

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Rural youth worldviews about social justice and action

STUDENT: Samantha F. Hinnenkamp

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The purpose of this research was to explore components of rural adolescents' social justice and social action (SJSA) worldviews. The research paradigm included influences from constructivist-interpretivist (e.g., Ponterotto, 2005), critical (e.g., Liu, 2014), and pragmatic (e.g., Savin-Baden & Major, 2014) perspectives. Participants in the pilot ($n = 10$) and main ($n = 13$) studies were 9th – 12th grade students attending a rural, Midwestern high school in the United States. Respondents completed a demographics survey and a semi-structured interview. Three research questions were investigated: 1. how do rural adolescents understand social justice principles, 2. how do rural adolescents comprehend inequity in their communities, and 3. how do rural adolescents understand social action in their communities. Coding team members for the pilot ($n = 6$) and main ($n = 4$) studies analyzed interviewees' responses relying on thematic content analysis (Boyatzis, 1999). Then, they reached consensus to finalize codes and themes for their respective datasets. Results from both studies suggested participants focused on interpersonal, rather than structural, factors when discussing social justice topics. In addition, adolescents had mixed responses about inequity in their community. While some respondents thought conditions were similar across community members, other youth thought some community members were treated worse (e.g., "Hispanic") while others were treated better (e.g.,

local business owners). Further, respondents reported their low participation, if any, in social action. Moreover, organized social action in their locales was not reported. When the interviewees disclosed the strengths and concerns in their locales, their responses were often associated with community members' social relatedness. Clinical (e.g., integrate social action into therapy or outreach), policy (e.g., support K-12 curriculum which incorporates critical perspectives on society), and research (e.g., collaborate on action research with rural adolescents to facilitate SJSA worldview development) implications of the findings are discussed, as are the limitations of the project.