID-19 on health disparities for historically marginalized

communities (Litam & Hipolito-Delgado, 2021), especially BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities, and among individuals with disabilities.

Implementing a Social Justice Agenda

Although the approach of intersectionality promulgates the identification of social problems, one of its notable features is an active social justice agenda driven by its critical analysis (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020). By linking several elements that deconstruct the intersections across structural forms of oppression, school counselors can be more intentional about locating how forces, such as racism, classism, genderism, ableism, and heterosexism, compound negative effects on SDOH (Bowleg, 2020, 2021). Given intersectionality's central focus on a critical inquiry (Collins & Bilge, 2020), the approach invites school counselors to create a systematic plan to dismantle inequities rather than simply documenting them (Bowleg, 2017; Chan et al., 2021; Hankivsky et al., 2014). Considering COVID-19 as the antecedent of SDOH and career disparities (Blustein & Guarino, 2020; Kantamneni, 2020), we call on school counselors to construct systematic plans that reduce negative effects of SDOH that often lead to career and educational inequities.

Implications and Interventions

Intersectionality theory is an intentional framework school counselors can use to address unique challenges and barriers for historically marginalized students. As students continue to transition beyond COVID-19, school counselors can employ short-term and long-term interventions that ameliorate the multiplicative effects of health inequity and marginalization. Here, we address interventions that school counselors can engage to integrate tenets of intersectionality theory.

First, school counselors should advocate for dissemination of needs assessments to obtain a better understanding of equitable access to resources for all students. According to ASCA (2016), school counselors are responsible for identifying gaps in college and career access. In an exploratory analysis that sought to identify school leaders' challenges and concerns during COVID-19, more than 20% expressed their concern about students' access to internet and technology, with minority-serving institutions (those with at least 50% Black and/or Hispanic students) reporting this access gap as a major limitation to academic achievement and student engagement (Trinidad, 2021). By assessing which students do not have adequate technology access, school counselors may be able to advocate for additional resources so that students can complete career exploration and related tasks that aid with postsecondary transition.

School counselors can implement career development interventions that encourage students to build social skills and obtain pertinent career skills. Socialization skills have been greatly impacted for secondary students as a result of quarantine

mandates and procedures related to the pandemic. Increased opportunities for career skills and socialization will allow students to further explore career options and address areas of ambiguity. In his explanation of the neurobiology of adolescence, Siegal (2013) expounded that disconnection and isolation can occur when adolescents feel socially separated, and that they can derive creativity from group settings. Career psychoeducation groups are interventions that have proven effective among students who have ambiguity toward career exploration and need further attention to career options. Small-group counseling is an efficient way to provide specialized career services to a variety of students and meet specific career needs and challenges, such as related mental health concerns and other SDOH that impact career decisions (Johnson, 2017; Pyle & Hayden, 2015). Within psychoeducational groups, school counselors are encouraged to administer career exploration assessments and facilitate discussion with students related to next steps and potential barriers. This will also allow an opportunity for school counselors to extend direct personal support to culturally diverse students who are experiencing increased negative effects resulting from the pandemic (Trinidad, 2021).

To address power dynamics enacted in work systems, we encourage school counselors to implement group interventions to assist students in making sense of common career and academic adversities. For instance, the Social-Belonging intervention offers opportunities for belonging and development of positive relationships among students with intersecting identities. Brady and colleagues (2020) utilized the Social-Belonging intervention with Black female students entering their first year of college and found that it helped address belonging uncertainty in the postsecondary transition. This may allow students to identify complex forms of oppression and SDOH related to intersecting identities, and a build a sense of community and support relating to career outlook.

Career guidance by school counselors should incorporate tenets of intersectionality theory to understand diverse identities of youth and the extent to which intersections and SDOH conditions affect career decisions. Research has shown that the percentage of school counselors' hours dedicated toward career planning is influenced by their varying responsibilities, including severity of school problems, career planning requirements determined by their schools, and students' demographic characteristics (e.g., school type, location, SES status; Edwin & Dooley Hussman, 2019). As students return to school buildings, career planning should increase and be a higher priority for secondary students, particularly due to the lost opportunities to gain work experience (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, trade work; Stanislaus et al., 2021). Work experiences assist youth in practicing technical and social skills and help them develop the ability to visualize themselves in potential careers (Mann et al., 2020). While working with historically marginalized youth, school counselors should support mental health advocacy, particularly in light of documented associations between SDOH and mental health risks (Johnson & Brookover, 2021).

Although researchers are investigating the impacts and consequences of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations, a need also exists for further research on the effectiveness of specific career interventions with historically marginalized and at-risk youth who hold intersectional identities. Increased interventions and outreach to these populations will aid in advocacy for equitable resources and health supports (Dawes, 2020). Although school-based mental health services have been provided effectively among youth, they are less utilized by racial/ethnic minorities compared to White youth (Green et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The rampant effects of COVID-19 exacerbated the effects of career disparities in tandem with SDOH. Because SDOH explicitly synthesizes health disparities and access to services, employment and career development are crucial elements for school counselors to consider in their practices and analysis. Intersectionality builds a promising platform for school counselors due to its attention to social context, power, social inequities, and social justice (Chan et al., 2021). Given intersectionality's incorporation of social structures, the approach invites school counselors to acknowledge their own vantage points and social identities in terms of inequities illuminated by COVID-19 (Litam & Hipolito-Delgado, 2021). Intersectionality also promotes an in-depth exploration of policies, supports, and services that create or ameliorate inequities. By navigating these inequities and services with students, school counselors can implement a litany of systemic interventions that intentionally dismantle career barriers. School counselors are situated to use this framework and locate SDOH that alter perceptions of career pathways and vocational outlooks.

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