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## Research Article

### Lights and Shadows: Lived Experiences of Guidance Advocates in the Practice of Ethical Bracketing

Aileen Joy B. Decena<sup>1\*</sup>, Deborah Natalia E. Singson<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Negros Occidental – Recoletos; Carlos Hilado Memorial State University, Bacolod City, Negros Occidental 6100, Philippines

<sup>2</sup>University of Negros Occidental – Recoletos; Bago City College, Bacolod City, Negros Occidental 6100 Philippines

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#### \*Corresponding author:

E-mail:

[ajbellezadecena@yahoo.com](mailto:ajbellezadecena@yahoo.com)

#### ABSTRACT

Due to the limited number of registered guidance counselors (RGCs) in the Philippines, public high schools are compelled to appoint classroom teachers as guidance advocates and perform the duties and responsibilities of an RGC, specifically facilitating counseling to learners. With their lack of training and fundamental knowledge, differing orientations, and demanding and overlapping work as classroom teachers and at the same time as guidance advocates, the participants are having difficulty practicing one of the ethical codes in the counseling profession – ethical bracketing; thus, its delivery is put to jeopardy. This study used descriptive phenomenological analysis to explore the lived experiences of guidance advocates on their practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating counseling services. Data were collected via unstructured in-depth interviews and analyzed using Lichtman's three (3) C's of Data Analysis, retaining only relevant themes: predicaments in ethical bracketing, factors for good ethical bracketing, transformation through counseling experiences, and counseling practice as a calling. The participants did not just overcome the challenges they had faced in practice but experienced transformations that significantly impacted their perspective about themselves, their counselees, and the counseling profession. The findings of this study serve as baseline information in creating a training program that can address the concerns of the guidance advocates on their practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating counseling services.

**Keywords:** *counseling, ethical bracketing, guidance advocates, phenomenological design, Philippines*

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## **Background**

Counseling is a professional collaboration that assists people of all ages in achieving their mental health, well-being, academic, and career objectives (American Counseling Association [ACA] Code of Ethics, 2014). Counseling is based on the belief that people who understand themselves and their surroundings will convert into more productive, effective, and happy people (Anyi, 2017). The goals are quite similar to education goals. Guidance and counseling in schools help students prepare for the challenges of the 21st century by fostering academic, personal, career, and social growth, among others (Nkechi et al., 2016).

Since the core of counseling is values (Yarhouse & Hataway, 2016), one way to aid the counselor from imposing their values on the counselee is through ethical bracketing (Grunhaus et al., 2018). Ethical bracketing (ACA Code of Ethics, 2014) is the intended separation of a counselor's values to render effective and appropriate counseling to all counsees, especially those whose worldviews, values, belief systems, and decisions are radically different from the counselor's. Since its origin, the counseling profession has acknowledged the importance of practicing under the guidance of ethics (Kimball, 2018). Because of the underlying professional principle of acting for the counselee's best interest, doing no harm, and maintaining professional boundaries in the delivery of services, the profession's ethics focus on the counselee's well-being and needs, which must take precedence over the professional's values (Cottone et al., 2021; Mahmood & Abdallah, 2020; Mansaray & Mani, 2020; Nor, 2020; Roxas et al., 2019). As a result, a set of principles for the profession has emerged (Francis & Dugger, 2014, as cited in Niles & Nassar, 2018), including ethical bracketing (ACA Code of Ethics, 2014). Awareness of this ethical code is critical to the competence in the domain of ethics of the counselor (Natiq, 2018).

In the Philippines, guidance and counseling is a profession that entails applying a holistic perspective to developing a well-functioning individual (Republic Act [R.A.] 9258, 2004). With nearly 23 million public school learners (Llego, 2021) and only 1, 096 Registered Guid-

ance Counselors (RGCs) as of May 2020, meeting the Department of Education's (DepEd) suggested ratio of one (1) guidance counselor for every 500 learners is nearly impossible (Magsambol, 2020; Ushiyama, 2019). This data shows that there is a limited number of RGCs in the country; hence, compelling public schools to appoint teachers as guidance advocates and perform the duties and responsibilities of an RGC, specifically facilitating counseling to learners (Cervantes, 2019; David et al., 2019; DepEd, 2021; Mendijar & Manamtam, 2020; Valdez, 2018). With this unaccustomed arrangement, guidance advocates are susceptible to experiencing the dilemmas of practicing ethical bracketing when facilitating counseling services (Malate, 2017).

A limited number of RGCs is likewise significant in the Divisions of Bacolod City and Negros Occidental. In response to this concern, they shared that both divisions assigned classroom teachers who were perceived as motherly, already tenured, or had a Psychology background as guidance advocates. Moreover, they acknowledged that the practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating counseling services is essential. However, due to lack of training and fundamental knowledge, differing orientations, and demanding and overlapping work as guidance advocates and at the same time classroom teachers, guidance advocates are having difficulty in practicing such ethical code, and its delivery is put in jeopardy.

There is a substantial literature on counseling globally; however, despite the significance of counseling services, few studies on Filipino counseling have been published in the country, especially in Bacolod City and Negros Occidental (Cervantes, 2019; Firmante, 2017; Martinez et al., 2020), and even fewer have been conducted regarding the practice of ethical bracketing in public high schools – this is the gap the study addressed.

The scarcity of local literature and the researcher's concern as a guidance counselor serves as a light source and affirmation to research on the practice of ethical bracketing. In addition, this study is necessary to provide a foundation for improving the country's guidance and counseling situation. Thus, this study

aimed to explore the lived experiences of guidance advocates on their practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating counseling services in public high schools.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

The researcher utilized the descriptive phenomenological analysis to explore the lived experiences or the life meanings of the guidance advocates on their practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating counseling services. Using this research design, the researcher comprehensively accessed and explained the guidance advocates' thoughts, feelings, and essence of their experiences in the particular phenomenon and not on the meaning that the researcher brings to the study.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were six (6) female high school teachers who are designated as guidance advocates in various public high schools in Bacolod City, Negros Occidental. This study used the purposive sampling technique, a non-scientific sampling technique based on selecting samples grounded on the researcher's objectives, controls, and criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2016), to identify the participants. To ensure that all of the participants have experienced the same phenomenon, they were selected based on these: have at least three (3) years in practice or experience in facilitating counseling services to high school students, non-Psychology or Guidance graduates, and with Master's degree in Guidance and Counseling, and with relevant training. The researcher ended collecting data after the sixth participant due to data saturation; the newly established categories and concepts no longer give new insights or reveal new properties to the study.

### **Research Instrument**

This study utilized an unstructured in-depth interview to gather data. One of the primary ways of collecting qualitative data is through interviewing and qualitative interviewing, specifically unstructured in-depth interviews, characteristically involves preliminary and probing questions by the interviewer

(researcher) intended to encourage the interviewee (participant) to talk freely and comprehensively so that the interviewee will disclose their feelings, intentions, interpretations or meanings, sub-contexts, views about a topic, scenario or situation, or idea defined by the former (Howitt, 2016; Lichtman, 2014). The unstructured in-depth interview does not recommend a specific set of questions; thus, the participants had the opportunity to tell their stories regarding their experiences in their practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating counseling services on their terms.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

In qualitative research, various methodologies are employed to collect pertinent data, e.g., interviews, observation, and notes.

Before collecting the data, the ethics clearance was first obtained from the university's ethics committee. Next, the interview protocol was prepared. The interview protocol included topic areas that covered the interview, biographic information, a script when opening and closing the interview, and questions that could lead the interview. Then a letter was written addressed to the Assistant Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Bacolod City, thru the Senior Education Program Specialist for Planning and Research, to obtain approval to conduct the study. After the approval, participants were selected purposively based on the inclusion criteria. When the participants were identified, their consent to be part of the study was asked by sending them an invitation letter and letting them sign the informed consent form. After gathering the consent forms, venues for the face-to-face interviews and equipment needed for the online interviews were prepared. Before the interview proper, participants were oriented regarding the purpose of the study, their participation in the study, how the data would be gathered and treated, confidentiality and privacy, and how long the interview will take. Included in this orientation was establishing rapport with them.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and online. During the interviews, the participants were asked personal, concrete, and feeling questions about their experiences in the practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating

counseling services. An interview protocol was used to make the interview progress smoothly. Notes were also taken from time to time, including observed facial expressions and gestures and questions or comments that needed follow-up. Probing was also implemented to elicit more information but made sure not to interrupt as the interview progressed. Bracketing was also practiced by focusing on the meaning the participants wanted to convey and not on the researcher. The researcher also made sure that the time allocated was adequately observed.

After the interview, the researcher expressed her gratitude to the participants. The researcher ended collecting data after the sixth participant since the newly established categories and concepts no longer give new insights or reveal new properties to the study. In addition, the proper health and safety protocols recommended by the IATF for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (Department of Health [DOH], 2021) were implemented and observed throughout the face-to-face interview. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy at the end of every interview. A post-interview was also conducted that comprised open-ended questions for follow-up questions and clear vague answers from the first interview. Audio recordings of the post-interviews were also transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. After completing the study, a psychosocial intervention was also conducted via online platforms.

During the psychosocial intervention, the researcher oriented the participants with the processes of what will happen, highlighted that it was not an investigation, and went through all the regulations. In the early part, the participants were encouraged to allay their fears and discomforts and describe the interview from their perspectives to establish what happened. They were then asked to state and discuss their first or prominent thought about the interview, recognize the most distressing or discomforting aspect and associated emotional reactions, and identify subjective symptoms of discomfort they had experienced since the interview. After the participants identified and discussed

their discomforting thoughts, feelings, and personal symptoms of discomfort, the researcher educated them about emotional and psychological discomfort and how to manage them. In addition, the researcher inquired if anything beneficial occurred since the interview to recognize the positive impact of the interview.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

This study employed thematic analysis using Lichtman's (2014) three (3) C's – coding, categorizing, and conceptualizing – to explore the lived experiences or the life meanings of the guidance advocates on their practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating counseling services. The iterative process was observed.

In the coding phase, the interview transcripts were carefully read one at a time while creating the initial codes. Then the transcripts were reread, and different codes were added. The nonverbal aspects of the participants' interactions were also noted, e.g., facial expressions, body language, voice pitch, and nuances like sadness and laughter. After, the preliminary list of the initial codes was revisited by rereading the transcripts. There was redundancy in some of the initial codes; thus, they were removed or renamed. Clarifying terms of the initial codes previously created were also given focus.

Since the codes were already modified, an initial list of categories and central ideas was developed. At this point, the researcher continued with the iterative process. The initial list was changed when the researcher recognized that some categories are less significant than others, or two (2) categories can be grouped into one (1). This process was done after additional rereading. After rereading and modifying the initial list, the categories and subcategories were revisited, redundancies were removed, and determined essential elements.

After revisiting and modifying the categories and subcategories, key concepts were identified that reflected meaning of the data collected. As the data were read and reread, some concepts appeared more prosperous and compelling than others. And since there are no guidelines regarding how many themes should be identified; but, a smaller number of well-de-

veloped and supported themes yield a considerably richer analysis than a large number of loosely conceived ideas; the researcher clustered the participants' significant statements into four (4) themes and ten (10) sub-themes. The final themes were selected for discussion with their relevance and significance in the study.

Following the thematic analysis, the researcher ran an audit trail on the themes and sub-themes to confirm that the findings were based on the participants' responses rather than the researcher's assumptions and prejudices. An auditor was requested to examine the themes and sub-themes previously identified, read the transcripts, and make suggestions and revisions on the identified themes and sub-themes if necessary.

On the other hand, the data were revisited and organized further to add richness and depth to the study's analysis. Thus, the researcher identified a metaphor: "Lights and Shadows," to see the study's analysis in a new light and elicit emotion. With this, the researcher better illuminated the essence of the lived experience of the guidance advocates in their practice of ethical bracketing.

To establish trustworthiness in this study, stringent qualitative research standards were used. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, was followed to convince the readers that the study findings were significant and worthy of attention.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

To ensure respect for every participant in the study, the researcher considered the following components of ethical standards in research: social value, informed consent, vulnerability of the research participants, risks and benefits, privacy and confidentiality, justice, transparency, qualifications of the researcher, adequacy of facilities, and community involvement.

### **Results and Discussion**

Themes and sub-themes were generated to construct patterns covering all the participants' experiences across the entire data set. The researcher developed the themes and sub-

themes based on her knowledge of ethical bracketing, the counseling profession, and the participants' personal experiences.

### **Predicaments in Ethical Bracketing**

This first theme emerged from references to the challenges experienced by the participants in their practice of ethical bracketing and the workplace. The sub-themes are inadequate knowledge and skills of the participants, their multiple responsibilities, and the absence of an adequate guidance and counseling facility in their respective schools.

#### ***Inadequate knowledge and skills***

The participants in this study are teachers assigned as guidance advocates of the school who facilitate guidance and counseling services to the learners. Most of them were graduates with a bachelor's degree in secondary education. They had not received or attended any training or orientation, before the designation, about ethical bracketing, guidance and counseling, and how to deliver its related services. Generally, the participants were designated because they were patient, approachable, accommodating, friendly, and motherly. They were also another reason for being new to the school and having less workload than the other teachers. With different orientations and poor staff selection, these teachers were exposed to work that did not professionally match what they had prepared for.

Cervantes (2019) noted in her study that guidance facilitators or advocates are not qualified to work as school counselors. Moreover, in the studies of Bustamam et al. (2021), Michel et al. (2017), and Warui et al. (2018), they mentioned that limited knowledge and skills and lack of training were the concerns faced by school counselor teachers.

Teachers have several functions, one of which is a counselor (Alonazi, 2017). However, teachers confront challenges in offering such services. In this study, it was evident that the participants lacked the necessary knowledge and skills to practice ethical bracketing and provide efficient and effective counseling services. They do not entirely comprehend the theme, are unaware of their roles, and lack basic skills.

### **Multiple responsibilities**

The term "multiple roles" refers to the simultaneous execution of one or more duties or positions (Cervantes, 2019).

According to Ushiyama (2019), the Department of Education is short on licensed counselors because it requires one (1) counselor for every 500 learners. As a result, teachers are designated as "guidance teachers" to continue providing the necessary academic support to learners without violating the law. However, they were recruited as classroom teachers rather than counselors in these cases, which places a tremendous strain on them (Gatheru, 2008 as cited in Warui, 2018).

Studies by Bustamam et al. (2021), Cervantes (2019), Ushiyama (2019), and Warui (2018) emphasized the concerns of teachers designated as "guidance teachers." The numerous responsibilities assigned to the teacher or guidance advocate jeopardize the quality of the delivered guidance and counseling services putting the program at risk.

This sub-theme occurred because the participants, designated as guidance advocates of their school, are also classroom and headteachers and discipline or records officers who handle classes and other numerous non- and teacher-related works. The guidance and counseling services tasks are added obligations for them who are already overwhelmed with classroom duties and other teaching and non-teaching responsibilities. The participants recognized that workload issues were problems restricting their availability to learners and their effectiveness in practicing ethical bracketing and facilitating counseling services.

### **Absence of adequate guidance facilities**

This sub-theme is consistent with the findings of Sindabi (2007), Egbochuku and Iyami (2000), and Oladele (1987), as cited in Warui (2018) that there are insufficient resources to deliver practical guidance and counseling services and one of those resources is the lack of physical guidance and counseling facility. The lack of a suitable guidance and counseling facility limits the participant's capacity to provide guidance and counseling services.

In this study, the participants emphasized the need for adequate guidance facilities.

Having a guidance facility will assist them in facilitating efficient and effective guidance and counseling services. They will be able to focus on the session without being interrupted and be able to practice good ethical bracketing when counseling. In addition, the counselee will express themselves more freely due to their privacy leading to a more therapeutic relationship.

### **Factors for a Good Ethical Bracketing**

This theme, which includes four (4) sub-themes: self-awareness, respect for individual differences, empathy, and self-reflection, discusses the factors observed and followed by the participants for a good practice of ethical bracketing.

#### **Self-awareness**

Participants who agreed that self-awareness is vital in ethical bracketing talked about how important it is to know one's values to understand what they will do and how they might aid their counselees.

Self-awareness in counseling is a powerful skill that, when used consistently, can benefit counselors and counselees more than anything else a professional can offer (Ackerman, 2022). It is a core competency for counselors and a critical skill to instill in counselees (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs Standards [CACREPS], 2016). Counselors who are self-aware can gaze inward, become familiar, and manage their internal reactions to accomplish real, lasting change and stay present with the counselee (Hutchison, N. D.).

This sub-theme is connected to the Self-awareness Theory of Duval and Wicklund (1972) that when it comes to prosocial action, self-awareness encourages the participants to help more – to demonstrate altruism or unselfish care for the well-being of others and their counselees.

For the participants, it is impossible to know the counselee unless they know themselves. Self-awareness assists them in opening the heart and mind to their inner selves' experiences and of their counselees. When they meditate on their thoughts and values, they can communicate more freely with their

counselees. Likewise, it is almost more accessible for them to give non-judgmental ideas and assistance to a counselee if they are self-aware. In addition, if they can distinguish their counselees' values from their values, they can only give more outstanding assistance to the counselee. Through self-awareness, the participants can understand the character of their counselees, resulting in ease in helping their counselees.

### ***Respect for individual differences***

Participants who agreed that this factor is critical in the practice of ethical bracketing discussed how important it is for a guidance advocate to respect the counselee's values and not impose their own when facilitating counseling services.

Similar to the study conducted by Christensen et al. (2018), it was found that respect for and appreciation of individual differences and varied populations were some of the dispositions required of counseling learners. Likewise, respect for individual differences was accorded equal weight in counseling in the Philippines. The Code of Ethics and the Code of Technical Standards for Registered and Licensed Guidance Counselors (R.A. 9258, 2004) have provided counselors with a set of principles to follow when establishing a good relationship with their counselees; two (2) of which are respecting the personhood and integrity of the person with whom they work and recognizing individual differences.

The participants stated that they must respect their and counselees' differences to practice good ethical bracketing. This characteristic led them to recognize the value or worth of their counselees as rational beings and not simply instruments for some purpose regardless of sex, status, etc. This recognition increases their possibility of establishing a therapeutic relationship with the counselees and designing counseling plans to assist them effectively.

### ***Empathy***

Participants who considered that empathy is essential in ethical bracketing discussed how crucial it is to understand the counselees' life experiences, feelings, family or background,

and upbringing, among others, to comprehend where they are coming from.

The studies of Macfarlane et al. (2017) and Moyers et al. (2016) supported the findings of this study. Empathy is vital to the counselor's personal and professional relationship and success in the counseling process. In addition, the results of this study coincide with Selva's (2022) notion that a counselor's empathy has a significant impact on the outcome of the counseling process.

Empathy allows the participants to see their counselees' experiences from their point of view. When they see the world through their counselees' eyes, they show that the counselees' point of view is valuable and that the counselees are respected and appreciated. Furthermore, empathy enables them to form a therapeutic relationship. It empowers them to respond in a way that fosters counselee trust, non-defensiveness, and openness to reveal throughout the therapeutic relationship's working phase.

### ***Self-reflection***

The participant who considers self-reflection as necessary in ethical bracketing discussed how important it is to examine oneself on what to do to guide counselees in the proper direction.

The findings of this study agree with Taylor and Cook (2018) that reflective practice is vital, especially in counseling. In addition, the participant specified that self-reflection is necessary for the practice of ethical bracketing to guide counselees in the proper direction. She challenges her assumptions and performs at her most excellent level. This belief corresponds to Alonazi's (2017) study that teachers believed that, in addition to receiving adequate knowledge from professional development programs or training, continuous reflection and examination of their process is a beneficial method in helping them give excellent service to learners. Furthermore, when applied in this study, the Brookfield Model of Reflection (Brookfield, 2017) emphasizes that a counselor or guidance advocate who assesses the ways and purpose of their counseling will help them improve the counseling process and assist their

counselees in discovering reaching their fullest potential.

For the participant, self-reflection is a crucial component of the counseling profession that contributes to her counselees' comprehension – aiding her when selecting the best effective intervention and becoming a better counselor to enhance their counseling relationship experience for personal, professional, and societal transformations.

### **Transformation through Counseling Experiences**

Transformation through counseling experiences is those that profoundly question people's assumptions and preconceptions, as well as their ideas and values, influencing how they view themselves, others, and the world through counseling. The fresh thinking that frequently accompanies unfamiliarity might cause people to admire the unexamined components of their surroundings, uncover new aspects of themselves or others, and attain in previously unthinkable ways.

This theme, which includes three (3) sub-themes: becoming agents of change, feeling of self-fulfillment, and learning from the experience, emerged through references to the learning and experiences gained by the participants throughout their practice in facilitating counseling services.

#### ***Becoming agents of change***

To become a change agent, one must promote and facilitate change within a person, group, or organization. The participants, who are guidance advocates, can assist learners with academic, personal, social, etc., concerns and are not only there to fill in the scarcity of RGCs in public schools. Instead, they are in the position to make an impact in the lives of their counselees. These influences promote life-long changes that guide the counselees to the right path – thus, becoming agents of change.

According to Michel et al. (2017) and O'Connor (2018), school counselors are agents of change in counseling. Moreover, Barnes (2021) claimed that counselors are a unique breed of individuals who do not want to do a mundane job but instead want to make a difference in someone's life. Indeed, the participants in this

study are agents of change who established a growth mindset that significantly impacts their counselees. They have a positive influence on the lives of their counselees in intellectual, social, and emotional aspects, among others, and these improvements are long-term rather than temporary.

Seashore et al.'s (Mattare et al., 2004) Use of Self-Model ties an individual's own potential to the world of change. The model brings together essential characteristics critical to sustaining and enhancing one's capacity as a change agent. In this study, the participants' desire to help and their intense awareness and belief that they can be powerful and successful change agents demonstrate that, even in small ways, they can assist their counselees in whatever difficulty they may be experiencing and make an impact in their lives to be better and for the better.

The participants, as guidance advocates, work tirelessly to make counseling goals a reality by developing a more equitable and effective counseling process regardless of the counselee's sex, intellectual ability, religion, or socioeconomic status, ensuring that each counselee has the same opportunity for success. Furthermore, irrespective of their academic background or position in which they were hired, the participants are changing or making changes in the lives of their counselees and the school as a whole; thus, they are agents of change.

#### ***Feeling of self-fulfillment***

Counseling is one of the most well-respected and personally satisfying professions (Blazevic, 2018). In this sub-theme, the researcher discussed what the participants felt from their experiences as guidance advocates.

The findings of this study coincide with the study of Cervantes (2019) that a sense of achievement emerged from the guidance advocates' counseling experience and that counseling is rewarding. Participants felt a sense of accomplishment when they could smoothly handle complicated counseling concerns and a sense of accomplishment when they could overcome difficult counselee or learners and help them get through with their concerns.



According to Riessman's (1965) Helper Therapy Principle, it looks more likely that individuals delivering assistance or help benefit from assisting or helping others. It is claimed that doing something meaningful to help someone in need improves their self-image. Furthermore, helpers functioning in a therapeutic situation may benefit from the role's significance and prestige as professional or nonprofessional therapeutic agents. In connection to this study, the study did not have concrete data on whether the counselees of the participants profited from the counseling relationship; nevertheless, the study proved that the participants did benefit from the counseling relationship.

The sense of fulfillment the participants' gained from helping and the knowledge they earned through facilitating counseling services and practicing ethical bracketing became their reward, unlike any other vocation.

### ***Learning from the experience***

Many assume that in a helping profession, the person who only benefits from the interaction is the one being helped. However, the person assisting or offering support also benefits from the relationship. In this sub-theme, the researcher discussed what the participants learned from their experiences as guidance advocates.

According to the Ikon Institute of Australia (2019), counseling may result in good changes because of the experiences in the counselors' lives. The lived experiences of the participants in this study fortify this notion. In conclusion, this could be a basis that counseling has the faculty to be a learning experience in the counselor's life. The participants benefited in numerous areas that impacted their lives.

This sub-theme demonstrated that the counseling process is helpful to the counselees and the participants as guidance advocates as well. Even though it will cost them their time and effort, they have opted to stay and continue the counseling relationship because of the intangible benefits (learning) they will gain as they continue.

### **Counseling Practice as a Calling**

In the Philippines, due to a scarcity of registered guidance counselors (RGCs), classroom teachers with varied college degrees, were appointed to be guidance advocates and perform duties and responsibilities associated with the profession (Cervantes, 2019; David et al., 2019; DepEd, 2021; Mendijar & Manamtam, 2020; Valdez, 2018). However, it has been noted that there are various reasons for selecting and staying in a career, both ideological and pragmatic. Often, an individual's desire for and persistence in a job stems from their ideology or calling.

In this study, the participants desire to help their counselees improve their practice and their lives. Despite the challenges they are experiencing as guidance advocates, they have stayed in the position. This confirms the findings of Haokip (2017) and interviews with certain members of the ACA that a person's desire or enthusiasm for their profession might be a motivation for staying despite problems.

According to the Work as Calling Theory of Duffy et al. (2018), a calling is a vocation that provides a substantial source of life meaning or acts as a forum for expressing meaning and purpose. In connection to this study, participants regard being a guidance advocate as a calling significantly attached to their overall life meaning – being able to help. This desire is their sense of significance or purpose in their career. Furthermore, modifying their work experiences to represent their desire shows their motivation to pursue their calling.

The participants recognized that being a guidance advocate and helping learners become their calling and purpose. For them, their definition of "calling" is being able to help their counselees. Seeing their career as a calling brings a unique theme of how they engage with their work as a guidance advocate to create significance and impact their counselees' lives, instead of on the indicators of success that are usually attributed with careers and career progression.

### **Eidetic Insight: Lights and Shadows in the Practice of Ethical Bracketing**

The participants' lived experiences on their practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating

counseling services, as derived through the interviews, weaved a blend of challenges and transformations.

The participants were appointed guidance advocates based on their personality rather than their qualifications. Because they are not licensed to hold the post, this circumstance put them in a difficult situation. The findings of this study reflect the conclusions of Bustamam et al. (2021), Cervantes (2019), Kimball (2018), O'Connor (2018), Ushiyama (2019), and Warui (2018) that inadequate knowledge and skills, heavy workload, and insufficient resources are some of the challenges that guidance advocates face when practicing ethical bracketing and facilitating guidance and counseling services resulting to putting the practice and services in jeopardy.

However, despite the challenges, the participants remained as guidance advocates who finally experienced transformations. This study reflects the findings of Barnes (2021), Haokip (2017), Michel et al. (2017), and O'Connor (2018) that guidance advocates are agents of change who gained fulfillment by assisting their counselees and had the privileged to learn from their experiences.

Therefore, the theme of ethical bracketing in counseling as a means of "lights and shadows" conjures up an image of guidance advocates walking on an endless dark road but with lamp posts. Figure II represents the essence of the participants' lived experiences on their

practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating counseling services. The endless dark road is the "shadows" or the challenges experienced by the guidance advocates. These "shadows" are the inadequate knowledge and skills, multiple responsibilities, and absence of adequate guidance and counseling facility that hampered their practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating counseling services. On the other hand, the lamp posts are the "lights" or transformational experiences – becoming agents of change, feeling of self-fulfillment, and learning from the experience – underwent by the guidance advocates throughout their journey in practicing ethical bracketing. Although the guidance advocates will experience challenges throughout their journey on the endless dark road; however, there is a lamp post that awaits them that may have a significant impact on their lives and will eventually lead to transformations.

Counseling and counselors or guidance advocates are sometimes overlooked and undervalued. When learners have concerns that significantly impact their everyday activities, the profession and practitioners are frequently viewed as a last resort. However, the general public is unaware that ethical bracketing in counseling, when facilitated by counselors or qualified guidance advocates, may affect and eventually change (for the better) the lives of even the most difficult, hopeless, helpless, and hapless counselee



*Figure II. Essence of the Lived Experiences of the Participants*

## **Conclusion**

Four (4) themes emerged that captured the lived experiences of guidance advocates on their practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating counseling services. The four themes are Predicaments in Ethical Bracketing, Factors of Good Ethical Bracketing, Transformation through Counseling Experiences, and Counseling Practice as a Calling.

The sincere desire of the guidance advocates to help their counselees aid them in serving them despite the difficulties they experienced in their practice. With this kind of motivation, they were able to undergo transformations that led them to embrace their designation, learn from their experiences, stay longer as a guidance advocate, and continue serving their clients genuinely. Therefore, it is concluded that guidance advocates can facilitate guidance and counseling services and practice good ethical bracketing that can significantly impact the lives of their counselees.

This study explored the lived experiences of guidance advocates on their practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating counseling services in public high schools. Because there were only six (6) guidance advocates who met the inclusion criteria and were willing to participate, the findings of this study do not reflect the experiences of all guidance advocates. Moreover, there were a limited number of Philippine literature in the same field of study; hence, only a few pieces of local literature support this study's findings.

Given the limitations of this study, recommendations for future research may be implemented. First, a study might be undertaken, but this time is concentrating on male guidance advocates and other psychosocial support services providers. Their perspectives might give valuable insights into the practice of ethical bracketing in providing counseling services. Second, a similar study with comparable objectives may shed information on the variations in the practice of ethical bracketing between female and male guidance advocates and other psychosocial support services providers. Lastly, a quantitative study will support the qualitative findings and serve as baseline information in creating a training program that can address the concerns of the guidance advocates

and other psychosocial support services providers in their practice of ethical bracketing in facilitating counseling services in public high schools.

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